

# **Immigrant Communities in Yorubaland: A Case Study of the Ebira Community in Ibadan, South Western Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

*The relations between host communities and migrants in Nigeria have received significant attention. Over decades, the nature of the relationship between host communities and migrants has been characterised by conflict and cooperation. However, as population movement remains one of the most intricate features of every human settlement, the need to examine migrants' communities in their host environment cannot be underestimated. In Yorubaland, Ibadan is one of the major towns that received a large influx of migrants beginning in the aftermath of the Yoruba Civil War and during the colonial period. As a major colonial administrative centre, Ibadan was a major point of destination for migrants in colonial Nigeria. Hence, the article examines the Ebira community in Ibadan. It employs a historical research methodology that relies on primary sources gathered through oral interviews and secondary data gathered through existing written works on host-migrant relations in Nigeria. Findings show that the relations between the Ebira migrant community and the host community have been characterised by peaceful co-existence and inclusiveness, which allow the migrants to thrive and contribute their quota to the socio-economic and political development of Ibadan.*

**Keywords:** *Ebira, Immigrants, Ibadan, Migration, Yorubaland*

## **Introduction**

Migration remains an intricate feature of every human existence and community. Studies on migration and migrants' political economy have mirrored clusters of themes such as demographic change, labour migration, host-immigrant, socio-cultural exchanges, integration dynamics and social cohesion (Manning and Trimmer, 2020; Pooley and Whyte, 2022; Kuper, 2022; Mayblin and Turner, 2020). Migration has also been an intricate part of Nigeria's pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history (Adepoju, 1998; Ikwuyatum, 2016; Adesote, 2017; Obi-Ani *et al.*, 2020). Given Nigeria's historical background and ethnic composition, population movement across various geo-cultural spaces is a dominant theme in its history across various epochs. Hence, this indicates that individuals and groups have engaged in multiple migratory patterns spanning centuries. Traditions of origin, population expansion and growth of these communities incorporate features of migration and inter-group relations.

The forces that shaped migratory movements in Nigeria before the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were caused by the development and disruption brought about by colonialism (Ibiloye, 2016; Adesola and Olabiyi, 2023; Obikaeze and Iloh, 2023). During the colonial period, economic policies, infrastructural development, and administrative setups had significant impacts on migration patterns. Population movement occurred from rural areas into the new administrative cities, cash crop-producing areas and areas with urban infrastructures in search of wage employment. The development of road and railway transport routes with new nodal points and the modernisation of certain aspects of society and economy construed as urbanisation influenced migration patterns during the colonial period (Freund, 1981; Olukoju, 1996, Rufai *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, colonial arrangements imposed new circumstances and enlarged the network of interactions for individuals and groups across rural and urban areas and throughout different regions of the country, in contrast to prior communities that were orientated towards indigenous cultural grounds (Osoba, 1969; Agbonlahor and Philip, 2015; Kanu, Bazza and Omojola, 2019).

Several studies exist on migrant communities in Ibadan (Olayemi, 1979; Albert and Onojie, 2016; Salami, 2013; Nwankocha, 2015; Jelili *et al.*, 2023). However, only a few studies have focused on the Ebira community in Ibadan. Oladiti and Oyewale's (2010) study on the Ebira people in Ibadan primarily focused on the political economy of the Ebira

people between 1900 and 1960 with a primary focus on migration and settlement patterns. Hence, as few studies exist on the Ebira community in Ibadan, this study will contribute significantly to understanding the affairs of the Ebira people in Ibadan. The migration of Ebira people to Ibadan remains one of the micro-histories of internal migration in Ibadan. Migration is a well-established part of life for the Ebira people. In the pre-colonial and colonial periods, the Ebira migrated across various communal, national and international boundaries (Joshua, 2018; Ojo, 2022). Also, during the colonial period, Ibadan, which emerged as a major colonial administrative centre with socio-economic infrastructures such as tarred roads and railways with cash crop-producing rural areas, was a major destination for the Ebira people.

The study employed a historical research method using a qualitative method of data analysis. The historical approach relied on primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through oral interviews conducted within the Ebira community in Ibadan. Oral interviews were conducted between September 2021 and May 2022. The study also relies on secondary data gathered, which included books, peer-reviewed journals and articles that focused on migration patterns in Nigeria, the history of the Ebira people and host-migrants relations in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework: Push and Pull Theory**

Since migration is one of the most widely recognised aspects of human nature, the push and pull theoretical perspective is commonly used to provide sets of explanations on why individuals and groups decided to migrate and the factors that shaped their migratory process and point of destination. Several studies, such as Kubat and Hoffmann-Nowotny (1981), Spring et al. (2016) and Zaman *et al.* (2023) on migration, have emphasised the appropriateness of Everet Lee's push and pull theory in understanding the culmination of factors that influenced the patterns of population movement. Everett Lee theorized the theory of the push and pull factor based on Ravenstein's (1885, 1889, 1976) law-like explanations of the human behavioural quotient to migrate, which codifies migrants' decisions and migration patterns (Bean and Brown, 2014, Ibaram et al., 2019). Hence, Lee's push and pull theory central thesis placed migration as an individual's decision to benefit from socio-economic and political opportunities not available in their homeland (Parkins, 2010; Urbański, 2022). As a neo-classical approach to population movement, push and pull theory emphasised the rational

choice model of individuals or groups through which they evaluate the costs and benefits migration decision (Chiswick, 2008). Lee (1966) contends that four major factors shape population movement: factors associated with an area of origin, destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. The push factors are the culmination of socio-economic and political factors that force individuals or groups to decide on migrating to areas perceived to possess the lacks in their places of origin, among which include absence or low employment opportunities, low wages, low standard of living, absence of modern infrastructure or development indices and low social mobility (Bean and Brown, 2014; Ibaram et al. 2019). Hence, the pull factors involve factors that attract migrants to a particular destination, which are also rooted in socio-economic and political factors (Bean and Brown, 2014; Ibaram et al., 2019). Hence, within the purview of Ebira people's migration to Ibadan, the push and pull theoretical lens provides the opportunity to assess various factors that led to the migration of Ebira people to Ibadan.

#### **Geo-cultural Identity, Kinship Networks and Ebira Immigrants in Ibadan**

The Ebira, primarily located in North Central Nigeria, have a rich cultural heritage and migration history that has shaped their social structures and economic opportunities over decades. Ebiraland is situated in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria. It lies roughly between latitude 7° 12'N and 7° 44'N and longitudes 6°E and 6° 51'E, with a landmass of about 2,934 square kilometers and a population of 884,396 according to the 2006 population census (Ahmadu, 2004). Ebiraland is bounded on the north by Lokoja, on the west by the Owe-speaking peoples of Kabba, on the east by River Niger and, by extension, the Igala-speaking peoples, and on the south by Edo State. A huge Ebira population resides in Okene, Adavi, Okehi, and Ajaokuta (Ahmadu, 2004). During the British colonial rule, Ebiraland was described as 'Ebira Ehi' - the Inland Igbirras by the British to describe the Ebira people vis-à-vis their environment (Okene, 1998). Given the advancement in the transportation sector globally, the Ebira now records a substantial internal, continental, and global diaspora population. Ebira community refers to the homogenous people living in Ibadan to improve various aspects of their lives, both economic and non-economic. Hence, they are primarily found in Mokola, Apata, Ojo, Apete, Oluseyi, Eleyele, Sango, etc. (Oladiti and Oyewale, 2010).

**Figure 1:** Map showing the geographical location of Ebira in Kogi State (Atawodi *et al.*, 2024)



The history of the Ebira reveals that migration is not a recent phenomenon but a continuation of long-standing patterns and practices. The Ebira have historically engaged in inter-communal and inter-regional migration influenced by various socio-economic factors such as agricultural practices, trade, and the search for better living conditions. Hence, the migration to urban centres like Ibadan was propelled by economic opportunities that colonial urban areas presented, such as access to markets, education, and healthcare. Within the purview of Everett's theoretical framework, there has been an emphasis on economic factors – wants satisfaction as a major driver of migration patterns. The migration of Ebira to various parts of Nigeria started as an individual affair before being further shaped through kinsmen relationships and, eventually, diaspora communities. Similarly, the patterns of Ebira people's migration to Ibadan included labour migration, especially during the colonial period.

The geographical location of Ebiraland was an immediate contributing factor that shaped the push pattern of Ebira people from their community of origin. Ebiraland is a hilly area with a relatively large population that cannot practise agricultural activities due to limited access to land. Hence, many Ebira people migrated to neighbouring communities such as Okpella and Ekpoma or distant towns such as Ondo, Ogbomoso and Ibadan to pursue their agriculture (Okene, 1995). The choice of Ibadan as an essential destination for the Ebira can be traced to the pre-colonial and colonial history of Ibadan, which was replete with migration history.

Ibadan was established in 1829, after the collapse of the Oyo Empire, and witnessed the migration of internally displaced persons at the height of the Yoruba Wars. Also, during colonial rule, the position of Ibadan as an important administrative and emerging urban centre redefined its position as an essential destination for immigrants across all colonial territories (Adesola and Osiyale, 2023).

The absence of cash crops by colonialists, the lack of profound colonial infrastructure such as railways and roads, and the colonial imposition of wage labour and taxation within its colonial economic policies were a significant factor that encouraged the migration of the Ebira to Ibadan. Although the introduction of wage labour influenced societal livelihood, the effort to earn colonial currency and the eventual need to meet with the colonial taxation system created an economic tension that disrupted traditional livelihoods and created economic pressure. The culmination of earnings and taxation compelled several Ebira people to move to urban centres like Ibadan in search of better opportunities and to escape the impact of these colonial economic policies. The Ago Ebira (strangers' quarter) was an entirely Ebira settlement in the Mokola district of Ibadan, populated mainly by the Ihima indigenes – one of the five indigenous Ebira clans (Other clans included Eika, Okehi, Adavi, Okengwen). The Ebira were among the early immigrant settlers in the area, alongside other immigrants from Tapa and Ilorin (Olaniyi 2015).

Beyond the colonial economic reasons, social reasons, rooted in traditional religion, were also essential factors that drove hundreds of Ebira immigrants from their societies of origin to Ibadan. The belief in witchcraft compelled the Ebira to migrate to Ibadan. The first of these belief crises was that spiritual problems with witchcraft caused material discomforts and social issues like child mortality and severe illness. Ebira people in Okene recorded that certain people migrated because of socio-familial crises (Leonard and Ishaq, 2018). To avoid socio-familial crises, they had to relocate to apparently safer places. Although the push factor is overtly socio-psychological, the economic meaning remains profound. With the emergence of the colonial economy, people began to measure social and material success from the availability of cash or the volume of capital accumulation. Hence, to find expressions of thought to the stress and poverty associated with the colonial commercialised economy, migrants blamed socio-familial crises as the major reason for relocation (Okene, 2005).

In addition, the early immigrants' successes in their various destinations also influenced the migration pattern during this period. The

social upward mobility and material prosperity of the early migrants enticed others to follow suit. The early migrants often returned to Ebiraland to build houses roofed with corrugated sheets and celebrate the festive season with wealth, influencing the migration pattern. Also, these early immigrants' upward social mobility influenced those who stayed behind to migrate. In other words, the Ebiras migration to Ibadan was associated with material prosperity and the high social status of early immigrants (Oral interview, Mr. Ojatuhuo Sanni Abdulrahman). Also, early immigrants from Ebiraland facilitated the migration of several of their kinsmen to various points of destination (Okene and Suberu, 2013).

The migration of the Ebira to Ibadan was also connected with the dynamics of kinship networks. These networks served as a crucial factor in facilitating the movement of individuals and families from their original settlements to Ibadan. The kinship networks among the Ebira were not merely social constructs. It was a vital economic and social support system that influenced migration patterns, settlement decisions, and the integration of migrants into new environments. At the core of the Ebira kinship system was a complex web of familial and communal ties that extended beyond immediate family to include extended relations and community members. This kinship structure was characterised by strong bonds of loyalty, mutual assistance, and shared resources, essential for survival in rural and urban settings. During an immigrant's decision to migrate, these kinship networks provided critical support by offering information about potential job opportunities, housing, and social services in the destination area. In Ebira immigrants' migratory networks, the decision to move to Ibadan was often influenced by the presence of relatives or friends who could assist them in navigating the challenges of urban life (Attah, 2011). The kinship networks played a significant role in this migration process, as they often served as the first point of contact for newcomers, helping them to establish themselves in the new environment (Oral Interview, Usman Onimisi, 2022).

In Ibadan, the Ebira immigrants formed a vibrant community that maintained their cultural identity while adapting to the urban landscape. These communities were often organised around kinship ties, where members supported one another through various means, including financial assistance, shared labour, and emotional support. The kinship networks facilitated the integration of migrants into the urban economy by providing access to informal job markets and business opportunities. Many Ebira immigrants engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship, leveraging their kinship connections to build an entrepreneurial base and

collaborate on business ventures. Moreover, the kinship networks among Ebira immigrants in Ibadan extended beyond immediate family ties to include relationships with other ethnic groups. Hence, inter-ethnic networking was crucial for economic survival in a diverse urban environment. By forming alliances with individuals from different backgrounds, Ebira migrants could access a broader range of resources and opportunities. These interactions often led to the creation of mixed communities where cultural exchanges occurred, enriching the social fabric of Ibadan (Oral Interview, Alhaji Lamidi Balogun, 2022).

The role of kinship in migration was also evident in the remittances sent back home by Ebira migrants. These financial transfers were a significant aspect of the kinship economy, as they helped sustain families and communities in the migrants' places of origin. The expectation of reciprocal support within kinship networks encouraged migrants to contribute financially to their families, thus reinforcing the ties that bonded them to their home communities. This flow of remittances not only aided in the economic development of the Ebira communities but also strengthened the social networks that underpinned their migration experiences (Oral Interview, Usman Onimisi, 2022). However, the dynamics of kinship networks were not static; they evolved in response to changing socio-economic conditions and migration patterns. As more Ebira people migrated to Ibadan, kinship networks adapted to accommodate new members and their unique needs. This adaptability was crucial for the sustainability of these networks, as it allowed them to remain relevant in a rapidly changing urban space.

In addition to economic factors, cultural identity played a significant role in the migration of the Ebira. The kinship networks helped preserve cultural practices, languages, and traditions among migrants, fostering a sense of belonging and community in a foreign environment. Social events, religious gatherings, and cultural celebrations organised by Ebira communities in Ibadan served as platforms for reinforcing these cultural ties. Hence, such activities strengthened kinship bonds and provided opportunities for intergenerational transmission of cultural values and practices. The impact of kinship networks on the migration of the Ebira people to Ibadan was multifaceted, encompassing economic, social, and cultural dimensions. These networks facilitated migration by providing essential support systems that eased the transition to urban life. They also played a crucial role in the economic integration of migrants, enabling them to establish livelihoods and contribute to the local economy. Furthermore, kinship networks helped maintain cultural identity



and community cohesion among Ebira migrants, ensuring their heritage was preserved even in a new and diverse setting (Atta, 2011).

### **Political Organisation of Ebira Community in Ibadan**

The need to establish an organised administration in host communities has always been an important part of life for immigrants. The establishment of the Ebira community in Ibadan necessitated the need for a political structure representing the people in their host community, helping in settlement patterns, settling disputes and integrating new immigrants. Before the emergence of the well-organised administrative system, the early Ebira immigrants organised themselves along family and clan systems rooted in gerontocracy (elders' system) (Oladiti and Oyewale, 2010). The male elder of a compound was, by practice, the head and spiritual leader of the compound. The compound formed the most important administrative unit in the land, and the living room of Adahi (father) served as the nerve centre and meeting point for important activities among the dwellers of the compound (Mukhtar and Abdullahi, 2010). Before a formal administrative institution, the early Ebira immigrants in Ibadan lived in various compounds of extended families of clans. Ibadan had five major Ebira clans: Okene/Okengwe, Adavi, Eika, Eganyi and Ihima.

The increasing number of Ebira immigrants led to the demand for a more organised system of administration that could protect the interests of Ebira. The subsequent development of formal administration led to the emergence of the *Ohinoyi*, who provided the leadership required by the immigrant community. Also, certain elected chiefs supported the Ohiniyi. Oba Abass Aleshinloye – Olubadan of Ibadan granted the Ebira immigrants' community the formal approval to have their own *Baale* called *Ohinoyi* (Oral Interview, Usman Onimisi, 2022). At the installation of the Ebira immigrants' community traditional ruler in Ibadan in 1936, four community districts agreed to rotate the chieftaincy throne. The districts are: Adavi, Eika, Ihima, Okene/Okengwe.

**Table 1:** List of Ebira Immigrant Traditional Leadership Since 1936

S/N	Ebira Baale (Ohinoyi)	Location	District of the Ohinoyi	Names of Olubadan who Installed them
1.	Pa Amodu Agomi (1936)	Mokola	Okene	Olubadan of Ibadan, Oba Abass Aleshinloye
2.	*Pa Garuba Lawal	Mokola	Ihima	Oba Abass Aleshinloye
3.	*Pa Momoh Akoyibo	Molete/ Isale-Jebu	Adabi	Oba Abass Aleshinloye
4.	**Pa Idegba	Mokola	Okene	Oba Salawu Aminu
5.	*Pa Audu Omeiza	Labo	Adavi	Oba Salawu Aminu
6.	*Pa Momoh Oga	Mokola	Obehira	Oba Kobiowu Yusuf
7.	Alhaji Audu Ameuru (1978-1997)	Mokola	Obehira	Oba Daniel Tayo Akinbiyi
8.	Pa Chief Damisa Ohiekun (1998-2005)	Felele/ Mokola	Eika	Oba (Dr.) Emmanuel Adegboyega Adeyemo Operinde I
9.	Alhaji (Chief) Lamidi Aliu Blaogun (19 <sup>th</sup> November, 2007-	Mokola	Ihima	Oba Samuel Odulana Odugade

(Oral Interview, Alhaji Lamidi Balogun, 2022).

**Note:** \* The exact period of reign was not known

\*\* The second name of the Ohinoyi

The political organisation of the Ebira immigrants' community in Ibadan since 1936 is similar to the political system in Ebiraland. It is a monarchical system, having no strict separation of the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government and deriving its acceptance from the people's culture and tradition but, more importantly, from the ratification of the Olubadan of Ibadan. The Ebira Migrant Community in Ibadan is characterised by its strong communal ties and a well-structured administrative system. At the core of the administration within the Ebira migrant community in Ibadan is the preservation of the cultural heritage and identity of the people. These leaders, often titled *Ohinoyi* or *Ohi*, served as the link between the past and the present, ensuring that generations of Ebira immigrants remain connected to their roots despite the distance from their ancestral homeland.

The traditional leadership structure mirrors that of the Ebira community in Kogi State, which is hierarchical and deeply respected. The leadership is symbolic and plays an active role in conflict resolution, cultural ceremonies, and community cohesion (Oral Interview, Dele Daniel, 2022). Traditionally, the Ebira are organised into clans, each led by elders who play a crucial role in decision-making and conflict resolution. This system of governance is rooted in their cultural practices, where the council of elders represents various lineages and is responsible for the community's welfare. As such, the elders preserve the cultural heritage, mediate disputes, and ensure that the community adheres to its customs and traditions.

One of the primary administrative responsibilities within the Ebira migrant community in Ibadan is managing social welfare and providing support to community members. This task is often carried out through communal associations and organisations, typically organised along family or kinship lines. These associations serve as platforms for mutual support, where members contribute financially and materially to assist those in need. During illness, death, or other emergencies, these associations mobilise resources to assist affected members. In Ibadan, the administration of the Ebira community is facilitated through various associations and unions that serve as platforms for collective action. Among these associations include the Adavi Progressive Union, Okenne/Okenwe Forum, Ehika District Association, Ihima Welfare Association, Ebira Community Union, Ebira Progressive Club of Nigeria, Ebira Vonya Social Club, Ebira Women Elite, Ebira Progressive Planner, Ebira Mercy Youth Club, Ebira Aveyewun Women Association, Ebira Golden Boys and Girls etc. These join hands to elect the Chairman of the community and support the Ohinoyi in his reign. Balogun and Ohinoyi are not chosen by election but by household rotation (Oral Interview with Chief Audu Obanimo). These associations promote the interests of the Ebira people and foster unity among members. The union organises cultural events, educational programmes, and social gatherings, reinforcing the community's identity and supporting its members (Oral Interview Usman Saliu Onimisi).

### **Host-Immigrants Relationship and Socio-cultural Identity of Ebira Immigrants**

The Ebira community in Ibadan has a unique history of inter-community relations. As a minority ethnic group in the city, the Ebira have had to navigate the complexities of co-existing with other dominant groups.

Immigrants' identity rooted in tangible and intangible cultural heritages remains an important factor in their receiving destination. Given the diversity of relationships between immigrants and host communities, the Ebira immigrants have established a profound relationship with host communities, leading to cultural exchanges and integration, economic diversification and political relations. Since culture is symbolic, shared, learned and adaptive, Ebira immigrants have contributed to the rapid growth of the population of Ibadan. In the socio-cultural dimension, a socio-cultural fusion exists between Ebira immigrants and the host community (Oral Interview, Usman Onimisi, 2022). Most immigrants strive to replicate some of their home delicacies to reconnect to their homeland while utilising this opportunity to set up migrant food restaurants in Mokola. Also, there are various traditional Ebira weaving businesses in the Mokola and Ojoo areas of Ibadan where Ebira produces woven cloth 'ofi,' which are worn during festive seasons as a means of belonging and connection to their homeland.

The Ebira migrants have also integrated into the socio-cultural space of the host community. The Ebira people have learned the host community language and adapted to their cultural identity, such as clothing. Almost all Ebira indigenes in Ibadan speak Yoruba fluently, particularly those born in the last thirty years (Oral Interview, Alhaji Lamidi Balogun, 2022). During oral interviews, the Ebira migrants also spoke fluent Yoruba. Another defining aspect of Ebira-Ibadan relations is the economic interdependence that has developed over the years. Many Ebira people have succeeded in various business ventures and have a well-established economic presence. This economic integration has fostered a sense of mutual reliance and cooperation, as it contributes to harmonious relations. The Ebira have also made significant efforts to build bridges with the Ibadan community, which has helped foster understanding and reduce stereotypes on both sides.

Moreover, the Ebira have actively participated in Ibadan's social and political life. Many Ebira people participate actively in their various community of residence associations and religious groups, which bring together people from different ethnic backgrounds. This involvement has helped to break down barriers and create a sense of shared identity with the other Ibadan residents. The broader context of ethnic relations in Nigeria has also shaped the relationship between the Ebira and their Yoruba counterpart in Ibadan. The country's history of ethnic tensions and conflicts has sometimes spilled over into local communities, creating an

atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. However, the Ebira and the Yoruba in Ibadan have maintained peaceful co-existence.

The host-immigrant relationship has also developed in the area of cultural relations. Ibadan and Ebira immigrants agreed on the Yoruba religious perspective that emphasises that the Supreme Being can be approached through intermediaries such as divinities, goddesses and ancestors (which masquerades represent) (Oral Interview, Dele Daniel, 2022). Oral interviews reveal that during the Egungun festival in Ibadan, Ebira people participate in these cultural parades and exhibitions around the Bere and Moniya areas. Also, the Ebira immigrants' group in Ibadan celebrates the *Eche-Ori*, a new yam festival. During this festival, traditional worshippers make sacrifices in the secret grove of '*Ori*' (deity) high up in the mountain to show gratitude for its protection and provision of a bounteous harvest. The worshippers carry long canes with which they whip one another in turns without exhibiting any sign of pain, a mark of strength or manhood. The '*Echori*' music sung by a female Ebira also marks an important cultural heritage. According to the Ebira customs and traditions, only after the festival can new yams be sold or consumed in the market, as it is taboo to do so before the festival in Ihima and Eganyi. The *Ekuechi*, a traditional masquerade festival, is another significant cultural event in Ebiraland that the Ebira immigrant community in Ibadan celebrates annually.

Inter-religious tolerance remains a distinguishing feature of the Ebira people. Although several Ebira immigrants in Ibadan are Muslims, including the Baale or Ohinoyi and numerous members of his committee and community, the persistence of traditional religious practices is still evident. This duality reflects a broader phenomenon in various African societies, where Islamic or Christian belief does not necessarily lead to the total rejection of indigenous beliefs and customs. One of the key traditional practices that remain significant for many Ebiras is the *Ekuechi* festival, a culturally rich event deeply rooted in their history and spiritual beliefs. The *Ekuechi* festival, which traditionally marks the end of the lunar year, is a social gathering and a religious event that honours ancestral spirits and seeks their blessings for the coming year. Despite their Islamic faith, many Ebira in Ibadan continue to observe this festival, demonstrating a strong connection to their cultural heritage (Oral Interview, Dele Daniel, 2022).

This blending of traditions can be attributed to the nature of cultural identity among the Ebira. Ebira immigrants' cultural practices are not seen as conflicting with their religious beliefs but complementary,

each providing a different dimension of meaning and connection to their existence and community. The continued participation in traditional ceremonies, such as the *Ekuechi* festival, illustrates the deep-rooted respect for ancestral customs and the desire to maintain a link with their origins in Kogi State. Also, travelling back to their hometown in Kogi State during festive periods and ceremonies further underscores the importance of these traditions (Ododo, 2010). This pilgrimage-like journey signifies more than just participation in a cultural event; it is a reaffirmation of their identity and a way to pass on these traditions to future generations. The persistence of these practices among the Ebira community in Ibadan raises intriguing questions about the intersections of religion and culture. It suggests that for many, adopting a new faith does not necessitate the rejection of their indigenous culture. Instead, it highlights the adaptability of cultural practices and how individuals and communities navigate their multiple identities in a rapidly changing world.

Inter-marriages among the Ebira and Ibadan facilitate peaceful relations and co-existence among the groups. Intermarriage is observed among the groups. One of the most notable aspects of these inter-marriages is how the Ebira and Ibadan communities adapted to accommodate and celebrate these unions (Oral interview, Mr. Bello Hassan). Traditional marriage ceremonies, once confined to the boundaries of each ethnic group, have evolved to incorporate elements from both cultures, creating a unique and vibrant celebration of unity (Ododo, 2010). The Ebira bride wears the traditional Ibadan attire of the *Aso Oke*. At the same time, the Ibadan groom incorporates Ebira cultural symbols into his wedding ensemble, symbolising mutual respect and appreciation for each other's heritage. Moreover, the children born from these unions are often raised with a deep understanding and appreciation for their Ebira and Ibadan roots. They are taught the languages, customs, and traditions of both cultures, ensuring that the rich heritage of their ancestors is passed down to future generations. These children serve as ambassadors of cultural exchange, bridging the gap between their two communities and fostering a greater sense of unity and understanding among the people of Nigeria (Oral Interview, Alhaji Lamidi Balogun, 2022).

More so, the acquisition of languages facilitated trade. Most of the Ebira in Ibadan today have learned the language and have used the language as a medium of communication with their hosts, particularly in trading during market days. This enhanced trade relations among the Ebira

people and the host community. The ability to speak Yoruba has been especially important for Ebira traders on market days in Ibadan. Market days are when the largest crowds gather to buy and sell, and the ability to speak the local language is essential. Ebira traders who speak Yoruba fluently can engage with many more potential customers than those who cannot. They can explain the features and benefits of their goods, answer questions, and close sales, all in the language their customers are most comfortable with (Oral Interview, Alhaji Lamidi Balogun, 2022). Beyond just speaking Yoruba, many Ebira traders have also learned to write in the language. This literacy in the local language is a major advantage when it comes to record-keeping, contract negotiation and signing, and other written business dealings. Ebira traders who can read and write Yoruba can easily keep meticulous records of their transactions, draft agreements, and handle paperwork. Ebira settlers in Ibadan also enjoy the privilege of associating with other ethnic groups in their areas, such as the Igala people and have co-existed peacefully with Ibadan people over time. Regardless of the settlement period in Ibadan, the evidence above has indicated some level of progress in attempts by both groups (Ebira and Ibadan) to achieve constant cordial co-existence (Layiwole, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

The study examined the Ebira migrant community in Ibadan. It argued that migration remains one of the profound realities of societies across all generations. Using Everest Lee's push and pull theory as a starting point, the study showed that several push and pull factors influenced the migration pattern of Ebira people to Ibadan. In the push factor, the absence of cash crops like cocoa, lack of development indicators like railroads that may aid development, colonial economic policies such as wage labour brought on by taxation, geographical influences, kinship influences and return predisposed the migration pattern. In contrast, the administrative, economic, market-driven economy, agricultural activities, political stability, and urban identity of Ibadan during the colonial period made Ibadan an important destination to many migrants. During the formative years of the Ebira immigrant groups, the political organisation of the groups from a clan system to a monarchical system of governance remains one of the fundamental contributions of the early settlers. Since then, the Ebira have established a profound relationship with their host communities regarding language, cultural practices, and inter-marriages. The study contributes significantly to understanding host-migrant relations in Nigeria. Contra narratives of exclusion and conflicts among

host and migrant communities in Nigeria, the case of the Ebira migrant community in Ibadan provides an alternative narrative of peaceful co-existence and cooperation, which are essential tools needed for sustainable development, national integration, and nation-building.

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**Oral Interviews**

S/N	Respondents	
1.	Alhaji Lamidi Aliu Balogun,	Ohinoyi of Ebira in Ibadan, Mokola, Ibadan,
2	Chief Usman Saliu Onimisi	Chairman of Ebira Peoples' Community, at Mokola
3	Mr. Dele Sheidu	Ebira man living in Eleyele, Ibadan

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4.	Chief Audu Obanimo	Member, Ebira Peoples' Community, at Mokola,
5	Mr. Ojatuhuo Sanni Abdulrahman	Trader and carpenter, Mokola
6.	Mr. Bello Hassan	Member, Ebira Peoples' Community, at Mokola