

# 1926 Slave Revolt in Sierra Leone

Alfred Arkley

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## 1. Slavery in Sierra Leone Crown Colony

Slavery is an important part of the history of the Sierra Leone Colony and Protectorate. In 1787, the British established Province of Freedom near present Freetown for London's "Black Poor." Included were African Americans who had gained their freedom after joining with the British Army during the American War of Independence. In 1792, the British established Freetown, which was settled by these former American slaves. They were called Creoles (today named Krios). The liberated Africans from the slave ships were also called Creoles. In those years prior to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, these settlers from Great Britain, Nova Scotia, and Jamaica struggled to survive. They were resented by the adjacent African and European slave traders. Some of these returned African freed slaves became slave traders themselves in order to survive.<sup>1</sup>

After the British abolished the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, Freetown became a Crown Colony. Even though the Atlantic slave trade between the Africans and the New World had been legally abolished, the slave trade continued and increased outside the Crown Colony until slavery was abolished in the USA in 1865. The Sierra Leone African slave traders simply moved away from the Freetown area. From 1825 to 1865, the British Navy liberated 130,000 slaves. The majority landed at Freetown. During that same time, over 1.8 million slaves were landed in the New World.<sup>2</sup>

The Colony was flooded with liberated slaves from the captured ships. These liberated slaves were apprenticed to various Krio masters. Unfortunately, this led to abuse where many of the so-called liberated slaves became enslaved again.<sup>3</sup> In 1847 the apprenticeship system, "so offensively close to slavery"<sup>4</sup> was abolished.

When slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, slavery was also abolished in Sierra Leone. However, slavery outside the borders of the Crown Colony was not affected. Even when the Protectorate was established in 1896, slavery was still legal in the Protectorate until 1928. Beginning in 1833, slaves of the tribes near the Crown Colony would enter the Crown Colony to become free. In 1841, the British established a legal principle that they would not return a fugitive slave who had escaped to Freetown.<sup>5</sup> This legal principle continued until the abolition of slavery in the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1928.<sup>6</sup>

Although slavery had been abolished in the Sierra Leone Crown Colony, slavery continued with new names. When the apprenticeship system ended, it was replaced by the ward system.<sup>7</sup> The ward system was where a Krio household in the Colony would adopt a child from outside the Colony to be educated and trained in useful occupations. Abuse occurred with children being sold to households and mistreated. Slave trade of children to the Colony developed in the 1850's. British attempts to prosecute the traders and require households to educate their wards were opposed by the Krios. They asserted the treatment of wards as not abusive. The testimony of the wards reported that they had been sold to Krios in Freetown.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Slavery in Sierra Leone Protectorate

The slave owners in the Sierra Leone Protectorate when explaining their practice of slavery usually described it as domestic slavery. The British did the same. This benign label allowed people to defend domestic slavery as mild and as neither oppressive nor violent. Orlando Patterson points out in his comprehensive review of slavery throughout the world "Slavery is one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master and total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave."<sup>9</sup> Domestic slavery in Sierra Leone had a power imbalance in the master slave relationship. It varied among the different tribes.

In 1923, it was estimated that 15% of the Protectorate population were in servitude. This was 219,000 people in a population of 1.4 million. The percentage of slaves varied according to tribe, with the Mandingo, Susu, and Vai in the 30% range and the Lokko, Kissi, and Limba in the 5% range.<sup>10</sup> How each tribe treated domestic slaves ranged from mild where there was little power imbalance between master and slave to a harsh situation where the power imbalance was great. The Mandingo slave owners were considered the harshest.<sup>11</sup>

To the British, domestic slavery was seen as mild. The British attitude could be summed up by the 1906 statement of Mr. Antrobus of the Colonial Office. "The system of slavery is not on the whole harsh towards the so-called slave, but secure for him and his family work and maintenance during his active life, and support and care during old age and sickness."<sup>12</sup> However, by 1924, Governor Slater indicated a change of the British position due to pressure from the League of Nations. "The fact remains that a domestic slave is a slave, and that a bad master has powers over him or her which are repugnant to the principles of British justice."<sup>13</sup> John Grace's study of shifting British policy on domestic slavery is comprehensive.<sup>14</sup>

In the post-WWI era, the pressure to abolish domestic slavery in the Protectorate came from outside Sierra Leone. The League of Nations appointed several commissions to suppress slavery in all its forms. It became clear by 1924 that domestic slavery in the Protectorate would not be acceptable to the League. As a result, a gradual abolition ordinance was promulgated in 1926 by the British using Sierra Leone Legislative Council. With the passage of this ordinance, the British were able to report to the League of Nations that domestic slavery was on its way out in Sierra Leone.<sup>15</sup>

For the Krios in the Colony, domestic slavery was also seen as mild. The Krio attitude in the Colony was summed up in the Sierra Leone Weekly News, 1922, "(the slaves have) for years have enjoyed the good will of their masters...and if abolition occurred Freetown would be flooded with idlers and do-nothings...loafers and people of doubtful honesty."<sup>16</sup>

The essence of the Krio position was that Protectorate domestic slavery was not an important issue. The important issue was that educated Africans should be given positions of responsibility in the governance of Sierra Leone. Domestic slavery was viewed as less important than British racism toward Krios in the Crown Colony. A British pronouncement on Protectorate slavery in the League of Nations was of little interest in the Colony.<sup>17</sup> The Sierra Leone Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was not concerned with domestic slavery. From 1912 to 1920, the Auxiliary's main concerns related to British racial discrimination against the Krios. From 1923 to 1928 when the discussions concerning the gradual and total abolition of domestic slavery happened, the Auxiliary was no longer meeting.<sup>18</sup>

The Protectorate Paramount Chiefs had no need to defend the idea that domestic slavery was mild because both the British and Krios already supported them.

The Hut Tax War of 1898, which they lost, actually was a win as far as domestic slavery was concerned. Since slavery was African custom and law, the British decided they would not immediately challenge nor change it.<sup>19</sup>

The general belief among all was that domestic slavery would disappear over time as Sierra Leone became more economically developed. The Krios had proposed compensation for the slaver owners when the gradual abolition of domestic slavery was proposed. Dr. H.C. Bankole-Bright proposed a payment of 200,000 pounds sterling following the precedent when slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833.<sup>20</sup> When the vote in the Sierra Leone Legislative Council to include compensation in the Gradual Abolition of Slavery Ordinance, none of the three of Paramount Chiefs voted for it. Compensation was raised again by the Krios when the immediate Abolition Ordinance was considered and this proposal was rejected by the British. However, Paramount Chief Bai Comber stated, “the slave owners in the Protectorate will suffer greatly and their wealth will be broken down almost entirely. I am recording this fact so that in the future you may be able to make some sort of recommendation to the big people in England to enable to make some sort of provision for the betterment of the Protectorate.”<sup>21</sup> Regarding the domestic slaves themselves, the history of Sierra Leone contains examples of Protectorate slave resistance. Fleeing to the Colony, actual revolts, disobedience of masters, threat of sale to another master, desire for freedom, and complaints of ill-treatment all give evidence that domestic slavery was neither mild nor pleasant for many slaves.<sup>22</sup> Today there are no narratives by emancipated slaves or their descendants. It seems that to admit slavery in one’s background is just not done in Sierra Leone.<sup>23</sup>

### **3. 1926 Slave Revolt in the Protectorate**

From 1923 to 1926, there was much discussion in Freetown regarding domestic slavery. There were stories in the newspapers about the proceedings in the Sierra Leone Council. The Gradual Abolition Ordinance was passed in 1925. In the Protectorate, rumors began to spread that slavery had been abolished.<sup>24</sup> Many of the estimated 219,000 slaves probably were aware of these activities.

Kodogbo Sabu was a Headman of slave village near Karina, Northern Province. His father was Biladi. His tribe is unknown. His owner was Foday Mansaray Dabor of the Mandingo tribe in the Biriwa Chiefdom. Kodogbo Sabu was trusted by his Mandingo masters, “(He) was truthful and we did not hesitate to send him out to transact any of our personal business.”<sup>25</sup>

Kodogbo Sabu had heard a rumor from Freetown that all the Protectorate slaves were free. This rumor spread to all the slave villages in Karina-Nafai area. Sometime in March-April 1926 Kodogbo Sabu went to Batkanu to pay the taxes he collected from his co-slaves. There he met with District Commissioner E.F. Sayers. Sayers told Kodogbo Sabu and other slaves that they were not free but only their children. This information was a, “blow to their hopes (and) roused resentment and discontent.”<sup>26</sup>

Headman Kodogbo Sabu returned to his village and told them what Sayers had said. Soon after the slaves became indifferent farm workers. “All these slaves were not doing any more good work,” according to their Mandingo masters. “...they treated all orders and messengers from their...masters with indifference.”<sup>27</sup> Apparently, during this time the slaves began to plan to do something definite about achieving freedom immediately.

Sometime in May 1926, Kodogbo Sabu accompanied by other slaves went to Makeni to see District Commissioner J.T. Kemp. N'fa Nonko, a Mandingo chief at Karina followed his slaves. According to the son of N'fa Nonko, "Then the slaves said to the District Commissioner that all the other slaves from other countries (USA and England) are now free and they too required freedom."<sup>28</sup> J.T. Kemp told the slaves, "You are not going to be free but your children are not slaves with effect from today's date." Kemp also told the slaves to go, "quiet themselves at home and he did not want to hear anything about fighting."<sup>29</sup> The slaves were unsatisfied about Kemp's advice.

Sometime in June 1926, the slaves left the Biriwa Chiefdom and moved to Pampanko, in adjacent Sanda Lokko Chiefdom. They moved to Pampanko because N'fa Nonko had some slave farms there. The slaves, "felt that they could have a stronger force if they joined their friends at Pampanko."<sup>30</sup>

The revolt of the slaves was a surprise to the Mandingo masters. "They plotted through secret meetings which did not come to our notice,"<sup>31</sup> according to the son of N'fa Nonko. Many of the other masters deny that the revolt was planned. "the slaves did not plan any revolt. It was a sudden action they took..." Yet all the Mandingo masters agreed that, "the slaves revolted through the incitement of Kodogbo Sabu."<sup>32</sup>

Sometime in September 1926, Commissioner for the Northern Province, Captain W.B. Stanley met with the Mandingo Chiefs of the Karene District at Batkanu. Stanley announced the British policy toward runaway slaves. A slave could gain freedom in two ways – either by purchasing his freedom or by running away without any of the master's property. However, the runaway slave must proceed further than the neighboring chiefdom. Otherwise, the master could enter the neighboring chiefdom and get his runaway slaves.<sup>33</sup>

The runaway slaves of the Biriwa Mandingoes led by Kodogbo Sabu must have learned of Stanley's runaway slave policy statement. In September 1926, to be safe, some slaves moved to Mapurto in the Sella Limba Chiefdom that was ruled by regent Banja. The rest of the slaves remained at Pampanko.

N'fa Nonko wanted his slaves back. In early November 1926, Northern Commissioner Stanley visited Karina, advising N'fa Nonko, "to go to Kamalu and see Bai Samura and get his permission to collect the slaves in Sanda Lokko and carry them back to Biriwa."<sup>34</sup>

In early November 1926, N'fa Nonko gathered, "all the Mandingo tribe,"<sup>35</sup> and went to Kamalu where Paramount Chief Bai Samura of the Sanda Lokko Chiefdom lived. There is some evidence that N'fa Nonko sent messengers to places outside the immediate area of Karina and Nafai. Nonko spent 10 days in Kamalu while Bai Samura waited for orders from District Commissioner Sayers about what to do with N'fa Nonko. The British report states that Bai Samura never received any instructions from Sayers. Nonko's son Alaji Alpha Borbor Sheriff, states that Sayers ordered Bai Samura to surrender the fugitive slaves to N'fa Nonko.<sup>36</sup>

In November 1926, there were over 300 slaves in Kamalu and they were represented by four Headmen, Kodogbo Sabu who was the spokesman. The other Headmen were Nyama, Fasidi, and Sabuba. Other leaders were Lansaneh, Jiba of Kaworokosonah, Alpha Koroma of Sokuldalah, Momodu Marah of Massah, and Bokari.<sup>37</sup>

On November 24, 1926, N'fa Nonko told Kodogbo Sabu that, "I have come to collect you to come back to my place." Kodogbo Sabu replied, "We did not revolt, it was the Europeans that set us free, but if you say that we should return we are prepared to return."<sup>38</sup> Sabu told Nonko that the slaves at Pampanko were hiding in the bush. Sabu asked Nonko for permission to go ahead to collect the slaves. Sabu left accompanied

by five of Nonko's men – Tida Sadiku, Foday Lansana, Momodu Fona, Salla Silla, and Momodu Koroma.<sup>39</sup>

"Immediately when they arrived, Kodogbo Sabu sounded the horn and the slaves assembled. Sabu said that they should return to slavery, the slaves revolted and almost killed the five people present."<sup>40</sup> N'fa Nonko's men returned to Kamalu that evening.

On November 25, 1926, N'fa Nonko returned to Pampanko with thirty of his followers to get the slaves. They found the place empty as the slaves had fled to a place near the Sella Limba Lokko boundary. They may have wanted to go to Mapurto in the Sella Limba Chiefdom where they would be safe from their masters according to British policy. The slaves led by Kodogbo Sabu had built a temporary camp at Masobai. It was a one house village, whose Headman was named Koba. The camp was composed of men, women, and children and was located in the Sanda Lokko Chiefdom.

On finding Pampanko deserted, the Mandingoes began to search for the fugitive slaves. The slaves placed an old woman as the guard to the entrance the temporary camp at Masobai.<sup>41</sup> "Yeramen, a slave owner, then found the old woman at the gate and asked her where her companions had gone. Of course, he was trying to trace their course in a secret way. The old lady summoned Yeramen to swear on her white hair to confirm that he was a slave. Yeramen, anxious to know where the slaves were, did so and the lady directed them to their huts. Yeramen led the way and was followed by the others."<sup>42</sup>

On November 25, 1926, a fight occurred when the slaves and their masters met in Masobai. The Mandingo masters were led by N'fa Nonko and the slaves by Kodogbo Sabu. Nonko claimed that Sabu was encouraged by two Lokkos, sub-chief Bai Bureh and Koba the Headman of Masobai. The slaves were armed with flintlock rifles and cutlasses. The Mandingoes claimed that they were unarmed and only carried ropes to bind the slaves. "We did not know that the slaves were going to fight us, that is why we did not bring any weapons with us." Yet, both Kabindi and Sabu Konte, slaves who fought against N'fa Nonko, claim that their masters were armed with guns and swords. Yet there are no reported casualties on the side of the slaves from gunshot wounds. In addition, when the Regent of Sella Limba Chiefdom, Pa Banaja Moi, disarmed N'fa Nonko's group, only one sword and twelve sticks were taken from them. Therefore, it would appear that N'fa Nonko's followers did not carry guns when they entered Kamakwie after the fight at Masobai.<sup>43</sup>

During the fight Alpha Laiba, a slave, shot Yeramen in the thigh. Laiba was aiming at his master Sala Silla but missed. Kabindi, another slave, shot his gun but he missed. It is not clear what happened next but eventually the thirty Mandingoes, led by N'fa Nonko were able to capture seventy slaves. "All the slaves who were captured after the fight were tied and flogged and taken to Nafai," according to a report by District Commissioner J.T. Kemp. At Nafai, the returned slaves were placed in stocks for several days as punishment. The masters confiscated thirty cutlasses and seven guns.<sup>44</sup>

At this point, the Mandingoes went to Kamakwie in the Sella Limba Chiefdom to search for more of their slaves. Kodogbo Sabu, Alpha Laiba, and the majority of the slaves had escaped. Arriving at Kamakwie on the same day N'fa Nonko demanded twenty-seven of his slaves from the Regent of Sella Limba, Pa Banja Moi, who refused to surrender the slaves. Moi told Nonko to disarm his group. Moi sent a message to Batkanu for advice from District Commissioner Sayers. Sayers ordered N'fa Nonko and his slaves to report to Batkanu. Sayers also praised Regent Moi for, "his action in

disarming N'fa Nonko's people and reporting the case promptly to me."<sup>45</sup> N'fa Nonko claimed he never received the order of Sayers to return so he returned to Karina.<sup>46</sup>

Yeramen whose wound became infected was sent on a hammock to Karina and died on December 3, 1926. Nonko asked A. Lynch, who was doing a topographical survey for the Sierra Leone government, to write a letter for him to Sayers. The letter mentioned the fight and the death of Yeramen.<sup>47</sup>

On December 6, 1926, Assistant District Commissioner E.J. Tyndall sent messengers to Karina requesting the presence of N'fa Nonko, his followers. In addition, his slaves at Batkanu. On December 11, 1926, N'fa Nonko, twenty Mandingoes masters, and twenty-seven slaves reported to Batkanu. A warrant for Alpha Laiba's arrest was issued charging him with the manslaughter of Yeramen. On December 7, 1926, two slaves, Sabu Konte and Kabindi were imprisoned for 14 days with hard labor for the illegal possession of firearms.<sup>48</sup>

On December 20, 1926, Sayers reported to Captain W.B. Stanley that, "all or nearly all of the masters (some twenty-five) are now in Batkanu with N'fa Nonko, and about sixty of the slaves, and there is now no possibility of further physical conflict between the two parties."<sup>49</sup>

On the same day, Kodogbo Sabu was arrested by Tyndall at Kamalu. Tyndall also reported that the Court Messengers were holding Alpha Laiba's wife and they expected and they expected to have Alpha Laiba soon, who was reported to be at Loma.<sup>50</sup>

When N'fa Nonko and his followers arrived at Batkanu, they were arrested and charged with conspiracy and riot. The slaves were held as witnesses. While at Batkanu, the prisoners answered a roll call each morning. The prisoners hired themselves out as farm laborers, "in order get chop." The prisoners remained in Batkanu until sometime in January 1927.<sup>51</sup>

On January 16, 1927, five cases were committed to trial in the Circuit Court. Case #1 - N'fa Nonko, Sheku Silla, Numa Kaloko, Momodu Dabu, Alpha Sheriff, Lamina Fona, and Fode Lansana Kaloko, all Mandingo slave owners, were charged with riot and conspiracy. Cases #2 to #4 - Salla Silla, Momodu Daba, and Sheku Silla, all Mandingo slave owners, were charged with assault in separate cases. Case #5 - Alpha Laiba, slave, was charged with manslaughter.<sup>52</sup>

The cases were heard in Makeni at a special court session from March 24-26, 1927 with William Butler Lloyd as the presiding judge. N'fa Nonko was represented by C.E. Wright, a Krio lawyer who was an appointed member of the Sierra Leone Legislative Council. At the trial Alpha Laiba was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to one year of hard labor. Sheku Silla and Momodu Dabu were both acquitted of the assault charges. Salla Silla was convicted of assault and battery and Wright filed an appeal. All the defendants, except Alpha Laiba, were acquitted of the riot charges. Four were convicted of conspiracy, N'fa Nonko, Sheku Silla, Momodu Dabu,, and Fode Lansana Kaloko. Numa Kaloko, Alpha Sheriff, and Lamina Fona were cleared of all charges. Wright filed for appeal of the conspiracy convictions.<sup>53</sup>

On June 29, 1927, the N'fa Nonko *et al.* and the Salla Silla cases were consolidated as the issues were identical. Did the master of a slave have the right to recapture the slave, if the slave ran away? On July 1, 1927, the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone quashed the convictions of N'fa Nonko *et al.* and Salla Silla in a two to one decision. The essence of the two majority opinions was that Ordinance No. 9 of 1926 (Gradual Abolition) did not abolish slavery. Justice J. Aitken stated that the laws of Sierra Leone, including Ordinance No. 9 of 1926 did not take away the slave owner's,

“right to use reasonable force to re-take” his slave. Since the Circuit Court at Makeni had, “found that none but reasonable force was used,” the masters were acting legally.<sup>54</sup>

In the end, only one person was punished in the British Colonial legal system, the slave, Alpha Laiba. One year of hard labor for the death of the Mandingo slave owner, Yeramen. The seven slave owners were acquitted of the charges of conspiracy and riot. Using African custom and law, which was supported by the British, the slaves were immediately punished, probably after a hearing before a British District Commissioner. N’fa Nonko’s 70 slaves were tied up and returned to Karina. There they were flogged and placed in stocks for several days. Two slaves were sentenced to 14 days of hard labor for possession of a firearm. Kodogbo Sabu was arrested, but there is no record of what happened. In January 1928, he was back in Karina again.<sup>55</sup>

#### **4. Abolition of Slavery in the Protectorate**

The reaction in Great Britain to the court decision was of shock and disbelief. No one could understand why slavery was allowed in Sierra Leone, the home of the freed slaves. The subtle difference between the Protectorate and Colony was lost to the general public. The texts of the judgment were published in the London Times and Manchester Guardian on July 27, 1927. The same day the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Ormsby-Gore sent a telegram to Sierra Leone requesting a copy of the judgment, A copy was sent on August 1, 1927. On July 28, 1927, Mr. Ormsby-Gore answered a question in the House of Commons about the N’fa Nonko case. Ormsby-Gore said, “If there appears to be a fault in the drafting of that Ordinance, an amendment will have to be considered.”<sup>56</sup> On July 29, 1927, the Foreign Office apparently still uninformed about Sierra Leone submitted a report to the League of Nations that made no mention of the new situation. Sir John Simon, a lawyer, stated in the London Times, “it would be indeed lamentable if the chiefs of West Africa were led to believe that they have behind them the support of the highest British authorities for maintaining a system of slave owning. The Colonial Office is doubtless considering what action should be taken, especially as the League of Nations is receiving reports at Geneva next month with a view to the final suppression of the remains of slavery throughout the world.”<sup>57</sup>

For the Krios, there was little immediate public reaction to the N’fa Nonko case in Freetown beyond publishing the majority decision on July 16, 1927 and the minority dissent on July 23, 1927. During this period the Sierra Leone Auxiliary of British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was disbanded.<sup>58</sup> The Society that had been defunct since WWI had never concerned itself with the question of slavery in the Protectorate. Its main purpose was to serve as a vehicle to the British government for Krio grievances. During the Legislative Council discussion of gradual abolition ordinance, the London office had done nothing to support the Krios for compensation for the slave owners. T.H. Thompson wrote a newspaper editorial that summed up the Krio attitudes. He pointed out the Freetown people did not see the question of slavery as important as the question of more African participation on the governing process. No one in Great Britain seemed too concerned about the 1926 Railroad Strike and no one worried about ending of the elected Freetown City Council.. Yet the entire world was concerned about slavery.<sup>59</sup>

The British moved quickly to abolish slavery in the Protectorate. On September 15, 1927, Ordinance No. 24 of 1927 was introduced at special session of the Legislative

Council. The Ordinance would abolish the legal status of slavery and would commence on January 1, 1928. There would be no compensation. The ordinance was passed on September 22, 1927.<sup>60</sup>

The reaction of the Freetown Krios was to write editorials in the newspapers. They urged for compensation the slave owners and for controls be implemented to prevent the Colony from being overrun with ex-slaves migrating from the Protectorate. Little concern was shown for the welfare of the ex-slaves but much concern was shown the dignity of the Krios.<sup>61</sup>

However, in the Sierra Leone Weekly News, Modibo wrote, "I am afraid Krio people in general have treated this matter of slavery too lightly, much too lightly if not with complete indifference, in the past. While strangers, who cannot in any way suffer by its retention or benefit by its removal, have for years 'pressed parliament' to remove the dread curse from our country, we who are most intimately concerned in the matter have scarcely lifted a finger to bring about the happy result...Talk of Compensation! Well, yes, there ought to be some compensation – not to the masters but to the poor slaves in an act of reparation for all the untold miseries they and their ancestors have endured for generations."<sup>62</sup>

On January 1, 1928, the legal status of slavery was abolished in the Protectorate. In Karina where the slave revolt began, Kodogbo Sabu told the slaves that they were now free. "When the slaves heard this they were dancing the whole of the day."<sup>63</sup> "Some of the slaves, after they had been set free, lived in groups and founded villages where they could farm for themselves."<sup>64</sup> Near Nafai the following villages were founded, Panpankoh, Fodesoriah, and Maribaya. Some slaves when becoming free added a second name to their former one, e.g., Laiba is now called Alpha Laiba.<sup>65</sup> Some slaves moved further away to Kondebaia, Sokudala, and Kaworosokornah." according Alhaji Borbor Nonko, son of N'fa Nonko.<sup>66</sup> In the Mabole Valley (Bombali District), in the Tambakka Chieftdom (Karene District) and in the Tamiso Chieftdom (Koinadugu District) slaves left their masters. The majority of the masters were Mandingoes.<sup>67</sup>

The abolition of slavery was a disaster to the Mandingo slave owners in the Karina area. There was no one to work the farms because most of the slaves had left or were working for themselves. Around Karina there were over 1,700 slaves, 1016 were owned by N'fa Nonko, one of the largest slave owners in the Protectorate.<sup>68</sup> At Waridala 268, slaves left and the Fona family reported in 1963 that they "are still suffering."<sup>69</sup> The British offered N'fa Nonko 200 pounds sterling for his legal expenses. He refused the money.<sup>70</sup> British sent Nonko's sons to Guinea for agricultural training.<sup>71</sup>

In the Northern Province, about 7,000 slaves left their masters. The majority of who had separated themselves from their former masters (after refusing to work for a lengthy period) before the Abolition of Slavery Ordinance was enacted.<sup>72</sup> According to British reports, abolition had little effect in the Central and Southern Provinces. In the Central Province, "The measure was received without demur – almost apathy throughout the district, and one might now believe that there had never been such an institution."<sup>73</sup> In the Southern Province, about 1,000 slaves came to Pujehun, "to ascertain actually from the Government itself, that they were free. Abolition of slavery had little effect anywhere in the province and offered few problems even to the Native Courts."<sup>74</sup> There was little evidence that abolition had any economic effect.

The only group outside Sierra Leone concerned with Protectorate slavery was the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society of Great Britain. The Society never had any knowledge of the problem in Sierra Leone because by the 1920's their Auxiliary in Freetown was not active. The Society did mobilize British public opinion against slavery



after the N'fa Nonko case and helped force the Colonial Office into a position of total abolition. The Society was also active in Geneva in working for an International Convention under the sponsorship of the League of Nations. The Society helped the cause of the Protectorate slaves by making their conditions known to the rest of the world. After slavery was abolished in Sierra Leone, the Society kept watch on the British Colonial Office reports to make sure abolition took place.<sup>75</sup>

In 1929, the Society having reviewed the British Colonial Office reports to the League of Nations on Sierra Leone concluded abolition had taken place. They noted that master-slave relationship was now an employer-employee relationship.<sup>76</sup> The British report stated the gradual steps were being taken to gradually pay for all labor called out on public service. They had decided to remunerate all labor employed in the construction and repair of Government buildings. They hoped to soon to pay wages for road construction in the Protectorate.<sup>77</sup> In 1933, the British Colonial Office reported to the League of Nations, "that no system of employment had yet to be devised for the free slaves, for they became independent farmers and obtained farms readily...Others sought employment...are paid...on daily rates...but all this will be regulated by the proposed Labor Code."<sup>78</sup>

In 1932, an Ordinance was passed restricting the chief's right to forced labor. In 1934, a comprehensive Labor Code was enacted. In 1935, the British reported to the League of Nations Advisory Committee on Slavery, "...it appears that there is a tendency on the part of some of the former so-called 'slaves' to object to doing communal labor. Moreover, whereas they were formally voiceless in assemblies (and usually absent), after the enactment of the ordinance (abolition) they tended to side against their former masters and to become more vocal."<sup>79</sup> In 1938, the forced labor law was strengthened. In 1939, trade unions were allowed to organize in the Colony and Protectorate.<sup>80</sup> However, in spite of the laws regarding forced labor and unions, "the rights of the Paramount Chiefs to exact forced labor was allowed for a wide variety of communal work...These obligations continued until the Cox Report in 1956. The report recommended that the rights of the Chiefs and Government to forced labor be abrogated because they were partially responsible for the recent riots in Sierra Leone."<sup>81</sup>

## 5. The Legacies of Slavery in Sierra Leone

One legacy of 1926 Slave Revolt is that it was successful in getting the British to abolish slavery immediately in 1928. It is unknown if **Kodogbo Sabu** knew that when he led the runaway slaves to leave their Mandingo masters, that this would result in the abolition of Protectorate slavery.

Another legacy, over 7,000 slaves left their masters in the Northern Province and 1,000 slaves in the Southern Province asked if they were free. The story of what happened to the 219,000 emancipated slaves and their descendants is largely unknown.<sup>82</sup>

Another legacy is that abolition was less successful in changing the economic, political and social structures that supported the exploitation of emancipated slaves. Domestic slavery continued as forced labor. In the 1970's, it was still happening as noted by John Grace.<sup>83</sup> It continues today as "woman damage" in Native Courts as described by Esther Mokuna, Maarten Voors, Erwin Bulte, and Paul Richards.<sup>84</sup>

The Civil War, 1991-2002 was related to the collapse of the Sierra Leone government "...intertwined with an accelerated a crisis in rural areas, where the abuse of customary law by ruling land holding elites had particularly severe consequences for young people."<sup>85</sup> Many participants in the Civil War 1991-2002 were, "children from ex-

slave backgrounds...Post-slavery conditions of social dependency and vagrancy reproduced themselves across generations. A rural underclass – ripe for militia recruitment – was born.”<sup>86</sup>

Another legacy was a failure to treat the emancipated Protectorate slaves as full members of Sierra Leonean society. In the school history books up to Independence, the condition of the freed Protectorate slaves was largely ignored or briefly covered. For example, **Kodogbo Sabu** and the slave revolt is unknown.

Another legacy was the invisibility of the emancipated slave. In 1945, it was noted, “The designation of ‘slave’ carries with it such odium that whether the slave was adopted as a son or given his liberty, the stigma remained”<sup>87</sup> As a result few would self-identify as having a slave background. No one wrote about his or her personal or family slave experience, as it was just not done. In 1963 in a Native Court, “...if a person calls another a ‘slave’ he could be fined up to 5 pounds sterling.”<sup>88</sup>

All these legacies are related to the existence of global slavery. Kevin Bales has noted that “slavery grows best in extreme poverty...Slaveholders must have the resources to fund the purchase, capture, or enticement of slaves and the power to control them after enslavement...Moreover, the potential slave must lack perceived alternatives to enslavement. Being poor, homeless, a refugee, or abandoned can all lead to the desperation that opens the door to slavery, making it easy for the slaver to lay an attractive trap.”<sup>89</sup> A study of Sierra Leone youth, “affirmed that decades of poor governance, poor economic prospects and violent conflict have produced this generation of young men and women who define their social status primarily in terms of their inability to fulfill their aspirations and their relative exclusion from mainstream economic and political processes.”<sup>90</sup> The possibility of the existence of conditions and capabilities for human exploitation that would lead to what Andrew Crane calls “Modern Slavery As a Management Practice” is probably happening in Sierra Leone.<sup>91</sup> It is time to recognize and document the slave experience before and after abolition in Sierra Leone so that the freed slaves and their descendants are treated with dignity and respect. This can start with **Kodogbo Sabu** and the Slave Revolt of 1926. It needs to continue with elimination or at least amelioration of slave-like conditions of employment that exists in Sierra Leone today. All of these actions would be important in the process of the understanding and healing of a terrible Civil War.

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**Alfred Arkley** is Professor Emeritus Management, University of Illinois at Springfield. He taught courses on Power, Negotiation, & Management. He taught African History at the Sierra Leone Grammar School as a Peace Corps Volunteer, 1962-1963. (While there, he started his research on the 1926 Slave Revolt.) He was a Public Administration Fellow with Federal Aviation Administration and Fulbright Professor of Management, Kaunas, Lithuania. He earned an AB, Government, Harvard, MA, African Studies and International Relations, Columbia, and MA, PhD, Political Science, Michigan State University. He is retired and now resides in Bellingham, Washington, USA.