THE PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL MIGRATION OF THE IGBO TO EQUATORIAL GUINEA

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ABSTRACT
Migration in History started from the earliest times, from the age of wanderers to the present. The Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria inclusive were involved in the migration web. This paper further establishes the existing discourse on the History of Equatorial Guinea focusing on the Igbo migrants who assisted in the pre-colonial feats of Equatorial Guinea through archival facts and the existing literature.

Introduction

The Igbo formed the bulk of Nigerian labourers who migrated to Fernando Po. However, some scholars claimed and referred to all the labourers from Nigeria as 'Nigerian labourers' without clear distinctions. This study focuses mainly on the Igbo of Nigerian descent that formed the bulk of the Nigerian population that migrated to Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Southern Cameroon, and other parts of Africa in circulatory out-migration.[i] For instance, there was a clear demand for Igbo labourers in British Southern Cameroon and Fernando Po, Equatorial Guinea because the Nigerian south-easterners were tested agriculturalists, hardworking, agile, and overwhelmingly Christians. Here, the Hausa and Fulani from Northern Nigeria were not desired as they were predominantly pastoralists and Muslims. The racialisation against Islam as earlier discussed and the proximity of the geographical location of the Hausa and Fulani in the Northern part of Nigeria necessitated the low population of the Hausa and Fulani in Equatorial Guinea. Even though some literature termed the migrant labourers as 'Nigerians' however, most of the migrants were Igbo.[ii]

> *Equatorial Guinea is a police state and citizens and foreigners alike have been reported subject to indiscriminate attacks by authorities.*[iii] *The President, Francisco Macias Nguema,*[iv] *is a member of the Fang tribe, which did not get along with Nigeria's Ibos, who traditionally make up the bulk of the contract labourers.*[v]

'Ibo' and 'Igbo' are generally used interchangeably in most Euro-centric literature. The words denoted the people, language, and cultural identities of the Igbo, the original pronunciation is indigenous to the word 'Igbo' since the European colonial administrators and writers could not pronounce the '*gb*' sound and such diction is not in the English pronunciation accents.[vi] The New York Times report further clarifies that the majority of Nigerians who migrated to Equatorial Guinea during and after the colonial rule as contract labourers were the Igbo. Some names below proved that the Nigerian migrants were Igbo migrants but not the entire Nigerian major ethnic groups of the Hausa, Yoruba, and others as some authors claimed. The archival records reveal the migration, life and death of the Igbo populace while in Equatorial Guinea[vii] The Igbo contact in Equatorial Guinea could be traced back to the late 1920s as contract labourers when the Spanish colonial administrators could not get enough labourers for the colonial cocoa, coffee, and timber plantations from China, Cameroons, and Liberia. Obadare noted that about eight industrial pacts transpired between the Spanish

colonial administrators and the Igbo contract labourers between 1942 and 1974.[viii]

Moreover, migration history emanates from the oral traditions of origin of the Igbo. For instance, the Eri oral tradition emphasised that the Igbo migrated from the middle belt of Nigeria; Eri was an acclaimed Igala man who gave birth to the sons that established the core of Igboland. The Igala kingdom of the confluence of Nigeria features in the migration oral traditions of Igbo origin. Consequently, the Igbo from earliest times till now have been migrants as evident in their oral traditions of origin, developments, and statistics of global dispersal overages.[ix] Apart from the Igbo migrants, other migrant labourers testified as evidenced in the quotes below.

> *I was stolen with six other boys three years and two months ago by a black man called Lennard. He is dead now, but his wife, Mrs. Madine is alive. I was told I would work for an Englishman and get 4£ a month. A Spanish steamer 'Pachico' took us from Freetown. When we went on board, we were locked down below for two hours till she left. The ship called at Monrovia and picked up plenty more boys. I do not know how many the boys were, and we went straight from there to Fernando Po. At Fernando Po, I got to a house and was asked to sign a contract that would last for three years. I said I did not want to. I was told that if I did not sign, I should be imprisoned, so I reluctantly signed.* [x]

The pre-colonial and colonial migration of the Igbo people to Equatorial Guinea represents a critical yet underexplored chapter in African migration history. This research delves into the historical, cultural, and economic dynamics that propelled the Igbo to migrate to Equatorial Guinea, tracing patterns of movement and adaptation from the pre-colonial period through the colonial era. It examines how socio-economic factors such as trade, labour demands, and colonial policies facilitated this migration, alongside the cultural exchanges that ensued between the Igbo and indigenous communities. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focus on intra-Nigerian Igbo migration or forced transatlantic displacement, this research situates Igbo mobility within the broader framework of intra-African migration, offering a nuanced perspective on their agency and resilience in navigating new socio-political landscapes.

A significant contribution to the literature is its emphasis on the interplay between indigenous African systems and colonial interventions in shaping migration patterns. The study critically evaluates how Igbo entrepreneurial activities and labour migration intersected with the plantation economy and colonial administrative structures of Equatorial Guinea. By employing a comparative analysis of pre-colonial voluntary migrations and colonial-era labour movements, it highlights continuities and disruptions in Igbo migration practices. This research distinguishes itself by utilising archival materials from Nigerian and global digital archives, filling gaps in existing scholarship that relies heavily on colonial records. It also brings attention to the long-term implications of this migration on identity, community formation, and cross-cultural interactions within Equatorial Guinea.

In framing the Igbo migration narrative within the context of intra-African dynamics, the study contributes to the broader discourse on African migration and challenges Eurocentric narratives that have historically overshadowed indigenous African mobility. This approach provides a fresh lens for understanding the complexities of African migration histories and their enduring impacts.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in migration theory, postcolonial studies, and cultural exchange frameworks, emphasising the multifaceted nature of the Igbo migration to Equatorial Guinea. Migration theory provides a lens to examine the push and pull factors that motivated the Igbo to relocate, such as economic opportunities, trade networks, and colonial labour demands. Postcolonial theory contextualises migration within the broader dynamics of colonial exploitation and resistance, shedding light on how colonial systems shaped mobility patterns while simultaneously being navigated and contested by the migrants. Additionally, the study employs the cultural exchange framework to explore the interactions between the Igbo and the indigenous communities of Equatorial Guinea, analysing how these interactions influenced identity formation, cultural adaptation, and socio-economic integration. This framework also

incorporates a historical perspective, connecting the pre-colonial voluntary migrations of the Igbo to the forced and incentivised movements of the colonial era. By intertwining these theoretical and historical approaches, the framework allows an exploration of migration as a dynamic process influenced by intersecting local, regional, and colonial forces.

The Igbo People in Equatorial Guinea

The recruitment and labour migration to Fernando Po entailed the last remnant of Spanish colonialism in Equatorial Guinea, which faced significant challenges and prohibitions imposed by other European empires. Despite its small size, comparable to Belgium, the Island was embroiled in a complex and illicit labour recruitment system characterised by explicit prohibition, and international intervention. The European colonial powers explicitly prohibited recruitment and labour migration to Fernando Po. This collective stance aimed to curtail the exploitative labour practices predominant on the island. In 1930, the International Labour Organization (ILO) intervened to halt the labour supply from the Republic of Liberia. This intervention brought significant attention to the harsh labour conditions on Fernando Po, leading to a widespread boycott and the island earning the grim monicker, 'the Island of no return.'[xi]

However, stealthy recruitment efforts entailed labour shortages with concealed labour suppliers. The planters of Fernando Po, responsible for producing about two percent of the world's cacao, faced a severe labour shortage due to boycotts and international scrutiny. This shortage forced them to seek alternatives, often illegal means to recruit labour. To address the labour deficit, planters turned to clandestine labour suppliers. These suppliers operated covertly to bypass international prohibitions and boycotts. Two distinct and successive clandestine labour recruitment operations were initiated in Rio Muni and Nigeria, located to the east and north of the Bight of Biafra. The first phase of stealthy recruitment targeted Rio Muni, the mainland part of Spanish Guinea. This region provided a pool of labourers who could be secretly transported to Fernando Po. The recruiters used deceptive tactics and coercion to secure workers. As the situation in Rio Muni became increasingly difficult, the planters extended their stealthy operations to Nigeria. This phase involved more sophisticated and widespread recruitment efforts, drawing primarily from the densely populated regions of Owerri and Calabar, where economic desperation made individuals more susceptible to entrapment. The scale of stealthy recruitment from Rio Muni and Nigeria was unparalleled in its region and period. The operations were extensive, involving a network of underground recruiters and connivance from local intermediaries who facilitated the transportation and concealment of labourers. Given the small size of Fernando Po, the proportion of stealthy labour recruitment was significant. The illegal recruitment efforts managed to sustain the cacao production on the island despite international prohibitions and boycotts. The labour recruitment and migration to Fernando Po during this period highlight the extreme measures taken by planters to overcome labour shortages. Despite explicit prohibitions and international interventions, the planters relied on stealthy operations in Rio Muni and Nigeria to maintain their workforce. The scale and audacity of these recruitment efforts were unprecedented, reflecting the desperation and determination to sustain the island's economic output amidst widespread condemnation and boycotts. [xii]

In 1926 with labour shortages in Fernando Po, Spanish colonial authorities turned to their continental exclave, Rio Muni. This decision marked a new phase in labour recruitment, transforming the border zones with Gabon and Cameroon into critical labour reserves for Spanish recruiters. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch describes the phenomenon of aggressive labour recruitment as "the plague of recruiters." This term refers to the widespread and often coercive labour recruitment practices rampant in the hinterlands of resource-extraction regions across central and southern Africa decades earlier. The recruitment efforts initially started with a trickle of small traders and recruiters using counterfeit papers to smuggle workers from Nigeria's eastern provinces, specifically from Calabar and Victoria to Santa Isabel, on ferry boats. Over time, this trickle transformed into a large-scale smuggled network that utilised canoes. This network illegally transported tens of thousands of Ibibio and Igbo workers to Fernando Po, highlighting the scale and organisation of the operation. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War left Fernando Po, then under fascist control, financially and diplomatically isolated until the end of World War II. This isolation exacerbated the reliance on illegal labour recruitment to sustain its economy. The economic and diplomatic isolation

entrenched the illegal canoe trade along the Bight of Biafra. Around 1940, following the Great Depression, Calabar's merchants, seeking profitable ventures, significantly increased their involvement in illegal recruitment. By 1940, the proportion of illegally recruited workers constituted about 10% of Nigeria's wage-employed population. This statistic underscores the vast scale of the smuggling operations and the economic pressures driving labour migration. The aftermath of the Great Depression in Nigeria and the profitable ventures by Calabar's merchants played crucial roles in driving the illegal recruitment network. Even after World War II, the flow of migrant labour to Spanish Guinea remained significant. The continued disenfranchisement and discrimination faced by these workers contradicted contemporary narratives of the late colonial period as a time of nationalist protest and class-based entitlements. Some migrant labourers challenged Frederick Cooper's and Carolyn Brown's assertions that the late colonial period was characterised by wage labourers turning to nationalist protests and claiming entitlements through class-based means.[xiii] Instead, the experience of migrant labourers in Spanish Guinea reveals a more complex and continued struggle for basic rights and survival. The recruitment constellation that took hold of Nigeria's eastern provinces highlights the transformation from small-scale recruitment to a large-scale smuggling network that transported tens of thousands of Ibibio and Igbo workers to Fernando Po. The Spanish Civil War and World War II further entrenched illegal recruitment, with significant economic and social impacts. Despite narratives of nationalist protest in the late colonial period, the experiences of migrant labourers in Spanish Guinea underscore continued disenfranchisement and exploitation, challenging simplistic historical interpretations.[xiv]

The empirical tracing of recruitment networks sheds light on various socio-economic and non-human factors that shaped labour migration, particularly focusing on the institution of bride-wealth in Fang societies of Rio Muni and the trading and merchant structures of the Igbo and Efik in southeastern Nigeria. This analysis also emphasises the often-underestimated role of kinship and ethnicity in these processes. In Fang societies, bride-wealth was a critical socio-economic institution. Young men migrated to earn necessary resources for the bride-wealth, influencing labour migration patterns significantly. The Igbo and Efik communities had sophisticated trading and merchant networks. These structures facilitated labour recruitment, with merchants acting as intermediaries, linking recruiters with potential migrants. Similarly, Ravi Ahuja's research on South Asian maritime labourers highlights how colonial 'networks of subordination' were accompanied by the 'networks of the subordinated.' These networks were not merely remnants of pre-capitalist societies nor solely infrastructures of resistance but were dynamic and multifaceted. Ahuja underscores the significant, though often underestimated, roles of kinship and ethnicity in structuring labour migration. These social bonds were crucial in organising and sustaining recruitment networks. The empirical tracing also includes the role of non-human actors such as currencies, travel documents, labour laws, and contraband goods in shaping labour migration. Financial transactions, including payments to recruiters and bribes to officials, were facilitated by currencies. These exchanges were pivotal in maintaining recruitment networks. The authentic and counterfeit travel documents enabled labourers to navigate bureaucratic and legal obstacles, that facilitated their movement across borders. Colonial labour laws, often manipulated by recruiters and employers, became tools of control and exploitation within recruitment networks. The smuggling of contraband goods, such as alcohol, was intertwined with recruitment activities. These goods were used as incentives or bribes, aiding in the illegal recruitment processes. Ahuja's analysis employs Bruno Latour's sociology of associations, which focuses on the interconnectedness of human and non-human actors within networks. Unlike traditional social history, which emphasises human agency and social structures, Latour's framework considers the influence and agency of non-human actors in shaping social dynamics. Applying Latour's sociology of associations to recruitment networks provides a comprehensive understanding of how various elements, human (recruiters, migrants, officials) and non-human (currencies, documents, laws, contraband) interacted to facilitate labour migration. The empirical tracing of recruitment networks to Fernando Po underscores the intricate roles of kinship, ethnicity, and non-human actors in labour migration. Integrating Ravi Ahuja's insights on networks of subordination with Bruno Latour's sociology of associations offers a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play. These approaches reveal the

complicated and often exploitative nature of colonial labour systems and emphasise the need for a holistic perspective in examining historical labour migration.[xv]

From the Calabar coastline, the silhouette of the volcanic peak of Fernando Po is visible on the horizon. The recruitment networks navigating the stretch to the island included a diverse group of Nigerian recruiters, including former labourers, traders, and professional gangs run by canoe-owning coastal merchants. As the former often engaged in small-scale recruitment, the latter, the commercial elite of Calabar Province, established a stealthy sea lane across the bay, using both steamers and canoes. The recruiters varied in background and approach. Former labourers and traders engaged in sporadic, small-scale recruitment, while organised gangs of canoe-owning merchants dominated the more systematic and large-scale operations. The commercial elite of Calabar Province played a crucial role in facilitating this stealthy route. The coastal merchants used their resources and connections, to enable a steady flow of labourers across the bay. During the Spanish Civil War, the number of labourers who arrived on colonial ferry boats significantly decreased. However, this decline was countered by a substantial increase in the use of large sea-going canoes for transporting labourers. Following the Spanish Civil War, the traffic of labourers on sea-going canoes rose exponentially. This shift underscored the adaptability and resilience of the recruitment networks amidst political turmoil. The post-Spanish-Civil War period saw a clear distinction between different social structures within which Nigerian recruiters operated. Igbo traders and former labourers primarily relied on kinship-based networks. These networks were rooted in familial and community ties, with facilitated trust and cooperation in recruitment efforts. In Calabar, the Efik wards operated on a patronage-based system. These networks were characterised by hierarchical relationships and patron-client dynamics, which structured recruitment processes. The Efik society also featured the Ekpe secret society, which operated a long caste-class line. This society played a significant role in organising and controlling labour recruitment through its influence and authority. The recruitment networks from Calabar to Fernando Po evolved in response to changing political and social conditions. The commercial elite of Calabar Province played a pivotal role in maintaining these networks and adapted their methods to ensure a continuous supply of labourers. The distinction between the kinship-based networks of the Igbo and the patronage-based Efik wards, along with the caste-class dynamics of the Ekpe society, highlights the complex social structures that underpin labour recruitment. This intricate web of relationships and systems underscores the multifaceted nature of colonial labour migration and the adaptability of the networks that sustained it.[xvi]

The two groups of Nigerian recruiters, labourers and traders, who were professionalised gangs of canoe-owning coastal merchants were driven by the material consequences of British colonial rule and the economic challenges of the palm oil depression. The development of transport infrastructure and the decline in palm product prices reshaped their economic opportunities, making labour recruitment for Fernando Po's planters highly attractive. The development of transport infrastructure under British colonial rule significantly affected canoe-owning middlemen. The new infrastructure reduced the reliance on traditional canoe-based transport, diminishing the economic power of these middlemen. The palm oil depression led to a remorseless decline in prices of palm products offered to farmers by European import-export factories. This economic downturn created financial pressure on farmers and traders who depended on palm oil as a primary source of income. Recruiters were promised payments between 500 and 800 pesetas (or £10 to £16) per labourer delivered to the Curaduria in Santa Isabel. These payments represented a substantial income, far exceeding what could be earned through traditional trading or farming. Even the lower figure of 500 pesetas was equivalent to approximately five months of work as an individual trader or a year’s work on a plantation. This comparison highlights the significant financial incentive for recruiters to engage in labour recruitment. By 1935, there were 5,000 Nigerians on Fernando Po, with half of them labourers. This indicates an already substantial recruitment effort driven by the aforementioned economic incentives. By 1940, the number of Nigerians under contract on the island had doubled to 10,000. This dramatic increase underscores the effectiveness and profitability of the recruitment networks established by Nigerian recruiters. The economic challenges posed by the solidification of British colonial rule and the palm oil depression created a context in which labour recruitment for Fernando Po's planters became a highly lucrative opportunity for Nigerian recruiters. The guaranteed payments for delivering *braceros*

(labourers) offered a significant financial incentive, far exceeding traditional income sources. This economic motivation, coupled with the changing transport infrastructure and declining palm product prices, drove both former labourers and canoe-owning merchants who actively participated in the recruitment networks, leading to a substantial increase in the number of Nigerian labourers on the island.[xvii]

In understanding the motivations behind Nigerian recruiters' enthusiasm for labour recruitment to Fernando Po, it is essential to consider the prolonged economic depression in Eastern Nigeria and the drastic decline in the value of palm oil. In 1933, Martin deduced that palm oil was worth only 17% of its barter terms of trade levels of 1912. This substantial drop in value indicates a severe and prolonged economic downturn, with Eastern Nigeria experiencing a long depression from 1914 to 1945. The significant reduction in palm oil's barter terms of trade value reflects a broader economic struggle in Eastern Nigeria. The plummeting prices for palm products meant farmers and traders could no longer rely on palm oil as a stable and profitable income source. Ship. The depression, lasting over three decades, created widespread economic hardship. Many individuals and families faced declining incomes and increasing financial pressures, pushing them to seek alternative means of livelihood. The promise of payments between 500 and 800 pesetas (or £10 to £16) per labourer delivered to Fernando Po offered a lucrative alternative. Compared to the declining income from palm oil, these payments were a substantial financial incentive. The payments for recruiting labourers were equivalent to several months of work as an individual trader or even a year's work on a plantation, this contrast in earnings made labour recruitment an attractive and profitable venture. Given the economic depression and declining palm oil prices, both former labourers and professional recruiters from the commercial elite of Calabar Province were highly motivated to engage in labour recruitment. The financial rewards provided a significant boost to their incomes. The number of Nigerian labourers on Fernando Po grew substantially, from 5,000 in 1935 to 10,000 by 1940. This increase reflects the successful efforts of the recruiters and the strong economic push factors driving labour migration. The prolonged economic depression in Eastern Nigeria and the drastic decline in the palm oil value created a context of financial desperation and hardship. With their guaranteed payments and higher earnings, this economic backdrop made the recruitment opportunities for Fernando Po an attractive and necessary alternative for many. Both former labourers and professional recruiters capitalised on these opportunities, leading to a significant increase in the number of Nigerian labourers on the island. This period highlights how economic conditions can drive labour migration and reshape local economies and livelihoods.[xviii]

The exceptional payment rates offered to recruiters for delivering labourers to Fernando Po, which were double those of recruiting agencies in other African colonies, played a crucial role in driving the recruitment efforts. These high financial incentives provided substantial economic motivation for Nigerian recruiters, resulting in increased recruitment activity and a significant influx of labourers to the island. This comparative advantage underscores the economic factors that shaped labour migration patterns and, highlights the importance of financial incentives in recruitment processes during this period.

The recruitment payments for labourers to Fernando Po were exceptionally high compared to other large-scale recruitment treaties such as that between the Union of South Africa and the Portuguese Empire. The payments for Fernando Po, ranging from £10 to £16 per head, were double the £5 per head rate in the South African agreement. This significant financial advantage provided powerful economic incentives for Nigerian recruiters, driving increased recruitment activity and contributing to the influx of labourers to the island. The comparative analysis highlights the role of financial incentives in shaping labour migration patterns and underscores the economic factors that influenced recruitment efforts during this period.

The migration of almost all recruits from the Owerri Igbo or Southern Ibibio regions of the palm oil belt provinces in south-eastern Nigeria to Fernando Po can be understood within the context of land scarcity, high population density, and economic pressures. The regions of Owerri and Calabar were among the most densely populated areas in Africa. In the 1930s, Calabar Province had a population of over 1 million, while Owerri had approximately 2 million people. This high population density led to significant land scarcity, making it challenging for families to sustain themselves through agriculture alone. The economic conditions in these regions were difficult, with low levels of

subsistence agriculture. The primary cash crops, palm oil, and cassava, were grown alongside food crops on family farms. Despite these efforts, the limited arable land and the pressure of a large population meant that many families struggled to meet their basic needs.[xix]

Palm oil and cassava were the main cash crops in these regions. The cultivation of these crops provided some economic relief but was insufficient to alleviate the widespread poverty and land pressure. The need to generate additional income was a significant driver for migration, as individuals sought better economic opportunities elsewhere. Colonial taxation policies further strained the local economies. In the colonial cartographic categories, some districts of eastern Nigeria had over 100 taxable sales per square mile, compared to approximately one per square mile in Rio Muni. The high tax burden and the limited economic opportunities at home made migration an attractive alternative.

Given the socio-economic pressures, many young men from the Owerri Igbo and Southern Ibibio regions were recruited to work on the plantations in Fernando Po. These recruits were drawn by the promise of better wages and living conditions, though the reality was one of harsh labour and exploitation. Recruiters employed various deceptive tactics to entice these young men, including false promises about the nature of the work and living conditions. Upon arrival, many found themselves trapped in a cycle of debt bondage and subjected to penal sanctions if they failed to fulfil their contracts.

The stark contrast in population density between south-eastern Nigeria and Rio Muni highlights the relative economic pressures the migrants faced. In Rio Muni, with only one taxable male per square mile, there was less competition for land and resources, which likely contributed to the demand for external labour from densely populated regions like Owerri and Calabar. Although the economic opportunities in Fernando Po were harsh and exploitative, these were perceived as better than the limited prospects in the overcrowded and economically strained regions of south-eastern Nigeria. This perception drove the migration despite the associated risks and hardships.[xx]

The migration of Owerri Igbo and Southern Ibibio individuals to Fernando Po during the colonial period was driven by acute land scarcity, high population density, and economic pressures in their home regions. Despite the harsh realities of labour conditions, the promise of better economic opportunities motivated this movement. Martin deduces that during this era, Eastern Nigeria was in a long depression between 1914 and 1945. Colonial taxation and recruitment practices exacerbated these pressures, making migration a seemingly necessary option for many young men from this densely populated area provided critical insight into the socio-economic dynamics and the exploitative nature of colonial labour systems.[xxi]

In Nigeria, recruitment paths for labour migration were intricately shaped through kinship ties and the development of ethnically redefined immigrant associations, which were becoming more prevalent in urban areas. These home town associations played a crucial role in supporting new arrivals by providing employment opportunities and other community needs. The recruits were Owerri Igbo or Southern Ibibio from the palm oil belt provinces, where land scarcity and high population density made subsistence difficult. In the 1930s, Calabar Province had a little over one million people, while Owerri had around two million. This high population density led to acute land scarcity and low subsistence levels, driving people to seek alternative livelihoods. Palm oil and cassava, initially grown as cash crops, became primary food crops on family farms. This shift indicates the economic pressure on these communities to sustain themselves amidst declining agricultural profitability.

The motivations for migration from Eastern Nigeria can be understood through two narratives: a liberal and ethnographic perspective and a Marxist and Materialist storyline. The liberal and ethnographic narrative genre emphasises the adventurous spirit of youth seeking to enhance their social status and eventually reintegrate into their home communities with improved prospects. The notion of Wanderlust and the pursuit of prestige played a role in motivating migration. The Marxist and Materialist storyline perspective highlights the economic struggles faced by poverty-stricken individuals responsible for paying taxes and bride-wealth. The political stabilisation and subsequent pauperisation in the interwar period increased mobility, particularly among younger sons who faced diminishing land shares and rising bride prices.[xxii]

The internal Igbo diaspora and recruitment patterns were in two ways, the internal Igbo Diaspora and the recruitment by Kinship. The internal migration within colonial Nigeria was significant, with millions of Igbo people moving to tenant farms, mines, trades, administrative, and urban jobs. Fernando Po became an additional destination for the diaspora. The recruitment by Kinship involved the Igbo recruiters, who typically operated in smaller groups compared to the more professionalised Calabar recruiters. Many Igbo recruits travelled with a relative, which indicated strong kinship ties in the recruitment process. These relatives were often from the same village group, though broader kinship terms could apply to those perceived as foreigners within Nigeria. These two sets of migrants usually travelled by walking. Later, the recruiters' advanced fees enabled buses, trains, and canoes to reach Oron, the departure point for ocean-going canoes to Fernando Po. Each canoe, seating up to forty people including ten paddlers, facilitated the clandestine transportation of labourers across the bay. [xxiii]The population of Igbo migrants and other Nigerians were close to five thousand according to 1936, census data for Fernando Po's residence. African population showed the following distribution: Bubi or Fernandino, 9,348; Rio Muni, 6,800; Nigeria, 4,819; French Cameroon, 4,200; São Tomé, 209; Liberia, 175; Sierra Leone, 155; and Annobon and Corisco, 146. During this period, Fernando Po was a significant destination for labour migration. However, there was a notable distinction in the type of labour provided by different groups of African migrants. Most non-Spanish African migrants who arrived on the island were skilled labourers and traders, compared to the unskilled plantation workers, or the braceros. This distinction often led to tensions and hostility among the different groups, as the skilled labourers and traders occupied a different socioeconomic status than the braceros, who were primarily involved in the unskilled work on the plantations. This divide exacerbated the existing social hierarchies and contributed to the complex dynamics of labour relations on the Island.[xxiv] Unlike the braceros who were primarily engaged in hard manual labour on plantations, these skilled labourers and traders brought different, skills and participated in various trades and services. Their economic activities were diverse, often involving trade and specialised skills that did not directly contribute to the labour-intensive plantation economy that was dominant on the island. The plantation economy, which was central to the economic structure of Fernando Po, required a substantial workforce of unskilled labourers to maintain productivity. The skilled labourers and traders were perceived as inapplicable to this economic system. The non-participation of these migrants in the plantation economy was seen as a lack of integration into the primary economic activities that the colonial authorities and plantation owners deemed necessary for the island's economic growth. The skilled labourers and traders faced hostility from the colonial administration and the local population involved in the plantation economy. Their different economic roles and perceived detachment from the hard labour required on plantations contributed to social tensions. The presence of skilled labourers and traders might have been viewed as a threat to the existing economic order, as they competed for resources and opportunities without contributing to the plantation workforce. The influx of skilled labourers and traders among non-Spanish African migrants to Fernando Po during this period led to significant social and economic tensions. Their skills and economic activities did not align with the needs of the plantation economy, resulting in perceptions of uselessness and hostility from those invested in maintaining the plantation-driven economic structure. These dynamics highlight the interplay between labour migration, economic integration, and social acceptance in colonial settings.[xxv]

The British firm Ambas Bay and the main German planter on the island, W.A. Moritz, were significant actors in labour recruitment. Ambas Bay used its launch to bring workers from rubber plantations in Calabar, funded by the Cámara (local colonial administration). Moritz received workers from a family friend's plantation near Mount Cameroon. J.W. Dougan, an influential planter on Fernando Po, was supplied with large numbers of workers from the Eyamba ward in Calabar. This indicates a well-established network between the recruiters in Calabar and the planters on Fernando Po. The recruiters were predominantly Efik, a group whose name means oppressor in the Ibibio language. This etymology reflects the historical dominance of the Efik over their Ibibio counterparts. These recruiters brought Ibibio and Igbo labourers and canvassed from riverside markets in their hinterland. Initially, recruiters also brought over the surplus of slave descendants from their towns, indicating a continued legacy of exploitation and subjugation within these communities. The primary recruitment centres were in Calabar and Umuahia near Bende. These towns were

connected by a well-worn trading route along Enyong Creek, a major tributary of the Cross River. This route facilitated the movement of goods and people, including the recruitment of labourers. The areas around Itu, Bende, and Afikbo had large slave markets. In the late eighteenth century, this route became a major artery for the Atlantic slave trade pouring out of Old Calabar. Even after the British government restrained its slave traders, the legacy of these markets influenced the labour recruitment practices in the region. A Freeboy Calabar testimony provides firsthand evidence of the recruitment practices. According to this testimony, the recruiters were deeply entrenched in the social and economic fabric of the region, leveraging their networks to supply labourers to planters on Fernando Po. The detailed accounts from various sources, including the Curaduria and police files, corroborate these testimonies. They offer a comprehensive picture of the recruitment networks and the socio-economic dynamics. The recruitment of labourers for Fernando Po's plantations involved a complex network of actors, including British and German planters, professional Efik recruiters, and the descendants of slaves. The well-established trading routes and historical legacy of slavery in the region facilitated this process. The testimonies and archival evidence have highlighted the deep-rooted connections between the recruiters in Calabar and the planters on Fernando Po, revealing the exploitative practices that persisted in the labour recruitment systems of the colonial era. For instance,

> *Archival sources reveal the intricate connections between recruiters in Calabar and planters on Fernando Po during the colonial era, shedding light on exploitative labour practices. Testimonies from former labourers and recruitment documents highlight how recruiters manipulated contracts, often misleading workers about wages and conditions. For example, correspondence between colonial officials in Nigeria and Spanish administrators in Fernando Po reveals complicity in illegal recruitment networks, despite nominal oversight. Court records from Calabar expose cases where labourers, primarily Ibibio and Igbo, contested abusive conditions, yet these claims were often dismissed due to systemic biases favouring recruiters and planters. Additionally, ship manifests and labour contracts show discrepancies in promised versus actual wages, underscoring the exploitative nature of the recruitment system. These archival materials illustrate the enduring power dynamics and the economic imperatives driving colonial exploitation.*[xxvi]

Furthermore, the German planters in Cameroon expressed significant concerns over the efforts of planters from Fernando Po to lure away their workers. This competition for labour was part of the dynamics of labour migration in the region, where Fernando Po, with its thriving plantations, became an attractive destination for workers seeking better opportunities. The Eyamba family, one of Calabar's most commercially and politically powerful lineages, played a notable role in this context. Members of the Eyamba family had settled on Fernando Po in the late nineteenth century, further entrenching their influence in the region. The rise of the Eyamba family on Fernando Po, particularly their involvement in the free market economy, came at the expense of the traditional landed interests of Duke Town, Calabar. This shift reflected broader economic transformations, where entrepreneurial families like the Eyambas capitalised on the opportunities provided by the colonial economy, often challenging the established powers back in their homeland. The Eyambas' success on Fernando Po exemplified the growing importance of commercial acumen and adaptability in the colonial context, overshadowing the more static, land-based power structures that previously dominated regions like Calabar.[xxvii]

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Igbo migrated in mass to Equatorial Guinea during the pre-colonial era and supported the prosperity of the agriculture-based economy of the colonial government. The Igbo migration was legal and illegal due to the massive and urgent need for more labourers on the colonial plantations. Archival documents reveal that both the Igbo and Equato-Guinean colonial governments benefitted from the migration with further hardships common with colonialism.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that further research and policy efforts recognise the historical significance of intra-African migration

in shaping cultural and economic landscapes. For policymakers and historians, understanding the legacy of Igbo migration to Equatorial Guinea offers valuable insights into contemporary issues of migration, integration, and identity within the region. This research underscores the need for preserving oral histories and cultural artefacts to document the experiences of migrant communities, ensuring their contributions are acknowledged and integrated into broader narratives of African history. Additionally, fostering collaborative initiatives between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea could enhance cultural exchange and economic partnerships rooted in this shared history. By highlighting the resilience and adaptability of the Igbo migrants, the findings advocate for more inclusive approaches to migration studies that prioritise indigenous agency and intra-African mobility over external, Eurocentric paradigms.

[i] Blackwell, "Igbo Migration", 79-83; https://eastwestreporters.com/2020/09/04/did-you-know-there-is-an-igbo-tribe-in-equatorial-guinea-and-they-are-the-third-largest; Sundiata, *From Slaving to Neo-Slavery*, 182; https://nationaldailyng.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-igbo-tribe-of-equatorial-guinea; and https://www.legit.ng/1368913-igbo-people-3rd-largest-tribe-equatorial-guinea-33500.html

[ii] Blackwell, "Igbo Migration", ii, 53, 127 and Sundiata, *From Slaving to Neo-Slavery*, 182; 403-7/1/2208, Calprof, Nigerian National Income Inquiry, 1950-1954; 4089-7/1/1945, Calprof, Labour Department: Annual Report, 1949-1953; 3412-7/1/1352, Calprof, Labour Department Establishment of 1945-1953; 3682-7/1/1640, Calprof, Labour Ordinance, 1946-1951; 3682/1-7/1/1641, Calprof, Labour Department., Return of Labour Statistics, 1949-1952; 3682/IV, Vol.III--7/1/1642, Calprof, Labour Department, Return of Labour Statistics. 1952-1956; 4081/3-7/1/1930, Calprof, Labour Situation in Nigeria, 1949-1950; OW4593.9/1/974, Rivprof, Labour Inspectorate: Annual Report, 1940-1952; OB438 Vol.I-4/1/199, Obudist, Labour Correspondence on General Matters, 1939-1954; C328-2/1/53, Rivprof, Recruitment of Nigerian Labour to Fernando Po, 1939-1951; C.737-2/1/102, Rivprof, Ports of Nigeria: Report by A.N. Strong, 1949-1951; 4597-7/1/2358, Calprof, Medical Department: Annual Report, 1950-1954; OG.1792-2/1/1798, Ogprof, Medical Department: Annual Report, 1939-1956; 1472-1/4/309, Ikotdist, Nutrition in the Colonial Empire Report, 1939-1956; 525 Anglo-Spanish Employment Agency, Recruitment of Labourer, 1950-1951; ARODIV, 19/1/44, OW.3961, Umprof. 5/1/41, Recruitment of Nigerian Labour to Spanish Territories: Return of the Nigerian Labour to Spanish Territories, A Provincial Administration, 1948-1949; pp.1,3,4,7,8,9,11,13,15,17,18,19,21,23,25,27,29; Quarterly Returns of Labourers to Spanish Territories of Gulf of Guinea with forms A and B, 1951-1955, pp. 35-44, 46-86.

[iii] This factor makes data collection in Equatorial Guinea infeasible. For instance, Sundiata was arrested, and detained, and his research was destroyed when he travelled to Equatorial Guinea for research fieldwork in the 1970s. See Sundiata, *From Slaving to Neo-Slavery*, xi.

[iv] The first indigenous president of Equatorial Guinea who ruled from 1968-1979. He was deposed and banished via a coup led by his nephew, Lieutenant Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo.

[v] The evidence of age-long police cruelty and brutal living of the Igbo in Equatorial Guinea, see N/A, "Nigeria, Citing Cruelty, Recalls 45,000 from Equatorial Guinea," *The New York Times,* January 27, 1976, 3.

[vi] NAI/CSO/A1/U1, Uchendu, *The Igbo of South East Nigeria*, 1965; NAI/CSO/A1/B2, Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 1966; NAI/CSO/A1/B3, Basden, *Niger Ibos,* 1966; NAI/CSO/A1/H8, Henderson, *the King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture*, 1972; NAI/CSO/A1/N7, Nwaguru, *Aba and British Rule: The Evolution and Administrative Developments of the Old Aba Division of Igbo land*, 1973.

[vii] *The New York Times*, 1976, 3; See the confirmation through the following names discovered in the archival materials: OP.496, 12/1/310, Ondist, Agreement between Aros and Ibos in Ujalli Court Area. Awka Division, Re-Land Rents for Lands Occupied by Aros, 1933-1949; CA/ Na/S.6115/52, Damion Nwonaku, Deceased, Letter on 24/08/1955, J.O. Thomas signed, Calabar, 648; CA/ Na/S.6115/52, Damion Nwonaku, Deceased Treaty Labourer, Calabar, Letter on 13/12/1955, J. Ola Thomas signed, L.O. His wages paid, 691; CA/ Na/S.3060/54, Thompson Nwachukwu, Deceased, Treaty Labourer, Letter on 15/09/1955, J.O. Thomas signed, Calabar, 660, 667-668, 670-671, 681, 683, 684, 704, 706, 709; 7/S.3/66, Nwanyiamadi Njoku, Deceased, Letter on 30/09/1955, signed by the British Vice Consul and L.O. 690, 646, 679, 696; CA/ Na/S.6030/52, Uchendu Achilike, Deceased from Calabar, Letter on 11/10/1955, J. Ola Thomas signed, 686-687; CA/ Na/S.6030/52, Uchendu Achilike, Deceased Treaty Labourer, Calabar, Letter on 21/10/1955, J. Ola Thomas signed, 691, 695, 708, 712-713, 721; CA/ Na/S.6030/52, Uchendu Achilike, Deceased Treaty Labourer, Letter on 14/12/1955, Entitlement Paid, 771; CA/ Na/9, Amadi Anozie, Deceased from Calabar, Letter on 25/10/1955, J. O. Thomas signed, 692; Non-payment of Balance, a letter written by Obiagwu Achilike on 21/11/55 to the D.O. Owerri Division, 719; CA/ Na/S.5778/52, Longinus Anumudu, Deceased, Letter on 28/11/1955 to D.O. Owerri Division; CA/ Na/S.6819/55, Anyamele Ajokubi, Deceased, Calabar, Letter on 19/12/1955, J. Ola Thomas signed, 770; CA/ Na/S.6319/52, Ubachuru Okere, Deceased, Letter on 21/01/1956 from Agbala Native Court, Owerri,786; CA/ Na/7/53, Kalu Okoronkwo, Money paid on behalf of the Deceased, Letter on 22/03/1956, L.O. signed, 854; CA/ Na/S.8442/55, Dennis Odunzie, Deceased, Calabar, Letter from Obudu Native Court Area, Owerri Division Reported by the Labour Officer, Calabar on 07/05/1956, 896; CA/ Na/S.8602/52, Josiah Mehara, Money Remittance, Letter on 07/04/1955, L.O. signed, 603; CA/ Na/S.8602/52, Josiah Katakoma Mehara Ohaka, Oforola, Remittance, Letter on 15/04/1955, D.O. Owerri Division signed 603; Remittance: Ayanwu Anosiye through the D.O. Owerri, Letter on 07/04/1955, D.O. Owerri Division signed by F.P. Treaty Labourer, 607-610; CA/ Na/S.8586/52, Deceased Raymond Nwagu, Letter on 25/04/1955, Urata Native Court, Owerri Division signed by L.O. 611, 614-616, 622, 624, 626, 633, 680, 689; L.11/157, Remittance: Dominic Oke, Letter on 20/05/1955, Signed by the British Vice Consul and L.O. 617, 627; Deceased No.5358/52, Jerome Agbala Nkwoji, Letter on 06/06/1955, Signed by the Senior D.O. Owerri Division, 626, 628, 637-640, 650-651, 656-658; 12074/50 (03491/52), Remittance Check for Donatius Eke, Letter on 18/06/1955, Calabar, Signed by the British Vice Consul and L.O. Santa Isabel, 642, 630, 643-646, 664; Deceased No. S.6115/52, Damion Nwonaku, Letter on 30/08/1955, Obudu Agwa, Signed by the D.O. Owerri Division, 626, 649, 654-655, 662-663; CA/ Na/S.2230/53, Aloysius Okere, Calabar, Remittance Letter on 10/09/1955, J. Ola Thomas signed for the Acting L.O. 666-667, 673-674; CA/S.5253/52, Remittance: Dickson Onu, Calabar, Letter on 16/11/1955, Owerri Division signed by J.O. Thomas, 724; S. 6319/52, a Deceased Treaty Labourer Ubaohuru Okere, Letter on 31/01/1956 of Agbala Native Court (N.C), Owerri Division, J. Ola Thomas signed for the L.O. remittance too.

[viii] Ebenezer Obadare, "Constructing Pax Nigeriana? The Media and Conflict in Nigeria-Equatorial Guinea Relations," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001): 80–89,

http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.114.104&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

[ix] Isichei, "*The Ibo People*", 29-30; NAI/CSO/B/M17, Mair, *An African People in the Twentieth Century*, 1965; NAI/CSO/A1/U1, Uchendu, *The Igbo of South East Nigeria*, 1965; NAI/CSO/A1/B2, Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 1966; NAI/CSO/A1/B3, Basden, *Niger Ibos,* 1966; NAI/CSO/A1/H8, Henderson, *the King in Every Man: Evolutionary Trends in Onitsha Ibo Society and Culture*, 1972; NAI/CSO/A1/E6, Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igbo land,* 1966; NAI/CSO/A1/N7, Nwaguru, *Aba and British Rule: The Evolution and Administrative Developments of the Old Aba Division of Igbo land*, 1973.

[x] A report from F. E. K. Strong, Lieutenant, and Commander, Senior Naval Officer, West Coast of Africa on a commentary statement by Sarpo, a Mendi boy, a native of Sierra Leone who lived in Krootown road, a British ambassador to Spain to Ministro de Estado, 14 January 1913, AGA Caja 81/06945 E-20.

[xi] Enrique Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment Networks in the Bight of Biafra: Fernando Po's Answer to the Labour Question, 1926–1945," *International Review of Social History* 57, S20 (2012): 40 https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859012000417.

[xii] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012: 40

[xiii] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa,* (Cambridge, 1996); Carolyn A. Brown, *"We Were All Slaves": African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery*, (London: Oxford, 2003)

[xiv] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:40; Cooper, "Decolonization and African Society",1996:80; Brown, "We Were All Slaves": 2003:45; Ravi Ahuja, "Networks of Subordination-Networks of the Subordinated: The Ordered Spaces of South Asian Maritime Labour in an Age of Imperialism (c.1890–1947)", in Ashwini Tambe and Harald Fischer-Tine (eds), *The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia: Spaces of Disorder in the Indian Ocean Region* (London, Oxford, 2009), 13–48, 33.

[xv] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:42; Ahuja, "Networks of Subordination", 2009, 33; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory,* (London: Oxford, 2005), 59.

[xvi] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:54

[xvii] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:54; See Appendix I-V

[xviii] Martino, Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:55

[xix] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:56.

[xx] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:57, 26.

[xxi] Susan Martin, *Palm Oil and Protest: An Economic History of the Ngwa Region, South-Eastern Nigeria, 1800–1980*, (London: Cambridge, 1988): 88, 119.

[xxii] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:57.

[xxiii] Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:58; Martin, 1988: 88.

[xxiv] See GG to DGMC, 12 June 1933, AGA, C-81/06467 E-19; ''Hospitalidad Excesiva'', El Defensor de Guinea, 2 November 1933 cited in Martino, 2012:54-55;

[xxv] Warren T. Morrill, "Immigrants and Associations: The Ibo in Twentieth Century Calabar," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1963): 424–448; Richard Henderson, "Generalized Cultures and Evolutionary Adaptability: A Comparison of Urban Efik and Ibo in Nigeria," *Ethnology* 5 (1966): 365–391; Howard Wolpe, *Urban Politics in Nigeria: A Study of Port Harcourt* (Berkeley: CA, 1974), 56–81; 60; Brown, "We Were All Slaves", 2003, 182–187; Martin, *Palm Oil and* Protest" (1988): 90-95; Segun Osoba, "The Phenomenon of Labour Migration in the Era of British Colonial Rule: A Neglected Aspect of Nigeria's Social History", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4 (1969): 524; Amin,

"Modern Migration in West Africa" 1974, 93-118; Chima Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Calgary: AB, 2010): 268–282.

[xxvi] GG, 31 October 1931, AGA, C-81/08146, E-1; Curaduria, 3 November 1932, C-81/08125, E-4; Ca´mara to GG, 16 December 1930, 81/08095, E-18; West African Plantation Company Victoria to Kemner, 20 May 1926, Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde [BArch], R 1001/3504.; Curaduria, 6 June 1932, C-81/08126, E-21; Ivor Miller, *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (Jackson, MS, 2009): 128; Patrick Manning, "Slave Trade, 'Legitimate' Trade, and Imperialism Revisited: The Control of Wealth in the Bights of Benin and Biafra", in Paul E. Lovejoy (ed.), *Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade,* (Madison, WI, 1986): 203–233; Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:60

[xxvii] GG, 31 October 1931, AGA, C-81/08146, E-1; Curaduria, 3 November 1932, C-81/08125, E-4; Ca´mara to GG, 16 December 1930, 81/08095, E-18; West African Plantation Company Victoria to Kemner, 20 May 1926, Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde [BArch], R 1001/3504.; Curaduria, 6 June 1932, C-81/08126, E-21; Ivor Miller, *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (Jackson, MS, 2009): 128; Patrick Manning, "Slave Trade, 'Legitimate' Trade, and Imperialism Revisited: The Control of Wealth in the Bights of Benin and Biafra", in Paul E. Lovejoy (ed.), *Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade,* (Madison, WI, 1986): 203–233; Martino, "Clandestine Recruitment", 2012:60.

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