

# Intercourse and Crosscurrents in the Atlantic World

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# Intercourse and Crosscurrents in the Atlantic World

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*Calabar-British Experience,  
17th–20th Centuries*

David Lishilininle Imbua

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS  

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*To my daughters, Beshiunim and Enounim, with love.*





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# Series Editor's Preface

The *Carolina Academic Press African World Series*, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola  
University of Texas at Austin



# Preface

The history of Calabar has been studied by various scholars ranging from amateurs to professionals. Okon E. Uya attributes the scholarly interest in Old Calabar to the unbroken contact between the region and the Europeans since about the sixteenth century, when the people and cultures of Old Calabar attracted the fascination of European explorers and traders. The early accounts of Old Calabar by these writers created a desire in some Europeans to visit this well-advertised African port city. From the eighteenth century, there were an increasing number of travel accounts and memoirs in which Calabar received prestigious mention.

Twentieth-century professional historians who researched on Old Calabar focused their attention on specific themes. Some of those prominent in this regard include Adiele E. Afigbo, J. C. Anene, Effiong U. Aye, Daryll Forde, Christopher Krantz, A. J. H. Latham, Paul E. Lovejoy, K. K. Nair, M. E. Noah, David Northrup, David Richardson and Okon E. Uya. While some of these scholars dealt with pre-European trade, politics, religion, and society, others analysed major developments in the area against the backdrop of European influence and thus emphasized the primacy of European factors in initiating change in Old Calabar. As important as the extant studies are, they hardly represent a systematic and holistic tracing of the underpinnings of the British-Calabar relations which left irreversible impact on both sides. That is exactly what we have attempted to accomplish in this study. Of special interest to us is the range of contacts that confirm the reciprocal fraternization between the British and the people of Calabar.

This study in transnational and interracial history interrogates earlier conclusions which were either products of nationalist history or built on popular views. For example, the claim by Noah that “the presence of foreign traders, Christian missionaries and British political officers in Old Calabar had made the area more crisis-ridden than it needed to be” is here reassessed. That Old Calabar developed to become not only a major commercial and religious centre but also the headquarters of the fledging British administration in the area

suggests that Noah overstated the case. Again, we show that rather than being passive victims, Africans in Old Calabar played active roles in their encounters with Europeans. We show the great borrowings and exchanges that took place in the Atlantic world among populations that were radically different in language, culture, and physique. We conclude that despite geographical and cultural separations, the physical and intellectual crossings that permeated the Atlantic world improved the fortunes of all its neighbouring peoples.

True, the very title of *Intercourse and Crosscurrents in the Atlantic World* may sound so banal and vast as to invite skepticism about its standing as a work of serious scholarship. To allay such doubts, we have made the study more concrete by delimiting an area of primary focus, albeit with the consciousness that the delimited area forms only an integral part of a wider community. Links between Calabar and Britain are more accurately characterized as links between Old Calabar and the primary Calabar trading ports of Britain — Bristol, Liverpool, and London.

Our work is situated within the framework of cosmopolitanism, which ensured that agents of radically different cultural backgrounds in Calabar managed their differences in such a way that ethnicity and nationality were not accorded any deterministic role. Admirably, migrants were absorbed into the dominant political and economic institutions of the society without participatory barriers as long as they had the ability to advance the fame and fortunes of Calabar. Convinced that Calabar's strength was in its ability to globalize the local and localize the global, the study admonishes us to discourage the current exclusion of non-indigenes of the area from certain socio-economic and political opportunities. Sadly, Nigerians distinguish between original inhabitants and "owners" of the land otherwise called "indigenes" and later comers called "non-indigenes." Indigeneship certificates are issued to those considered original inhabitants of their Local Government Areas, while columns for state of origin are inserted in national public forms like admission and civil service recruitment. The notion of indigeneity has deep social and political implications. Even if a person has lived in a certain place for most of his/her life, worked, married and had children there, he/she is still considered a stranger. This work makes clear that without "strangers," Calabar's contribution to Nigeria's development as well as to her international fame would have been greatly lessened.

To avoid the charge of excessive dependence on written records, which often ignore the authentic African voice, we have interrogated the Efik voice through massive collection and use of oral histories. While doing this field work, we dealt with persons who have a good knowledge of what happened in the past



and the ability to relate it to the present. The cautious use of oral sources in conjunction with written and printed archival documents was intended to create a picture that best approximates what actually happened.

This book grew out of my thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. The work could not have been brought to its present status but for the unlimited help of Ambassador Prof. Okon E. Uya, chief supervisor of my doctoral dissertation. My encounter with this internationally acclaimed historian and Genius Laureate of Nigeria remarkably blessed and reshaped my destiny and I will forever remain grateful.

I would also like to thank David Northrup of Boston College and Christopher Krantz of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, who kindly responded to my many queries with both advice and documents. Ours was another dimension of intercourse and crosscurrents in the Atlantic world and this work is the better for it. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Joseph Ushie of the University of Uyo, who has become an unfailing source of encouragement and inspiration to me. I thank Dr. Ivor Miller for providing me with rare documents and for his critical inputs at various stages of editing.

I am extremely grateful to the numerous informants who enthusiastically shared rich oral traditions and history with me. I am also indebted to the numerous individuals at the various branches of the Nigerian National Archives who provided me with great assistance.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Juliet Dave Imbua, for her unusual interest and motivational comments which sustained the effort that culminated in this book. More importantly, however, Juliet gave birth to our first child, Excel Beshiunim Dave Imbua, on the day I defended my dissertation. Our second child, Kerima-Cherish Enounim Dave Imbua, was born as this work was going to press. For the pride we feel in Beshiunim and Enounim, and the indescribable joy they bring to our lives, I dedicate this book to them.



# Abbreviations

AG	Action Group
CADIST	Calabar District
CALPROF	Calabar Province
CHJ	Calabar Historical Journal
CMS	Church Missionary Society
COPE	Calabar Oil Palm Estate
COR	Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office
HWTI	Hope Waddell Training Institution
IDH	Infectious Disease Hospital
JAH	<i>Journal of African History</i>
NAC	National Archives Calabar
NAI	National Archives Ibadan
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
OUP	Oxford University Press
RCM	Roman Catholic Mission
UAC	United African Company
UDC	Urban District Council
UTC	United Trading Company