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Entangled Landscape: Spatial Discipline and Liminal Freedom in Coastal Sierra Leone

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Abstract

In this article, I present the freedom narratives of the diverse enslaved Africans who were liberated from barracoons and captured slave vessels and resettled at Regent Village on the Sierra Leone peninsula in the nineteenth century. Following the British abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1807, the British Royal Navy patrolled the West Atlantic Sea and redirected illegal slave vessels to Sierra Leone, where the Vice-Admiralty Court (which became the Mixed Commissions in 1820) would set them free from slavery. While legally free from bondage, liberated Africans became colonial subjects living in a nascent British colony. What can historical archaeology reveal about the history of freedom among diasporic ethnic identities at Regent Village? I answer this broad question by drawing on historical and archaeological data to demonstrate how people navigated and transformed the village landscape, as well as the decisions and choices they made at the household level, focusing on selected two house loci, which serve as a case study. I concentrate mainly on the identities, experiences, and historical narratives of liberated Africans in the village and extend the discussion to the lives of their descendants who continue to negotiate issues of power and control in contemporary Sierra Leone.

Resumen

A partir de este trabajo, presento las narrativas de liberación diversos grupos de población esclavizada liberados de los barracones y embarcaciones de esclavizados capturados y reasentados en Regent Village en la península de Sierra Leona en el siglo XIX. Tras la abolición británica del Comercio Atlántico Esclavista en 1807, la Marina Real Británica patrullaba el Mar Atlántico Occidental y redirigía las embarcaciones legales con población en cautiverio a Sierra Leona, donde el Tribunal de Vicealmirantazgo (que se convirtió en las Comisiones Mixtas en 1820) los liberaría de la esclavitud. Aunque legalmente libres de la servidumbre, la población africana liberada se convirtió en súbditos coloniales que vivían en una colonia británica incipiente. ¿Qué puede revelar la arqueología histórica sobre la historia de la liberación entre las identidades étnicas diaspóricas en Regent Village? Respondo a esta pregunta amplia utilizando datos históricos y arqueológicos para demostrar las formas en que las personas navegaron el paisaje del poblado y los transformaron, así como las decisiones y elecciones que tomaron a nivel doméstico, centrándome en dos lugares seleccionados de casas, que sirven como estudio de caso. Me enfoque principalmente en las identidades, experiencias y narrativas históricas de africanos liberados en el poblado y amplió la discusión a las vidas de sus descendientes, que continúan negociando problemas de poder y control en la Sierra Leona contemporánea.

Keywords: household archaeology; African Diaspora; freedom; liberated Africans; Krios; Sierra Leone

Palabras clave: arqueología doméstica; Diáspora africana; liberat; africanos liberados; Krios; Sierra Leona

Taking inspiration from Rinaldo Walcott's (2021) book, the "Long Emancipation" refers to the continual refusal of oppression by local populations in colonial and postcolonial contexts in the Black Atlantic. Although the struggle for freedom began before the slave ships left the coasts of Africa, some of the slave ships also played a role in the Long Emancipation of enslaved Africans. Walcott (2021) adds that the legislative and juridical practices contributed to the "unfreedom" of Africans and people of African descent during and after emancipation. In fact, according to Walcott, "Africa is a central part of the long emancipation, since independence from former colonial masters has not reshaped global relations in ways that we might call freedom" (Walcott 2021:39). Therefore, the Long Emancipation has its roots in enslavement and colonialism and remains an ongoing effort because true autonomy and freedom continue to be elusive and contested. The limits of emancipation bring about potential freedom or awaiting freedom, which I term "liminal freedom" in this research. Liminal status in colonial Sierra Leone includes property rights, apprenticeships for "children," forced marriages for adult women, and forced enlistment of men in the British Royal Navy. Consequently, emancipation cannot be considered freedom. Local-to-global relations must be reshaped for the ongoing desire for autonomy or the expression of life without any restrictions to become a reality rather than a sensation. This article uses colonial entanglement, exchange, and identity formation as analytical concept to explore the entangled history of power, land, and freedom between the British colonists and formerly enslaved Africans in the nineteenth century and to implicate and complicate the question of nationality and citizenship in Sierra Leone in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The results show complicated entanglements of historical conditions as well as contemporary events and practices that need urgent and vocal attention.

In this article, I provide tangible and intangible evidence of freedom through varied themes such as social relations, experiences, and material things. I focus on landscapes, architecture, and artifacts to discuss how freedom was exercised, abstractly and materially, in the village based on the geospatial data obtained through pedestrian surveys and surface materials. Afterward, I concentrate on two house lots to reveal to what extent the liberated Africans and the Krios—as their descendants came to be known—were able to carry out their plans after liberation from slavery and in a colonial context. A significant portion of the house yards associated with the two structures that once stood on the two house lots at Regent Village—a nineteenth-century settlement primarily inhabited by Krios—was excavated. One of the goals of the excavation was to reveal the experiences of those who lived in the houses. The combination of landscape approaches with household-scale assemblage sheds new light on the nature of power relations between the colonists and the villagers and the formation and transformation processes the village underwent during the colonial period.

The primary sources of documentary material include registers of liberated Africans, parish registers, land conveyances, probate records, censuses, topographic maps, old photographs of the village, tax records, newspapers, and police reports housed in many government institutions in Freetown. I also draw on secondary sources of information, which include books written on the history of the British slave trade, abolition, and the transition to colonialism in coastal Sierra Leone (e.g., Anderson 2020; Anderson and Lovejoy 2020; Blyden 2000; Fyfe 1962, 1979; Kaifala 2017; Lovejoy and Schwarz 2015; Peterson 1969; Scanlan 2017; Wyse 1989). Overall, I relied on suggestions from key stakeholders (the Krios) in the village and government offices to determine the section of the village to excavate, when to conduct the excavations, and how to secure letters of permission from individual landowners.

The historical research discussed in this article is a component of my doctoral research undertaken as part of the Syracuse University Archaeological Initiative in the Sierra Leone Estuary (AISLE), directed by Christopher R. DeCorse with the support and permission of the Sierra Leone Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs (MTCA) and the Sierra Leone Monuments and Relics Commission (MRC). The AISLE project is a larger ongoing archaeological project in the Sierra Leone estuary focusing on the analysis of cultural and economic transformation during the opening of the Atlantic trade. Over the years, limited but growing archaeological work has been conducted in the coastal region of the Sierra Leone River and reported elsewhere (e.g., Amartey and Reid 2014:7; DeCorse 2014a, 2014b:12–22, 2015:296–316). My doctoral research expanded the ongoing archaeological surveys

and excavations but focused on nascent colonialism and the tension for freedom to understand the experiences and perspectives of people who lived and worked at Regent Village (Agbelusi 2023).

Conceptual Framework

The concepts of entanglement, exchange, and identity formation are useful analytic tools for examining the notion of freedom in this archaeological context. I begin with an analysis of the conceptual framework concerning entanglement to inform our understanding of the conditions that contributed to changes in spatial organization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although it has been widely demonstrated that there is always resistance to power, I complicate the binary opposition of domination and resistance through the study of spatial expressions that show changes in social life thus illuminating entanglement. Colonial entanglement, in this perspective, is described as a historically contingent process that links colonists, local people, and distant metropolises in a complex web of political, economic, social, and cultural relationships that often have intended and unintended consequences (Dietler 2010:53, 74). I use the material evidence from the pedestrian surveys to highlight the spatial manipulations in residential or domestic settings and nonresidential areas. The study of entangled landscapes, particularly the planned construction of the built environment, shows a means to create and transform social relations rather than reproduce forms of dominance and subvert control (Dietler 2010, 2018; Jordan 2014; Martindale 2009; Stahl 2002; Thomas 1991).

I draw on exchange, particularly local and regional trade networks and the Industrial Revolution that produced many of the imported materials in the artifact assemblages from Regent Village. I use exchange as a framework for understanding production activities and participation in trade networks. Some materials (food preparation items such as ceramic vessels and ground stone artifacts) were locally produced to serve subsistence needs, whereas many liberated Africans and Krios acquired the mass-produced items as a result of intercontinental trade and incorporated them into local cultural practices through appropriation (Appadurai 1986; Thomas 1991). Their participation in the trade of mass-produced goods allows us to analyze the complex political, social, economic, and historical contexts in which they dwelled and continue to dwell (DeCorse 2019; Fyfe 1962; Fyfe 1977; Misevich 2015; Scanlan 2017). The production and consumption of commodities also have implications for our understanding of the construction and maintenance of identities.

Finally, I turn to identity formation, which may have contributed to the cultural practices identified in the village. Identity formation has been an important framework for conceptualizing and interpreting diverse African cultural identities and practices (Anderson 2020; Richard and MacDonald 2016; Shennan 1989; Singleton 1999; Wilkie 2000; Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005). Upon arrival in Sierra Leone, the liberated Africans may have identified themselves with major ethnolinguistic groups in the region. Ethno-historical research shows that liberated Africans from certain ethnicities (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo, Calabar) clustered in specific areas of the village and may have maintained aspects of their cultural practices (e.g., Fyfe 1962; Peterson 1969). Through the intersectionality of “nations,” ethnicity, class, race, gender, sexuality, and age indicated in the historical records, I examine how the liberated Africans and Krios describe(d) themselves and their sense of place a colonial context that is already multilocal and multivocal. I also examine how they rebuild their lives at Regent while adapting to new local life using archaeological materials collected through pedestrian surveys and excavations.

Understanding Freedom in Sierra Leone’s Colonial History

The story of anti-slavery and freedom in West Africa can be traced back to the resettlement of freed Blacks from various parts of the Americas in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Recent archaeological investigations in these two countries offer new comparative datasets that are broadening our understanding of abolition, freedom, resettlement, and adaptation from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century (Agbelusi 2023; Reilly et al. 2019, 2024). In the case of Sierra Leone, which is the focus of this article, the liberated Africans came from a variety of locations on the West African coast and Central Africa (Posnansky 1999:36). They were first called “captured negroes” or “recaptured negroes,” but the use of these labels ended in Sierra Leone in 1822 in favor of “liberated Africans” after the word “Negro”

was considered an insult at the King's Yard (Agbelusi 2023:3; Fyfe 1962:114, 138). Unlike the American Colonization Society's settlement in Liberia, where the noun "recaptives" existed, the British used "captured negroes" or "recaptured negroes" in Sierra Leone and the British West Indies (Lovejoy and Anderson 2020:3–4). Following Lovejoy and Anderson (2020:3), I employ the label "liberated Africans" with skepticism because these "freed" Africans enjoyed a narrow sense of freedom from bondage.

What was the idea of freedom in the colony of Sierra Leone? In this study, I describe freedom as the lack of impositions on one's ability to make choices and decisions, carry out plans and wishes, and change plans after emancipation. I also note that we need to consider other free actions, such as deliberations, responsibility, opportunities, equality, and living in peace. Could these free actions be realized by the liberated Africans and Krios in a colony? Historical sources reveal that liberated African children were either resold or "disposed of" (using Governor Ludlam's words) to Europeans and other early settlers in the colony as apprentices for a sum of 20 dollars or forced into apprenticeships to serve Europeans and people of African descent who established the "Province of Freedom" (which would become Freetown) for a period of seven to 14 years, a system some scholars have considered as another form of enslavement (e.g., Brooks 1988:158–166; Lovejoy and Schwarz 2015:21; Scanlan 2013:127). Although liberation from slavery was supposed to put an end to people being traded as commodities, the Vice-Admiralty still treated the formerly enslaved people as a "category of goods whose commodity phase is ideally brief, whose movement is restricted, and which apparently are not 'priced' in the way other things might be" (Appadurai 1986:24). The liberated Africans were still subject to resale under the deception of apprenticeships or redemption. Also, the masters and mistresses to whom the formerly enslaved were apprenticed regarded them as valuable property because a fee was paid (Fyfe 1962:182; Lovejoy and Schwarz 2015:21). For a decade, precisely between 1819 and 1829, no inspection of apprentices was conducted in the colony (Fyfe 1962:183).

Furthermore, there was forced marriage for adult women immediately after liberation, whereas some adult men experienced forced enlistment into the British Royal Naval Patrol and forced migration to the British West Indies and elsewhere to serve the needs of the British Empire's military and economic goals (Anderson and Lovejoy 2020; Fyfe 1962; Lovejoy and Schwarz 2015:21; Melek Delgado 2020). For those forced into the Naval army, the British colonial government relied on their local knowledge to identify the locations and routes of slave ships. They supported the anti-slavery patrol on the West Atlantic Sea and fought for freedom. The liberated Africans who were not drafted into the British Royal Naval Patrol were given iron tools and sent to new places on the peninsula to start or join a new settlement and practice agriculture there (Fyfe 1962:106; Lovejoy and Schwarz 2015:21; Scanlan 2013:127).

The colonial government also introduced the liberated Africans and Krios to Christianity (which was available to all, irrespective of race or economic status) and ensured that all adults worked actively to achieve wages. However, the liberated Africans and Krios quickly realized that freedom could not be easily attained without struggle because freedom and opportunity were a threat to the profits British merchants made from colonialism. Churches brought people together and helped build communities, but African traditional religions were incorporated into Christianity. Churches and schools were joined by mutual benefit associations and secret societies to shape new community life. Membership in these associations and societies symbolized social duty (Anderson 2020; Peterson 1969). The rise in social and economic life—particularly property ownership, membership in churches, schools, mutual benefit associations, and secret societies—may have allowed the liberated Africans and Krios to express themselves as individuals and as a community.

How was freedom constructed and transformed into reality at Regent Village? The answer partly lies in the establishment and growth of the village over time. I start with a brief historical background of the village and then delve into the development of the settlement's cultural landscape. However, before doing so, I note that the resettlement on the Sierra Leone peninsula has complex beginnings, which have been widely reported by historians and archaeologists over the years (e.g., Blyden 2000; DeCorse 2014a, 2021; Fyfe 1962; Peterson 1969). The Sierra Leone Company—a British anti-slavery organization that operated in the coastal region of the Sierra Leone River in the eighteenth century,

took the land from the local people after many disputes and transferred the ownership to the British Crown in 1808 due to financial challenges. Starting in 1809, the British colonial government resettled shipmates (i.e., a member of the same ship) together, provided the land on the Sierra Leone peninsula for the newly freed Africans to create “free” Black communities, and protected all of them from being resold into slavery. The colonial government tied masculinity and land ownership closely together. However, both depended on freedom. A map dating to the colonial period that shows land grants and land partitioning was unavailable at the time of study. However, we know from written sources, including censuses, that liberated African men became landowners and began building houses and farms on the British Crown lands. Of the 26 liberated African villages established on the Sierra Leone peninsula and the Banana Islands, Regent is an ideal case study for a discussion on the material expressions of social control and liminal freedom because (1) there is rich historical documentation about this village, (2) the nature of preservation of colonial period houses is remarkable, (3) there is access to conduct archaeological research in this village, and (4) additional support was received from locals, especially the stakeholders of the village. I now turn to the historical background of Regent Village.

Regent Village

The village of Regent is in the northern part of the Sierra Leone peninsula (Figure 1). It emerged following several liberated African resettlements and was registered as a liberated African village in 1812 (Fyfe 1962:109; Scanlan 2016). It was established by Governor Thompson who sent some of the “freed” Africans into the bush to build a new village at the “Hogbrook” (meaning warthogs wallowed in the

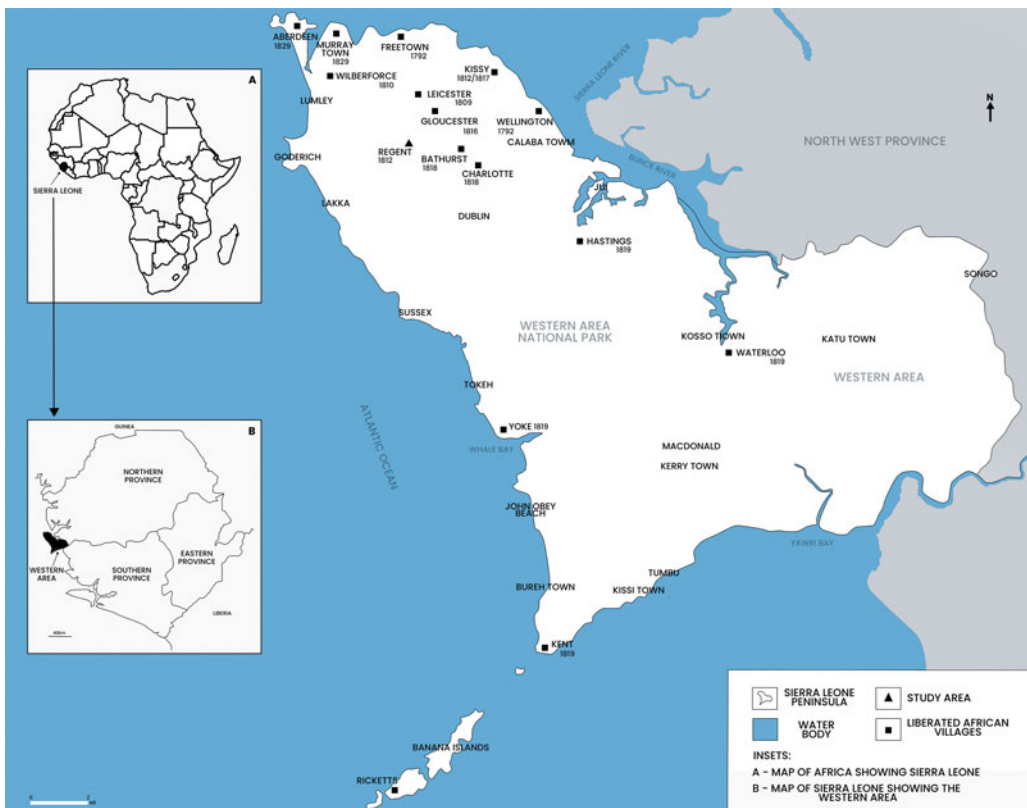


Figure 1. Map of Western Area showing numerous liberated African villages, including Regent. Inset: Map of Africa showing Sierra Leone (*above*) and a map of Sierra Leone, showing the Western Area and the Provinces (*below*). (Computer illustration by Abayomi Diya and used with permission.)

stream; Scanlan 2017:91). Governor Thompson renamed Hogbrook “Kingston-in-Africa” after his hometown—“Kingston-upon-Hull”—in 1812, but his successor, Governor MacCarthy, changed the name to “Regent’s Town” five years later in honor of the Prince Regent of England (Fyfe 1962:109).

The village grew quickly, with a population of roughly 2,000 living in two-room houses “built in the Country fashion—some being circular, others oblong, some of them square . . . wattled, mudded, & covered over with grass roofs” (Scanlan 2013:346). A small part of this village in 1821 is shown in Figures 2a and 3, respectively. The inhabitants consisted of White missionary superintendents and elite groups of African converts who acted as magistrates, chiefs of police, clerks, and tax collectors (Scanlan 2013:302–303). There were also liberated Africans trained as masons, bricklayers, carpenters, shingle makers, sawyers, smiths, tailors, and brickmakers (Fyfe 1979:41; Peterson 1969:108). The Krios also lived in the village but eventually rented out some of their houses to local Africans in the neighborhood, such as the Temne and Loko, at the end of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries (Agbelusi 2023:24).

Landscapes of Spatial Discipline and Liminal Freedom

How do landscape and people come together to tell a story of freedom and survival? Upon arrival at Regent Village, the liberated Africans were first kept in the King’s Yard, which is a temporary settlement where the Liberated African Department (LAD) recorded details of each person and provided them with clothes and food until they had a place to live in the village and started cultivating lands. Historical records revealed that a camp wall was built around the King’s Yard, possibly to control the movement of the newly liberated African arrivals (Figure 2a). I identified a house foundation within the camp wall through a locally led pedestrian survey during my fieldwork at Regent (Figure 2b). The site of the old King’s Yard still contains the famous St. Charles Church, the stone vicarage, and the primary school, which is now surrounded by twentieth-century structures. I view the King’s Yard as a transient space (*sensu* Turner 1967) that determines the transition from enslavement to liminal freedom and subject making. Although the liberated Africans were freed from bondage, they did not experience true freedom. Instead, they became colonial subjects, which troubles the nature of freedom that emerged in Sierra Leone in the age of emancipation. Liminal freedom replaced full or true freedom. This liminal freedom resembles what was called the “seasoning” period on plantations throughout the Americas (Matthew Reilly, personal communication 2023). Armstrong (2010) proposes a continuum of freedom to explain the gradual transition from enslavement to freedom in Jamaica, where the “decree of freedom” only led to variable “degrees of freedom.”

The British Crown did not only grant land to the liberated Africans to obtain titles or leases but also decided how these lands were ordered. Lots were often allocated based on how houses should be arranged in the village instead of on soil fertility, which is necessary for agricultural practices (Anderson 2020:112–113). Because the Sierra Leone peninsula was a British Colony, the colonial government imagined a well-ordered village with a church at the center of a cadastral grid system lined with European-style buildings, which are common features of the English cultural landscape (Figure 3). The church tower provided panoptic “lines of sight” of the house settlements located on the flank of other hills, whereas the cadastral grids trained the inhabitants’ bodies to function in the geometry of the colonial economic order and allowed private property ownership (Agbelusi 2023:112–113). This spatial ordering would also enable the collection of taxes, the recording of censuses, and the movement of goods across the village (Pezzarossi 2020:921–922). The highly visible location of the church (at the hilltop) reinforced symbolic authority.

How did liberated Africans and Krios experience this new village landscape? What can landscape studies tell us about group identity, power, and race relations in the village? Given that the liberated Africans were freed from bondage, how was freedom, an abstract and analytical concept, manifested materially on the village landscape? I weave documentary sources such as maps and landscape approaches to examine how the built space and yard areas were used to manipulate the cadastral grids on the village landscape for autonomous cultural formation and change. The focus on the spatial distribution of houses, street grids, footpaths, and waterways provides insights into the lifestyle and social networks that sustained the village settlement.

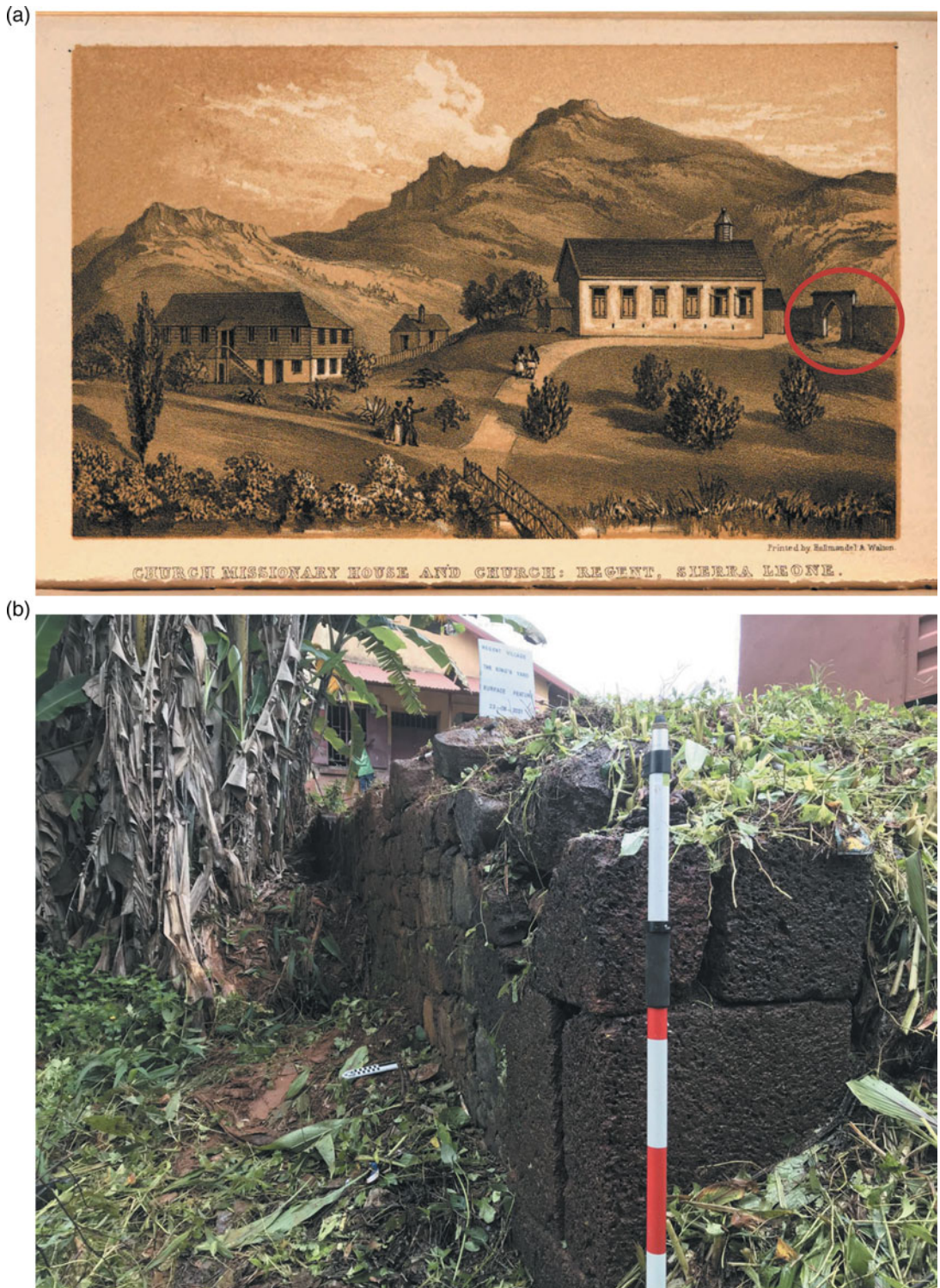


Figure 2. (a) A view of the King's Yard at Regent Village, showing St. Charles Church and a wall built around the settlement. The wall and its entrance are indicated in the circle (Poole 1850:frontispiece). (b) The remnant of the wall. (Photograph by the author.) (Color online)

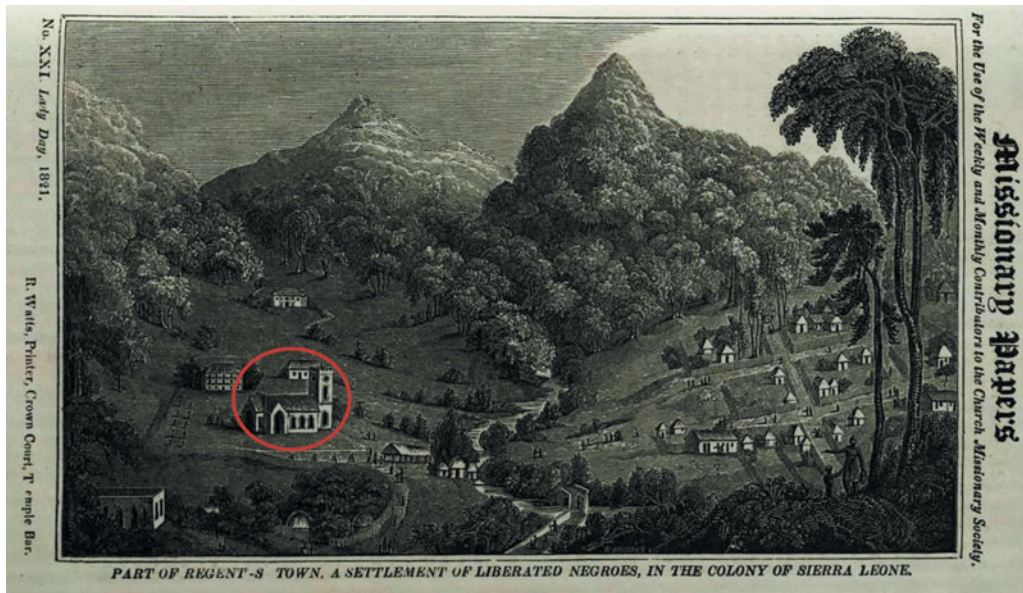


Figure 3. Regent's Town, circa 1821. St. Charles Church is shown in the circle (<https://liberatedafricans.org/digital-resources/image-gallery.php>). (Color online)

Entries in the 1831 census indicate that most villagers lived in huts made from wattle and daub with thatched roofs, which were neither erected in a line nor remained in a location. A series of changes occurred in the village landscape, including settlement reconfigurations as some people regrouped along ethnic lines, whereas others maintained their shipmate bonds. A few moved their ephemeral architecture away from the gaze of colonial authority and resettled along trails and pathways that connected nearby villages and forest road intersections (Anderson 2020:120–121). Soil fertility and agricultural practices, particularly slash-and-burn horticulture and the chances of finding a wife, also contributed to the regrouping processes (Fyfe 1962:169). Religious ceremonies also allowed for the fluidity of movement and regrouping because they were central to communal life (Anderson 2020:215–216). Although the colonial government made attempts to stop relocation across villages, the limited European presence allowed so much mobility that some liberated Africans eventually returned to their homeland either by land journeys or sea voyages (Anderson 2020:123).

The field crew surveyed an area of 4.66198 km² (1.8 square miles). Survey tracts followed street plans or grid plans, as well as individual house lots. Of the 16 streets in the survey area, 14 comprise architectural remains and related colonial period cultural deposits. The field team located 48 archaeological loci containing several residential areas ($n=41$) and a few nonresidential areas ($n=7$; Figure 4). The houses were arranged along narrow streets in cadastral grids, but these houses were adapted to fit local lifestyles and building materials. They appeared in simple square forms but were not a perfect model of British architecture and settlement plans. Equally, the archaeological study of the yardscapes allowed the villagers to forge social networks and group identities in a colonial system. The villagers had more control over their actions in the houseyards, a degree of autonomy that is visible in the archaeological record through the activity areas represented by features and artifacts. The yard was a bridging space between families—a culturally defined landscape used for maintaining a communal way of living (Armstrong 1999). Through the use of yard spaces, “families shaped the built environment into sites of comfort and support and therefore their homeplaces” (Battle-Baptiste 2007:236).

The concepts of homeplaces and identity can also be extended to the hamlets in the villages (Battle-Baptiste 2007). Ethnohistorical sources indicate that the majority of the liberated Africans at Regent Village were “Igbo” and “Calabar” people and that they may have been purchased at the

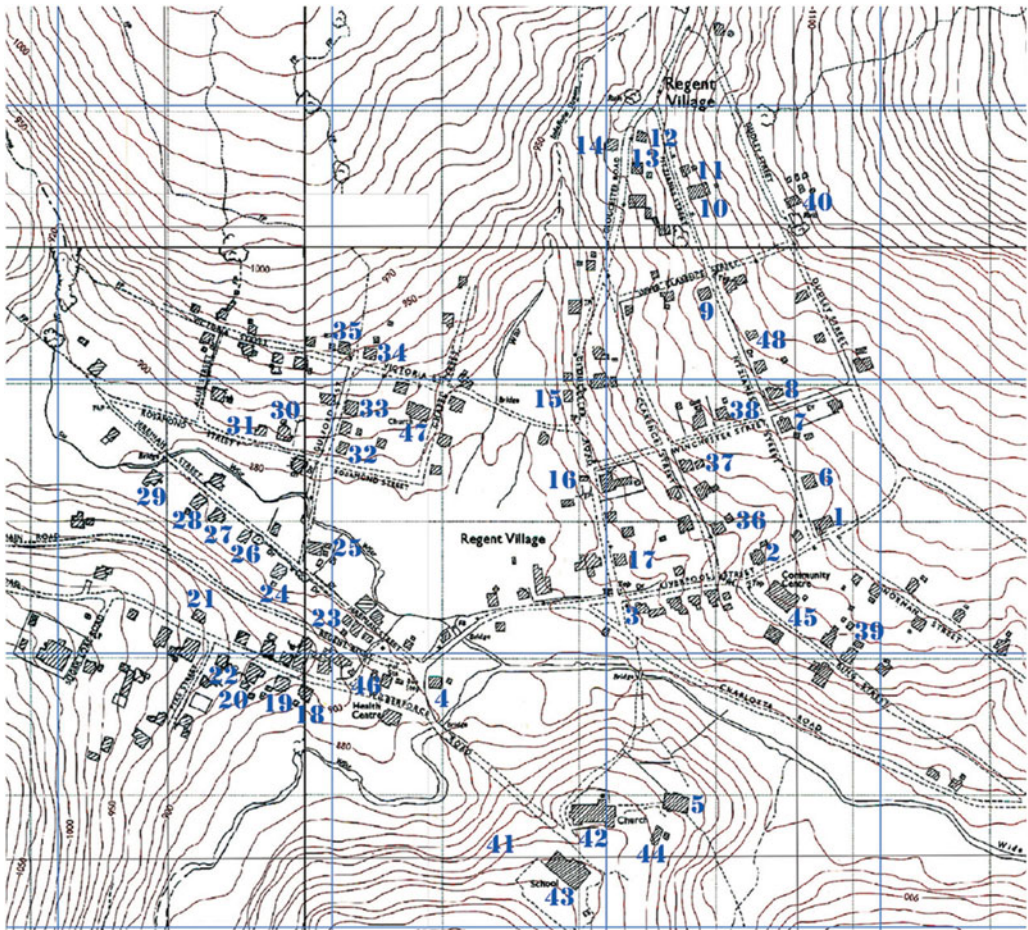


Figure 4. Locations of colonial period house structures that survived at Regent Village indicated on a georeferenced 1966 topographic map. (Courtesy of Mr. Tamba Dauda, Director of the Department of Surveys and Lands, Freetown, and used with permission.)

Port Bonny in the Bight of Biafra and, possibly, the Bight of Benin. As noted earlier, the LAD resettled them based on shipmate bonds, but they regrouped themselves over the years through marriages, land transactions, and religious and political alliances to form towns within the village. The results of the pedestrian survey revealed toponyms of spaces within the village, such as Mocco Town along Gloucester Road, Aku Town along Jeremiah Street, and a Katunga/Katanga square, which is located at the far end of Jeremiah Street. These ethnic groups originated from places in West Africa and Central Africa. For example, the Mocos are Ibibio-speaking peoples from the Cameroons, whereas the Akus are known to be Yoruba-speaking people from Nigeria. Katanga is a historical region in the southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo. If the true ethnonym is Katunga, then the square at the far end of Jeremiah Street is likely linked to the Yoruba-speaking people who arrived from Old Oyo, Nigeria. The streets were named after places in Great Britain or English people who provided financial support toward the resettlement of the liberated Africans in the colony (Alie 1990). However, the water bodies within the village take their names after prominent liberated Africans such as “John Ogoo,” “Farrah,” “Ajumalay,” “Pantap,” and “Odo-pa.”

Although the village landscape was supposed to help colonists maintain order and display power in the villages, the liberated Africans had the freedom to communicate, move, assemble, and engage in trade. Turning to the entanglement framework, the liberated Africans in this village manipulated or

tempered the spatial discipline, and they shared the landscape with the Europeans as nearly equal partners, instead of just resisting or residing on it. They were actively involved in the shaping of the landscape in which they dwelled and continue to dwell, and they were fully enmeshed in the emerging landscape and the changes over the years. To dwell “is not merely to be inside it spatially. . . . Rather, *it is to belong there*, to have a familiar place there” (Pezzarossi 2019:82–83; emphasis in original). The cultural landscape of the village is therefore considered an entangled space with unanticipated responses to colonialism, illustrating how the local population made a claim to and had a stake in a dynamic social space. This vantage point moves us away from what the colonists intended to the village inhabitants’ understanding and engagement with a changing landscape. It is in the context of a somewhat equal form of power and freedom that the study of the liberated Africans and Krios must be considered. We must reconfigure our understanding of the village landscape as being transformed by the social relations established among liberated Africans and Krios because there have been multiple levels of involvement and experience of the village landscape over the past 200 years.

Overall, an analysis of space shows that the liberated Africans and Krios made choices in shaping their social and built environment. They had a say in the design, construction, and location of their dwelling structures, thus playing a critical role in the shaping of the visual scene and the way the landscape functioned. The liberated Africans and Krios developed the settlement layout to meet evolving conditions, and the houses were built in response to particular social and economic needs.

As early as the 1840s, some liberated Africans and Krios left the villages on the peninsula to search for their family members in their homeland, to find better opportunities, or to spread Christianity to other parts of West Africa. Freedom means making new decisions and looking for new opportunities. However, it is challenging to determine the pace of the emigration because the censuses taken every decade after 1871 were defective (Fyfe 1962:602). It is important to note that not all liberated Africans sought the achievement of freedom abroad. Some stayed in the villages to maintain new family and community ties. For those who stayed in the colony, the tasks of organizing communities included the need to create new lives, reunite families and friends, and figure out what it would mean to live in the colony. Those who left the villages either rented their lands and houses to locals or sold parcels of land. They organized, moved around, and created new settlements in their homelands, where they had once been enslaved, or they moved to the British Caribbean islands as indentured laborers. The migration patterns show that many returned to the seaboard cities of the Bights of Benin and Biafra. They would have lived in a constant state of migration and fear or self-protection to avoid being re-enslaved or imprisoned. The incessant migration of liberated Africans and Krios and the civil war (1991–2002) led to the abandonment of places and sites in the villages that hold great significance to the history of freedom. The ongoing rapid expansion in the villages is a way to revitalize aging settlements, which is uprooting old buildings and neighborhoods. Although Regent Village is fast growing, the village settlement nucleus remains rich for archaeological research. It has been functionally reorganized, but it holds key historical buildings and house lots suitable for historical and archaeological studies. Two house lots located within the village settlement nucleus serve as a case study.

Case Study: The King Family Lot and the Johnson Family Lot

I briefly illustrate the ideas of freedom in the village by turning to household-level assemblages from archaeological contexts. I focus on specific classes of artifacts to discuss the expression of both personal and group identity. Several studies have shown the role of material culture in the expression of social relations in domestic settings (e.g., Armstrong 2003, 2022; Mrozowski 1984; Mrozowski et al. 1996; Pérez Rodríguez 2013; Robin 2003; South 1977). Although some aspects of social relations (e.g., individual strategies) are difficult to reconstruct without a detailed archival record, the material record can reveal group behavior and communal solidarity. I focus on group behaviors, highlighting social networks. I take the house residents as social or occupational groups but note that the group is a combination of individuals in the household. For this study, “the family is defined as the smallest organized, durable network of kin and others who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and ensuring their survival” (Battle-Baptiste 2007:234).

I present the artifact assemblages from two house lots at Fitzjames Street, possibly occupied in the second half of the nineteenth century, during the period when the Krios dominated the population in the village. The first house lot belongs to Mr. E. M. Emeka King and Mrs. Justice Jamesina King, whereas the second house lot is in the care of Ms. Molade Johnson, but ownership of the land remains within the broader Johnson family. Locus 6, which is the first house lot, located at No. 1 on Fitzjames Street, once contained a two-story, single-family board house possibly built in the late nineteenth century. Many residents lived on this house lot from its initial purchase in 1891 to 2006, when the structure was torn down. Land conveyances housed in the Office of Administrator and Registrar-General in Freetown provided a limited occupational history of the property. During the 1890s, the house lot belonged to John Robbin Mason, who sold the property to Ezekiel Thomas on November 5, 1891 (Office of Administrator and Registrar-General [OARG] Vol. 47:315–317, Conveyance for the King Family at Fitzjames Street, Regent Village, Freetown). The Johnson family continued to live on the property until approximately four decades later. Local people moved into the house as tenants until the house was purchased by Mr. Emeka King and Mrs. Justice Jamesina King as joint property on August 23, 2006, and it was immediately torn down (OARG Vol. 609:109). The property remains in the possession of the King family, who are descendants of William Anthony Osho Johnson.

Locus 9, which is the second house lot, located at No. 16 on Fitzjames Street, also had a two-story board house—considered the main house—and a one-story board house labeled an outbuilding, which was possibly built before the main house. Both houses were occupied by Regina Smith, Horton Johnson, Akigbade Johnson, and possibly their liberated African ancestors. Regina Smith and Horton Johnson were not married couples but kin who lived in the family house. The house continued to serve as an extended family home until the late twentieth century, when it was abandoned. Oral sources suggest that at least three generations lived in the houses and the land was never sold. Archival research at the OARG confirms the oral history, as no record of the houses was found in the land conveyances. The property remains within the broader family ownership. The occupational differences that separated the two houses can be used to distinguish them socially. However, both families are related. The Johnsons occupied the two houses by the mid-twentieth century.

The two houses are surrounded by yards at the front, side, and back. From March 2020 to August 2020, archaeological excavations focused mainly on the backyards of the two houses. A total of 168 m² was excavated at the King family lot, whereas the excavations at the Johnson family lot covered approximately 384 m² (Figures 5 and 6). The majority of the artifact assemblages were recovered from the backyard features of the two house lots described above. One was found in a subfloor pit from an outbuilding behind Johnson's home, and the second assemblage was also recovered from a discrete artifact cluster located in the yard behind the King's home. The artifacts from the former suggest post-1911 deposits during the long period that the Johnsons lived in the house. The artifacts from the latter, however, suggest that they date to the early twentieth century, perhaps at the time when William Anthony Osho Johnson moved into the house. The artifacts in the subfloor pit indicate storage and possible reuse, whereas the discrete artifact cluster was probably part of the trash that was kept in a single place but that spread across distance over time.

The dates of the artifact deposition at the two house lots occurred before the houses were abandoned and torn down, which means they were used in the houses by the people who lived on the house lots at the time the features were filled. However, studying the earliest stages of rebuilding lives after emancipation from the artifact assemblage recovered during excavations is challenging because the earliest artifacts date to the mid-nineteenth century. Another issue is the fragmented occupancy history of the two house lots, particularly Locus 9, belonging to the Johnson family. We do not know the names and identities of the liberated Africans who lived at Locus 6 and Locus 9 in the mid-nineteenth century, although it might be possible to identify them in the land conveyances or census records of the period in the near future. Nevertheless, several individuals likely lived in the houses over multiple occupation periods.

Here, I briefly summarize the archaeological data found in the two house lots and turn the focus to the connection between exchange and freedom. I have relied predominantly on the archaeological record to interpret the remains and the lives of the people. The excavations yielded an impressive

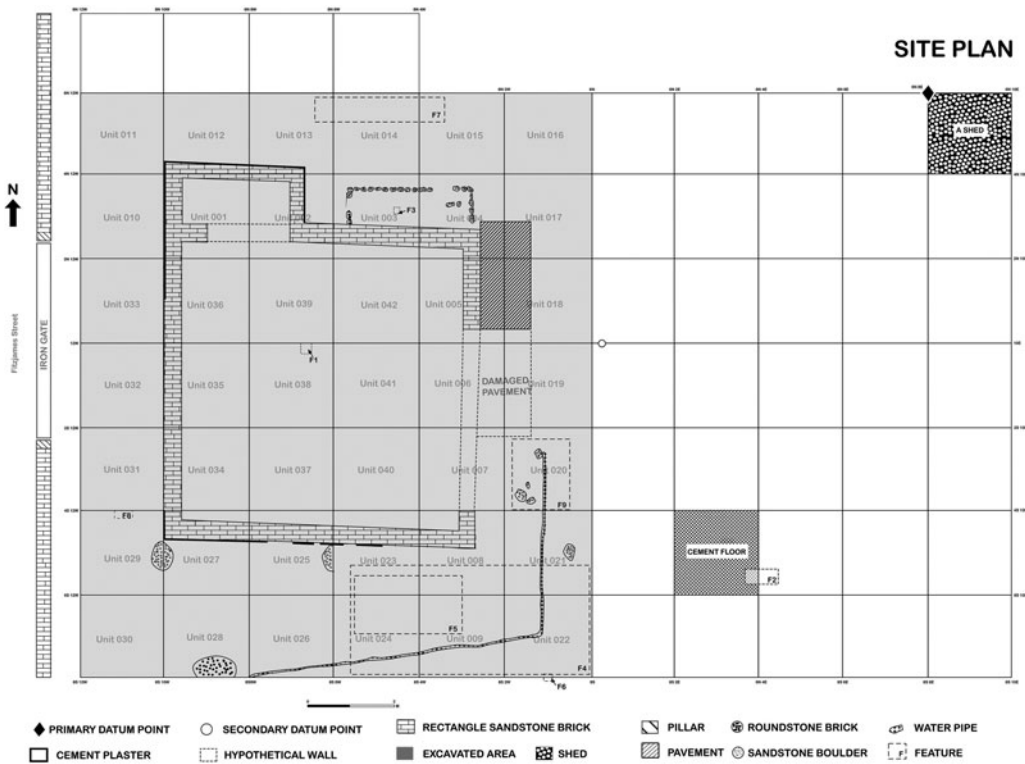


Figure 5. The site plan for Locus 6—the King family lot—indicating excavated and unexcavated portions. (Hand drawing by the author; computer illustration by Abayomi Diya and used with permission.)

array of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century materials in the discrete artifact deposits found in the two house lots. Glass, ceramics, metal, and stone artifacts accounted for most of the artifacts recovered from excavation. Nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century nails and window glass fragments accounted for the overwhelming majority of architectural artifacts, whereas a large portion of the activity-related artifacts consisted of local and imported ceramic sherds and numerous glass bottle fragments (see Agbelusi 2023:196–331). However, there are more architectural-related artifacts than activity-related artifacts. Imported tobacco pipes, buttons, beverage and pharmaceutical bottles, ceramic bowls, plates, cups, buckles, iron nails, and gunflints showed that the Krios and, to a lesser extent, their liberated African ancestors participated in the foreign exchange networks. Beverage bottles contained liquor, wine, beer, and soda, but most of the bottles were for alcoholic beverages. Manufacturing marks of these artifacts served as dating tools to determine when the houses were built and intensively occupied. However, many of these bottles may have been reused for storage or household-scale liquor production (Pezzarossi 2017:166–167). The artifacts were made by manufacturers based in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States.

Consequently, archaeological research revealed that residents in the excavated two-house lots were often connected to the global economy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The locally made ceramics and ground stone artifacts for food preparation, as well as metal iron tools for agricultural practices, are clear evidence that the house residents participated in a range of local and regional economic networks (Figures 7a and b). Liberated Africans and the Krios sought to display or improve their status and wealth by participating in the use of mass-produced goods in the marketplace (Figures 8a and b). However, the task of being reintegrated into a new environment reflected a desire not always to become British but one that was to gain access to better opportunities and commodities. They were creative and resourceful, sought opportunities, and actively worked toward citizenship in their communities. Although the individual liberated Africans who possibly lived in the two houses

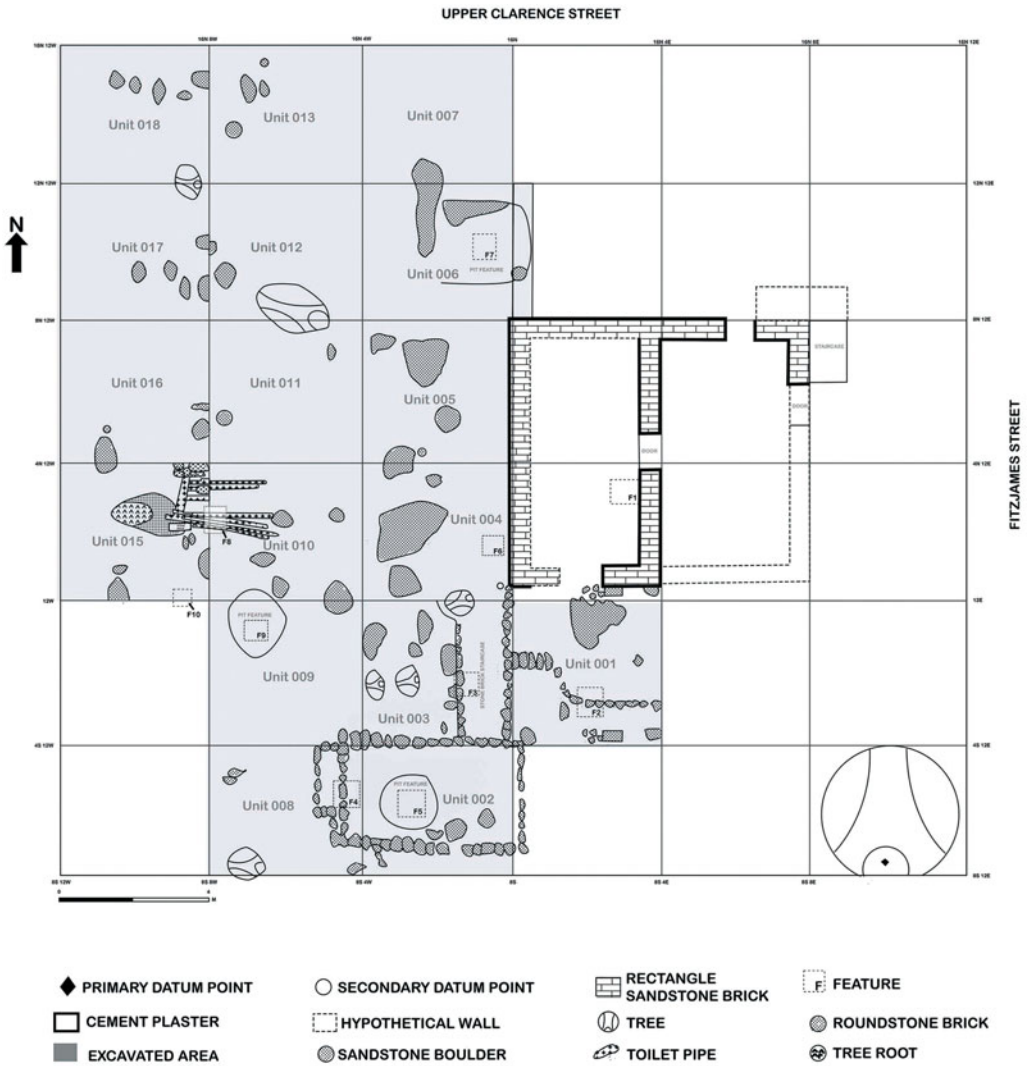


Figure 6. The site plan for Locus 9—the Johnson family lot—indicating excavated and unexcavated portions. (Hand drawing by the author; computer illustration by Abayomi Diya and used with permission.)



Figure 7. Locally produced objects: (a) a pot lid refitted from several fragments (Locus 6); (b) two local ceramic pots refitted from several fragments (Locus 9). (Photographs by the author.) (Color online)



Figure 8. Imported objects from Europe: (a) a glazed earthenware, possibly from the nineteenth century (Locus 6); (b) English stoneware penny ink bottles dating to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Locus 9). (Photographs by the author.) (Color online)

brought very little in the way of personal goods on the transatlantic journey, they received supplies from the British colonial government to help them settle, at least in the first year of arrival. After 1825, the colonial government provided support to the young and elderly only (Anderson 2020:124). The artifact assemblage revealed that the Krios and, to a lesser extent, their liberated African ancestors in the two house lots were self-sufficient and never experienced isolation in their cultural practices or lifeways. Rather, the material culture shows a clear degree of connectedness to the global economy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Conclusion

Historical archaeology at Regent Village has helped to uncover the long struggle for freedom. Many newly arrived liberated Africans had to adjust their lifestyle to limit the impact of the changes that slavery and resettlements brought to their lives. However, the liberated Africans did not just survive the harsh realities of slavery and the lasting impact of colonialism. Rather, they lived their lives and thrived, had families, and maintained communities. The material record from pedestrian surveys across streets and excavations in the village shows how the liberated Africans and Krios mobilized limited resources and built the community. Both reflect adaptations required to rebuild lives. What emerged on the Sierra Leone peninsula is a historically contingent diversity among people who were brought from different places and at different times but who succeeded in making their own history shaped by preexisting practices and current circumstances that simultaneously afforded them opportunities for becoming new people in the face of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism in a new and changing social environment. I have privileged the aspect of human action and dynamic spatial outcomes in which people manipulate spatial organization through social interactions. Through the study of changing historical conditions, I have argued for some degree of equality in relations through entonyms, building styles, use of yard space, and land transactions. Freedom can vary when examined from multiple perspectives, but on the surface, the stories of the two houses are not different. The house residents were able to express themselves through land ownership, use of space within domestic settings, and economic purchasing power.

The elites among the liberated Africans and Krios had political influence in their communities, which was drastically reduced due to the European “Scramble for Africa” in the last decade of the nineteenth century until Sierra Leone became an independent nation on April 27, 1961. However, the long struggle for freedom and racial equality in Sierra Leone has not been completely won, given that the Krios continue to experience racial and social marginalization. For example, the Provinces Lands Act 1960, Cap. 122 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, along with other statutes, “precludes Krios from acquiring any customary land rights or freehold title in the Provinces, restricting them to acquiring only leasehold interest of a specific duration” (Campbell 2020; also see Crown Lands Amendment Act No. 37 of 1961, pp. 1266–1277 [<https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC180232/>]).

However, the population in the interior can freely purchase land on the Sierra Leone peninsula due to the complicated land tenure in Sierra Leone (Blyden 2013:68–69; Renner-Thomas 2010). It appears that the statutory restrictions put in place by the colonial government, which are still in effect, treat the Krios as non-natives and a minority ethnic group. The involvement of locals and descendant community members in my doctoral research on the Sierra Leone peninsula offers us a solid foundation to reexamine issues of race relations and uncover how liberated Africans and Krios created and continue to create lives in the face of marginalization (for a similar view, see Hartemann 2024). As Posnansky (2006:56) rightly noted, “If the past is to be preserved it has to be preserved by all the local population and not just by a few academics and intellectuals.” I engaged multiple stakeholders—including families, landowners, and community leaders—in archaeological research to enhance the visibility of their heritage and accomplishments. I hope true freedom will be guaranteed to all citizens of Sierra Leone and that everyone will be able to participate fully in society. However, can full freedom be earned in this postcolonial context? Only time will tell about the future. What we know, at this moment, is that the Krios continue to live peacefully in their homes at Regent and other neighboring villages and act as cultural custodians, stewards, and guardians of land habitually occupied and used by them.

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