

and its implications for conservation and human health, (iii) the writing of a field work report on primate conservation status in Eastern Côte-d'Ivoire, (iv) the editing of my dissertation, and (v) the writing of a research proposal.

At the end of my residency, the article on seed dispersal was well advanced and the review article on bushmeat consumption was submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. The fieldwork report on primate conservation status was completed and I had edited my dissertation and submitted it to Tropenbos International for publication (a PDF version is available on the Tropenbos web site). Finally, I had written two research proposals, one of which has been funded to specify the distribution of endangered monkeys in some forest areas of Côte d'Ivoire.

One of the most important outcomes of my residency was certainly the number and quality of people I met at UW and elsewhere in the US. Indeed, I was entirely integrated into the Bioanthropology Section of UW and participated in its weekly meetings. I participated in several other meetings such as those of the Department of Psychology and those of the Interdepartmental Animal Behaviour Group. My stay in the USA also allowed me to participate in the first meeting of the Midwest Primate Interest Group (MPIG) held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in October 2004 on the topic of primate conservation. I found all these seminars to be very constructive since I heard talks and discussions about various topics related to different disciplines and different organisms.

Personally, I had the pleasure to give a talk at the Department of Anthropology of UW and another one at the Department of Anthropology of the Ohio State University (OSU). Both talks focused on the unsustainability of hunting of monkeys in the Taï area (Côte d'Ivoire) and the effect of hunting on monkey behavior.

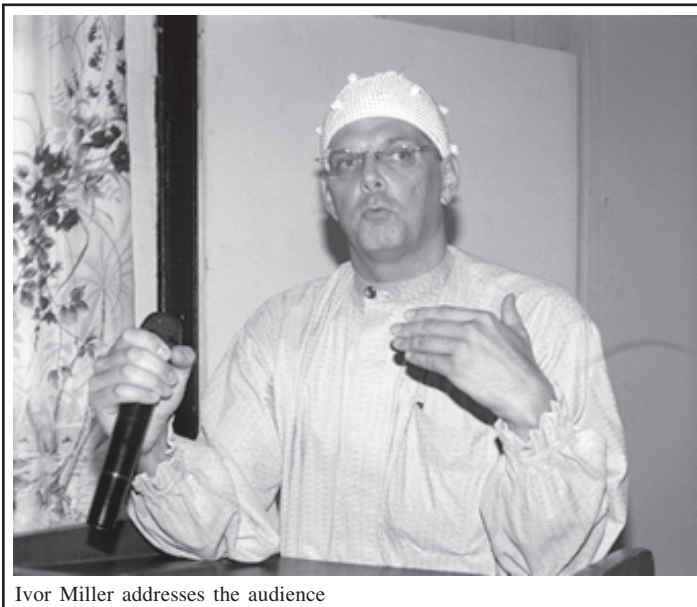
Another important outcome of my stay in the USA was my discovery of many aspects of American culture such as the presidential campaign, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and the daily American way of life. I also visited important sites such as the Natural History Museum and the Bronx Zoo in New York City.

To sum up, I believe that there are reasons to be proud of the outcomes of my residency at UW. This residency certainly contributed in advancing the mission of WARA. Indeed, besides being very productive as a scholar, thanks to the facilities of UW, and more open-minded thanks to my travel within the USA, the residency allowed me to establish contacts with important resource persons including well-known researchers, conservationists and representatives of donor agencies. These are very important connections for consolidating the career of the Sub-Saharan African scientist that I am.

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How I went to Calabar and became an Ékpè Ambassador to the Cuban Abakuá brotherhood



Ivor Miller addresses the audience

"If I did not know that you are a chief, I would not allow you to wear that cloth you have on," announced Chief Joe Bassey through the microphone in the filled auditorium. As the crowd applauded, a mischievous smile appeared on his face, leading him on to other

remarks about my presentation to the community of Calabar, Nigeria.

In the lecture hall were many men and women in traditional attire, among them leaders of the indigenous government of the entire region, known as the Ékpè or Ngbe (leopard) society in the local languages of Efik, Ejagham, and Efut (Balondo). As did I, they wore ceremonial hats, carried walking sticks, and wore "loin cloth" wrappers tied around the waist. The type I wore, called Ukara, was an indigo dyed cotton that only Ékpè members may wear, since they display symbols and signs related to the mystic workings of the society.

We were in the "Old Residence" of the former colonial District Officer overlooking the Calabar River, now home to the National Museum. Down the hill from us to the west sprawled Atakpa, an ancient Efik settlement with a beachhead that served as the port to embark thousands of enslaved locals to the Americas. In the distance to the east (up river) lay the port of Creek Town, the first Efik settlement before Calabar became a metropolis, and the place from where the majority of enslaved humans were loaded on canoes to be placed forcibly on the European ships that carried them to their fates.

In Calabar with the support of a grant from the West African Research Association, I had been invited by the museum director,



Mr. Nath Mayo Adediran, to speak about my research topic: the recreation of the Ékpè society in Cuba by enslaved members taken from these shores. I called my talk “Okobio Enyenison Efik Obutong: Cross River History and Language in the Cuban Ékpè Society,” based on a Cuban chant memorializing those who founded Ékpè in Cuba. With the help of speakers of Cross River languages in the USA and now in Calabar, we had made great strides in interpreting many of the Cuban chants, in the belief that these are important links to the history of the region. We confirmed that Obutong was an Efik settlement, some of whose leaders were enslaved during conflicts in the 18th century, and that all terms in this Cuban phrase are coherent in the Efik language.

Local personages were taking this topic very seriously, since they have learned that Cuban Ékpè is a direct link to their own past as a people(s) that promises to become an important contemporary issue as the depth of the cultural transmission to Cuba becomes apparent. Several other scholars have worked on the links between Calabar and Cuba, but I was particularly well received, perhaps because for the first time, we were organizing a trip of leading Cuban members to visit Calabar.

With me at the presenters’ table in the lecture hall were Dr. Okon E. Uya, Chair of the History Department at the University of Calabar; Dr. Ekpo Eyo, the former director of the National Museums of Nigeria; Dr. Jill Salmons, senior researcher into Cross River traditional arts; Mr. Larry Esin, the Managing Director of Tourism for Cross River State; and “Etubom” Bassey Ekpo Bassey, an Ékpè leader who presides over the Calabar lodge responsible for the coronation of the Obong, or traditional ruler of the Efik people (Efik society is organized into Houses, groups based on an extended family lineage including ancestors and descendants, as well as incorporated exogenous members [wives, servants, etc]; Etubom is a title meaning “Head of House,” in this case the King James House). In the front row sat a dozen Ékpè leaders in regalia, with many others present discretely wearing street clothes.

Among those dressed to the nines, Joseph Bassey is the Muri (clan leader) of the Efut Ekondo lodge in Calabar, founded by Efut migrants from Cameroon in the nineteenth century and earlier. In Cuba, the Efut are known as “Efó”, and considered “the founders” of Ékpè.

Representing the Ékpè lodge of Big Qua Town in Calabar was Chief Imona, whose father had been the Ndidem (paramount ruler) of the Qua Ejagham of Calabar. A week earlier the Qua Ndidem had received me in their lodge the ceremonial way: with Ékpè masquer-

ades, drumming and chanting, food and drink; afterwards Imona told me I was the first foreign researcher they had brought past their portal, a privilege extended due to my recent initiation by another lodge. Imona had worked with many foreign Ékpè researchers in Calabar over the years, including Robert Farris Thompson, Keith Nicklin, Jill Salmons, and Amanda Carlson. The honor accorded to me was a sign of the seriousness with which Cuban Abakuá was regarded. The Ejagham, also migrants from Cameroon, are considered by many to be the founders of Ékpè. They are known locally as Àbàkpà, the term used by the Cubans to name their own society, Abakuá.

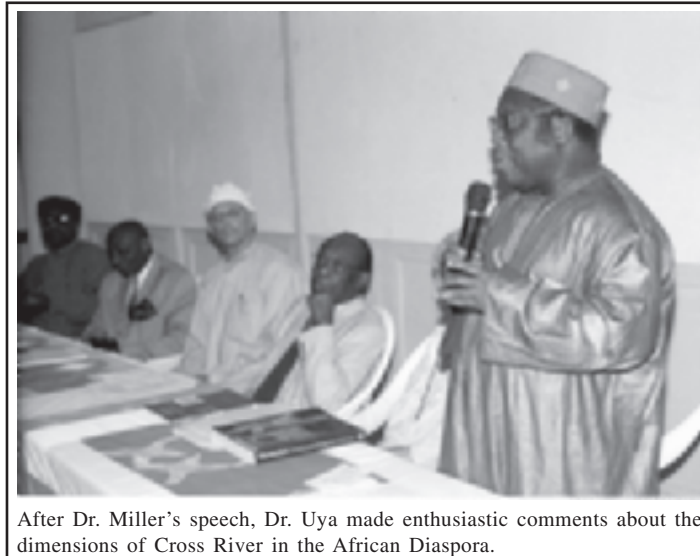
As a shared culture in Cross River history, Ékpè was transmitted from one group to another, becoming a key factor for inter-group alliances and trading networks. In tension with this tendency toward co-existence is a more recent one of ethnic nationalism that threatens to destabilize the region, as “leaders” of each group battle over land rights based on which group migrated to Calabar first,

which group founded Ékpè, etc., despite the reality of intermarriage among them for centuries. Those at the lecture that night in the Museum were clearly interested in the Cuban narratives of the Cross River past, because within them are perspectives untainted by local politics that bring fresh perspectives about their own pre-colonial history.

Indeed, the primary message of the Cuban Abakuá is one of brotherhood across ethnic and racial borders. Historically, Abakuá narratives speak of the Efut and Ekoi (Ejagham) as

founders, the other tribes entering later through a series of consecrations, with each bringing their own contributions to the aggrandizement of the culture, making it truly a multi-ethnic enterprise. In other words, the issue is not merely to identify a “founder”, but to reach an understanding of Ékpè as a shared culture that ties the region together.

My interaction with West African Ékpè members began in 2000, when, after publishing samples of Abakuá phrases from a commercially recorded album (Miller 2000), Nigerian members of the Cross River Ékpè society living in the USA informed me that they had recognized these texts as part of their own history. Thus began a process of interpretation that led to what was perhaps the first meeting between both groups, at the Efik National Association meeting in Brooklyn (2001), then in Michigan (2003), culminating in the first official visit to Calabar of Cuban Abakuá during the Third Annual International Ékpè Festival in December 2004, a trip organized by myself and paid for by the government of Cross River



After Dr. Miller’s speech, Dr. Uya made enthusiastic comments about the dimensions of Cross River in the African Diaspora.

State. Fittingly, one of the two was Ogduardo “Román” Díaz, a professional musician from whose 1997 recording I transcribed the chant identified by Nigerians in my 2000 essay.

The key to my success as a facilitator of these meetings was by acting as a historian interested not in “secrets”, but in using Abakuá chants to identify source languages and regions, a project of interest to Abakuá themselves. Because I as an American scholar had access to information about Africa that Abakuá did not have, by sharing this with Abakuá, we became colleagues, helping each other through the difficult materials.

Thanks to the support from WARA, I was able to spend three months in Calabar during the summer of 2004. I met Ékpè/Mgbe leaders from many lodges in Calabar, as well as throughout the entire Cross River region, including the villages of Nsofan and Abijang in southern Etung, Oban, Oron, Uruan, Umon, Efut Ibonda, and Creek Town, all in the Akwa Ibom and Cross River States of Nigeria. I also traveled to southwestern Cameroon, lectured at the University of Buea, and traveled to Ekondo Titi, Dibonda-Balondo, Bekura, and other villages to meet with Mgbe elders. As I learned, all these regions were connected through the Calabar trading network during the 18th and 19th centuries, and all of them are reflected in the Cuban Abakuá narratives.

I shared an English translation of my Cuban manuscript with selected Ékpè leaders, who were formally educated, and who grasped the significance of the work. One of them, “Chief Engineer” Bassey Ekpo Bassey, was able to interpret large portions of the Cuban material into the Efik language, the nineteenth century *lingua franca* of the region (since two different men named Bassey Ekpo Bassey appear in this essay, I put their traditional titles in quotes to distinguish them; as a personal name, Bassey, an Anglicization of the Efik term for God, Abasí, is profuse in Calabar). He was able to make sense of how the language was transformed using an Ékpè system of communication known as ‘nsibidi’, which consists of signs and symbols that are spoken, danced, or drawn. Many other Ékpè leaders helped me identify Cuban terms after I read them aloud, and described their meaning. In this way, we were able to identify the likely source of scores of Cuban lodges founded in the 19th century by Ékpè who left Calabar.

Furthermore, my WARA trip enabled me to set the stage for the official invitation and sponsorship of the Cubans. Since we were successful, they spent ten days in December 2004 performing at the festival, during which time we met with the Minister of Culture, who enthusiastically pledged that this project would receive Federal support. Also, the governor of Cross River State agreed that a delegation should be sent from Calabar to Cuba, after which more Cubans would be invited for the December 2005 festival. All of these projects are pending.

The idea behind this process is simple: as the repositories of knowledge about their own history and culture, the ideal research methodology would be to reunite the leadership of Ékpè and Abakuá, and allow them to compare notes. Because Cuban Abakuá

actually came to Calabar, this project was no longer theoretical: the living connections were readily apparent, and as a consequence, news of the Cuban Abakuá spread rapidly throughout southeastern Nigeria.

In spite of these tremendous strides forward, the process has been by no means simple. On the one hand, the history of repression of the Abakuá society from all Cuban governments in the 20th century gives one little hope for official support at the present. On the other, the ongoing and infamous climate of corruption in Nigeria, as well as the radical “Christianity” being used there to attack indigenous culture, leaves little hope for a sustained and historically engaged study of trans-Atlantic culture continuity, as supported financially from Nigeria.

Nevertheless, WARA support has enabled significant strides forward to my project. As I shared news about my research among Cuban Abakuá, and then video tapes I made in Calabar, news of the planned encounters between Cuba and Nigeria spread like wildfire among Abakuá in Cuba, as well as those living in Europe and the USA. Being in Calabar allowed me to focus the Cuban material and organize it into a publishable form. As a facilitator between the masters of Cuban Abakuá and Nigerian Ékpè, we have established communication that will certainly lead to meaningful and large-scale interactions among them in the years to come.

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Dr. Miller dancing to Cuban Abakuá music at the end of his talk. It was a big hit with the crowd!





WARA Newsletter

The Newsletter of the West African Research Association (WARA)
and the West African Research Center (WARC)

Spring 2005

Justice on a Shoestring: Sierra Leone, International Community and Life in a Post-Conflict Society

This Spring, Sierra Leone has been the focus of research and several events at the Center for African Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. With a Rocca Fellowship for Dissertation Research from the Center, a Political Science doctoral student, Victor Peskin, traveled to Freetown to observe the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). Other students at the Law School have been following the SCC proceedings. Another student in Education, Susan Shepler, will complete her dissertation on the rehabilitation of child soldiers in Sierra Leone. In April, Ibrahim Abdullah from Sierra Leone, will take up residency at the Center as a WARA Fellow. Dr. Abdullah is currently at the Ministry of Youth and Sport in Freetown, and works on youth culture, violence, democracy and post-conflict transitions. With our focus on Sierra Leone, we have become acutely aware

Martha Saavedra (MS): There are many issues to discuss regarding Sierra Leone, but perhaps we can start with daily life. Currently, fuel shortages are gripping Sierra Leone, grounding vehicles and limiting provision of other essentials, such as water.

Mariane C. Ferme (MCF): While this reflects global factors such as the increase in oil prices everywhere and problems in the supply from regional West Coast refineries, it also highlights a predictable waning of international interests and aid, which had previously poured into the country. Over the past year, the United Nations troops and other associated humanitarian groups have shifted much of their focus and personnel to Liberia. The unrest in Liberia (beginning in 1989) provided the antecedents for the 1991 cross-border actions that began the Sierra Leone civil war, so the solution to this regional conflict is also presumed to be found in securing Liberia. When I was in Sierra Leone in 2002, the country was flush with fuel and reconstruction money and programs deemed necessary for the May 2002 elections to be successful. These were supposed to be the big transitional elections

of serious fuel and water shortages throughout the country. News reports indicate that in some areas of the country the price of fuel has gone up five-fold (8000 leones to 40,000 leones or \$3.27 to \$16.33 per gallon). To contextualize the current situation, Martha Saavedra, the Associate Director of the Center, spoke with Mariane C. Ferme, the Center's Director and Associate Professor of Anthropology. Prof. Ferme has conducted research in Sierra Leone over the past 20 years, and has published extensively, including her 2001 book, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* by University of California Press, and more recent articles examining governance at the state and local level, humanitarian intervention, human rights, and citizenship. The following is derived from a conversation between Prof. Ferme and Dr. Saavedra.



A "hunter group" from Wunde Chiefdom performing for a visiting government official before the war.

after the war was declared officially over in January 2002 by President Kabbah. At that time, international experts and notable Sierra Leoneans were weighing in on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and this in conjunction

with free and fair elections and the prosecution of key war criminals were thought to be crucial to a lasting peace.

The TRC process was not funded to the extent that the Special Court for Crimes (SCC) was later. Therefore there was not much "punch" to its enquiries, and its leadership lamented this problem from the beginning. They did conduct interviews, workshops, and there were some trips up-country, but they shut down after only a year or so in operation, just as the SCC was getting underway. Recent press reports in Sierra Leone suggest that its findings have been discredited by the current government's supporters because they do not shed very positive light on it.

By 2003, the SCC was underway, but it too was meant to be a limited project. There were never to be more than a dozen or so potential prosecutions, most notably Charles Taylor, leader of the Liberian insurgency and then President of the country (1997-2003), Foday Sankoh (leader of the Revolutionary United Front - RUF),

(see "Justice on a Shoestring" on page 14)

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WARA Newsletter

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