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The Ohi institution and the preservation of Ebira cultural heritage, 2006–2023.

George Adava Ayo[1]
Department of History and International Studies
Federal University, Lokoja
Kogi State Nigeria

Mohammed Suleiman Audu[2]
Department of History and International Studies
Federal University, Lokoja
Kogi State Nigeria

Roseline Morenike Oshewolo[3]
Department of History and International Studies
Federal University, Lokoja
Kogi State Nigeria

Abstract

This study examines the enduring significance of traditional institutions within African societies, with particular focus on Ebira land. Historically, such institutions have served as resilient governance structures that predate colonial rule and continue to persist amidst ongoing political transformations from the colonial period to contemporary democratic regimes. Focusing on the period from 2006 to 2023, this research examines the role of the Ohi institution in safeguarding Ebira cultural values. It critically investigates the mechanisms through which the institution sustains indigenous norms, practices, and belief systems within a socio-political environment characterized by rapid change. Employing a qualitative historical methodology, the study draws on both primary and secondary sources. These sources were systematically analyzed and cross-validated to ensure reliability and coherence. Organized thematically, the study provides a historical overview of the Ebira people, traces the emergence and institutionalization of the Ohi stool, and evaluates the strategies employed by the institution to preserve cultural heritage. The findings demonstrate that the Ohi institution functions as a symbol of communal identity and continuity across generations. The research concludes that, despite the influence of modern political changes, the Ohi traditional institution remains a vital agent in the preservation and revitalization of Ebira cultural values.

[1] george.ayo@fulokoja.edu.ng

[2] mohammed.audu@fulokoja.edu.ng
[3] roseline.oshewolo@fulokoja.edu.ng

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Introduction

Traditional institutions are key component of leadership in most African societies and it dates back to the pre-colonial era. The institution has provided leadership cutting across various aspect of life within their locality. This study therefore, examines one of such institutions in Ebira land, which is the Ohi traditional institution, with particular focus on the role of the Ohi traditional institution in the preservation of the cultural values of the Ebira people of Kogi State, Nigeria. The study is presented in eight themes including the conclusion, which include the survey of the people of Ebira land, the sociopolitical structure of the people before the creation of Ohi stool, the background to the creation of the Ohi institutions in the land, the creation of the Ohi stool by Kogi State Government and the efforts of the Ohis in the preservation of the cultural values of the people, which is the central arguments of the study. Although scholars like Audu, has examined political conflict in Ebira land, while Suberu interrogated political development in Ebira land and Okene discussed extensively on the evolution of the sociopolitical make up of the people. However, the objectives of this study is to examine the role of the Ohi institution in preserving the cultural values of Ebira people, which is achieved by examining it from the perspectives of acting as symbolic representation, cultural custodian, oral traditions, language and historical values, among other.

A Survey of the People and the Land

In tracing the historical background and origin of the people, several scholars have attempted to trace the actual origin of the people, but it has not been easy as the origin of Ebira-Tao is shrouded in obscurity. However, efforts by scholars in tracing such historical phenomenon have pointed to same direction. Ohidah, traced the origin of Ebira back to between 15th and 16th centuries when Ebira peoples left Kwararafa Kingdom in the North Eastern state of Nigeria, later called Gongola state, now Adamawa and Taraba states among the Jukuns stocks. He was named after Burak hill Aniburak corrupted Anebira and later called Bira or Ebira.[4]The documented history of the Ebira was largely compiled by British colonial administrators in the early 20th century, based on palace sources. According to oral traditions, the Ebira trace their origins to Wukari, in present-day Taraba State, where they were part of the Kwararafa Confederation. Around 1680 AD, a chieftaincy dispute led to the migration of the Ebira, along with the Idoma and Igala people, from Wukari.[5]

Between 1680 and 1750 AD, the Ebira people split into various groups and settled in different areas. The Ebira Tao first lived with the Igala at Idah before crossing the Niger River to settle in EbiraOpete, near Upake in Ajaokuta LGA. Itaazi, is considered the father of the Ebira Tao, led them to this initial settlement. He had five sons, who later migrated and established the main districts in Ebira land. Itaazi's five sons and the districts they founded are,

[4]. National Archives Kaduna N.A.K. / Lokoprof. / File No.4636/1906 Kabba Province. Sept. 1906.
[5]. Prince E. Ohidah, Ebira Nation (Okene: Dima Printers, 2013). 7.

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Adaviruku/Ohizi, founded Adavi, Ododo founded Okehi, Obaji founded Eika, Uga founded Okengwe, Onotu founded Ihima and Ohunene founded Eganyi. Each of the clans in Ebira land descended from Itaazi's sons, making them integral to the district's identity.[6]

Socio-Political Structure in Ebira Land

The bases of the Socio-Political organization of the Ebira people started from the family. The family consisted of the father, wives, children and grandchildren, all living in the same house and governed by rules and taboos aimed at promoting unity among them.[7] The family settlement was so designed that anybody visiting the compound could easily understand the settlement pattern. For instance, the family lived in a specially designed *Ohueje* (inner compound). The inner compound was demarcated from the *ovovu* (outer compound). The outer compound was used by those not genetically related to the head of the family. Such people included the family slaves, war or famine refugees on asylum and the family labourers. The maternal grand children of the head of an *Ohueje*, for example, did not belong to this *ovovu* (outer compound) though they might be living in the *Ohuoje* but are more inclined to that of their fathers.[8] It should as well be noted that an *ovovu* might grow larger after a period of time to form an *abara* (kindred) and one *abara* might consist of two or more *ovovu*. The head of the family who is known as the "*Ohi-Ohueje*", was the oldest surviving male. He looked after the cultural and clannish heritages of his family members, and as well has the final say on the socio-economic and political matters as they affect the entire family.[9] His decisions on the above matters which in most cases include marriage of his children and grandchildren were believed to have come from the ancestors, *Ohiku*.

The *abara* which was the next socio-political unit after the family was made up of several families who were particularly related by blood. For that, members of the same lineage considered it a taboo (*enyisi*), to get married to one another. This in essence encourage inter-lineage marriage and harmony while discouraging conflict and skirmishes. Just like the head of the family known as the *Ohi-Ohueje*, the head of the lineage, *Ohi-abara* was the oldest surviving male of the lineage. He could only take decisions after consulting the various heads of families that made up the lineage[10] He had the exclusive right over the economic activities of the lineage. In the opinion of Okene, this was by the virtue of the fact that the lineage land was vested in him, and the annual produce of the *abara* were gathered through him. Examples of lineage are *Ogagu*, *Adovosi*, *Avi*, *Ajimi*, *Egusi* and *Ataa*. The clan, *Iresu*, was the next large socio-political unit

[6]. Habib Sanni Angulu. Has History been Fair to the Attah, (Okene: Desmond Tutu Publishers, 1999). 25.
[7].AliyuAbdullahiOnumo. History of Ebira People (ItopaAneEbira) Modified. https//www.com. Retrieved on 28/06/2025.
[8]. Festus Ojo, The History of Okene People. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.1990). Pp.4-6
[9]. Interview with Peter Obaro, Secretary, IhimaKingmakers Council, 79 years, Oboroke, Ihima. 06/11/2025.
[10]. Ahmed A. Okene, "The Transformation of Ebiraland 1880-1960". Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History,BayeroUniversity Kano. 1997. 49.

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after the lineage. This was the main political unit. The clans which were many were made up of two or more *abaras*. Every clan have or had a prefix of either *ezi*, "the children of', or *ani* 'the people of such' attached to his name, such as in *Ezi-Avi*,*Ezi-Asuwe* or *Ani-EmaniAni-Ohueta* etc.[11]

Apart from the preface, each clan as well maintained iconic symbols and eulogies, derived from the names and their animals or objects considered sacred by the various clans. For instance, we have *Ezi-Udu*, *Ezi-ede*, and *Ezi-Odumi* meaning 'the Children of lion', 'children of crayfish' and children of hyaena respectively among others. The symbols serve as means of identification for the distinctive and particular migration groups and parties of either a lineage or clan.[12] Since members of each clan believed they were from common genetic origin, it was forbidden for a man and woman from the same clan to get married. The post of clan head went to the eldest living male member of the clan. His power was limited to his own clan, and his political influence was remarkable as he presided over any clan affairs' meeting. His judgment was determined mainly by the consensus of opinion of the elder and kindred gathered for the purpose. His decisions on other matters concerning the clan were based on consultations with the head of the lineage that made the clan.

He also represented the economic interest of the entire clan and other ancestral properties in trust for the clan. The income from all the clan land which he held in trust for the clan such as the produce from oil palm and locust beans trees went to him. If a member of his clan killed a game or a game was killed on the clan land, hind-legs were given to him. But he is obligated to share this with two kindred heads.[13] The next socio-political unit which could be regarded as the largest among the people of Ebira was the clan group *Ekura*. The administration of all the clans constituting a clan group lay in the hands of the eldest of the group of clans, (*Ohireba*). About six of such clan group existed in the past and these include *Adavi,Eika, Ihima, Okengwe, Okehi* and *Eganyin*.[14]

Background to the Creation of Ohi Traditional Institution

At the creation of Kogi state in 1991, the stool of Ohinoyi was prominent among the traditional institutions in Ebira land and the only first class stool in the area. This did not go well with some elders and stake holders in the land, hence, the quest to either upgrade the existing stool of the clan heads (*Ohiresu*) also referred to as *Taarus.* The clamour was later strengthened by some politicians in the area.[15]Obaro opines that it was the desire for Ebira land to have more first class graded tools for the purpose of equity and fairness and to further

[11]. Ahmed A. Okene, "The Transformation of Ebiraland 1880-1960". Ph.D. Thesis, Department of History,BayeroUniversity Kano. 1997.52.
[12]. Mohammed SuliemanAudu. Political Leadership and Conflicts in Ebiraland, Nigeria, 1900-2003.(Saarbrucken: Lambert Academic Publishing 2011). 25-26.
[13]. Mohammed SuliemanAudu. Political Leadership and Conflicts in Ebiraland, Nigeria, 1900-2003.(Saarbrucken: Lambert Academic Publishing 2011). 27.
[14]E. D. Ahmadu, An Introduction to the History of Ebira. (Kaduna:BethBekka Publishers, 2004).28.
[15]. Interview with John Enesi, 71 Years,Chief Security Officer to the Former Deputy Governor of Kogi State, Dr. Philip Salawu, Zango, 02/10/2025.

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strengthen the republican nature of the people that heightened the desire and clamour for the creation of the Ohi stool. To him, historically, Ebira nation does not have a paramount ruler, hence, each clan has a clan head that administers his people and that the issue of creating a paramount head was a development birthed by the colonial masters, who needed a unified and simple means of administering the people.[16] Another position, puts it that the issue of having Ohis as the heads of the districts in Ebira land equally featured prominently in the agenda of a series of meetings held by the Ebira Peoples Association E.P.A., a socio-cultural umbrella body that seeks to promote the development of the land including the well-being of sons and daughters of the area, with branches across Nigeria and even beyond.[17]

By 2003, the affairs of Kogi State was taken over by His Excellency, Ibrahim Idris, with Dr. Philip Salau of Ebira extraction as his deputy. The administration among other request, received was that for the creation of the stool of Ohi in the five traditional districts of Ebira land which would be of first class status.[18] There are varying accounts on why some of the people wanted the creation of the Ohi stool; a number of the people especially the political class felt a perceived marginalization and inequality in the number of first class title in the area compared to what obtained in other senatorial districts of the state. They were of the opinion that with the establishment of the Ohi stool, such inequality would have been addressed.[19]Oyeka,[20] Dada,[21] and Oricha,[22] among others hold this perception. While interrogating these claims, it was also discovered that a majority of the people viewed the reason for the establishment of the stool from similar angle. To such, they believed that some politicians who felt that the introduction of the Ohi stool was to compliment the position of the Ohinoyi, who was the only one that enjoyed the first class status, more so, the status of Ohi was to be a first class title.

The third group of persons were those who felt that the creation of Ohi stool was to bring recognition to the five traditional district of Ebira land and bridging the gap that existed between these districts and the government. Momoh[23] and Anivasa[24] are among the proponents of this assertion. This again arose the question of if the need for the presence of first class institutions was the reason for the establishment of Ohi, why not upgrade the stool of the clan heads (*Ohiajas*)?. The response to this was that there were many *Ohiajas* in the land, since each clan and sub clans have their clan head *Ohiajas,* this therefore,

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16. Interview with Peter Obaro, Secretary, Ihima Kingmakers Council, 79 years, Oboroke, Ihima. 06/11/2025.
17. Interview with John Enesi, 71 Years, Chief Security Officer to the Former Deputy Governor of Kogi State, Dr. Philip Salawu, Zango, 02/10/2025.
18. Interview with John Enesi, 71 Years, Chief Security Officer to the Former Deputy Governor of Kogi State, Dr. Philip Salawu, Zango, 02/10/2025.
19. Interview with H.R.H. Umar MomohJimohOpewu, Ohi of Eika, 57 Years, Abobo, 08/11/2025.
20. Interview with SiyakaOyeka, 68 Years, Farming/Bricklaying, Ogaminana, 07/11/2025.
21. Interview with Dada Omanayin, 66 Years, Retired Teacher, Ogaminana, 07/11/2025.
22. Interview SumonuOricha, 67 Years, Retired Civil Servant, Oziokutu,08/11/2025.
23. Interview withYakubuMomoh, 58 Years, Teaching, Obehira, 28/06/2025.
24. Interview with Samuel Anivasa, 67 Years, Politician, Okene,28/10/2025.

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rendered the suggestion unrealistic.[25] The Ohis are therefore, to oversee the activities of the districts and also to collaborate with the *Ohiajas* in maintaining law and order within their districts. The Ohis also act as the head of the traditional council in their various districts and by 2006, the then Executive Governor created the Ohi stool.

It therefore, suggest that the need to have more first class stools in the land, the desire to maintain the republican nature of the Ebira people, the role it will play in terms of ending clannish hegemony, over superiority claims in the district, to balance the numbers of first class chief across the state and the promotion of unity in Ebira land, have accounted for the desire, clamour and the eventual creation of the Ohi traditional institution in Ebira land. However, it was not an easy route.

Creation of Ohi Institution

The proposal of the request for the creation of Ohi stools was submitted by the representatives of the people to the State Executive Council (SEC). After which the SEC constituted a panel from the Ministry for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs and having received the report of the panel from the Ministry for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, the SEC sent a bill to the State House of Assembly in 2005, to enact a law for the creation of Ohi Stool. After series of deliberations and seating in the State Assembly. The voice of the majority in favour of the bill prevailed over that of the minority, the majority's voice had their ways as depicts by democracy, and the bill eventually sailed through the assembly.[26] The State Government afterwards, promulgated into law the Chiefs (Appointment, Deposition and Establishment of Traditional Councils in Kogi State) Law also referred to as "The chiefs Law." As an important subsidiary/adjunct to that law, the State Government promulgated vide Section 7 of the former the Creation/Establishment and Procedure for the Accession of the stool of Ohi in Ebira land by an referred to as "Order 2006."[27]

In the Order, the Paramount ruler in the five traditional districts in Ebira land were made First Class Chiefs and they are to be addressed as Ohi of their respective Districts. In addition, by Section five of the Order, the stool of Ohi is to rotate among the constituent native Clans in each of the five Traditional districts in central zone of the state.[28] The government also used legal instruments, such as edicts or gazettes, to formally establish Ohi stools. For instance, the Kogi State Government in 2006 promulgated Edit No. 2 of 2006 (titled "the creations/establishment and procedure for the ascension of the stool of Ohi in Ebira land order, 2006"). It suffice to assert that the government acted in response to popular demand from the people.

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[25]. Kogi State of Nigeria Gazette on the Creation/Establishment and Procedure for the Ascension to the Stool of Ohi in Ebira Land Order, 2026. No. 1 Vol. 1.7-8.

26.SalihuOyibo. How Ohi Stool Emerged. Blueprint Daily Newspaper, No. 1116, 19th January 2016.4.

27. SalihuOyibo. How Ohi Stool Emerged. Blueprint Daily Newspaper, No. 1116, 19th January 2016.5.

28. Kogi State of Nigeria Gazette.The Creation/Establishment and Procedure for the Ascension to the Stool of Ohi in Ebira Land.Order, 2006.Vol. 1 Legal Notice No. 2. 9.

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In addition, the government was responsible for issuing official letters of appointment to the selected Ohi, who are chosen according to the gazetted traditional procedures and customs of their respective areas. The government also has the authority to suspend and reinstate monarchs, as seen in the case of the Onu Ife of Omala. More so, a significant motivation for the government in creating Ohi stools was to address lingering crises, resolve controversies surrounding superiority claims of a clan over the others in most of the districts, especially as seen in that of Ihima. The government also defines the scope and status of the new stools, such as declaring them "first class" paramount chiefs and specifying their roles, like serving as Chairman of a Local Government Traditional Council.[29] In essence, the government provides the necessary legal framework and formal recognition for the Ohi stool to exist and function within the modern administrative structure of the state.

Ohi Institution and the Promotion of Ebira Cultural Values

Traditional rulers are considered the primary custodians and protectors of their communities' cultural heritage and values. Their roles are essential in ensuring that ancestral values, customs, and traditions are not lost to modernization and globalization, but rather passed down through generations.[30]In similar vein, the Ohis have been active and led the campaign in the preservation of Ebira cultural heritage. The Institution represents the highest traditional authority of the district among the Ebira people of Kogi State, Nigeria, and occupies a pivotal position in the preservation and promotion of Ebira cultural values. The history of the people is deeply rooted in their culture, which is manifested in their ways of life. The Ohis therefore, in preserving the cultural values of the people, serves as a symbolic representation, cultural representation, supervises ritual/ceremonial functions and act as moral/social authority among others.[31]

Symbolic Representation: In its symbolic representation**,** the Ohis do not just serve as the heads of districts, their oversight functions in the districts bestows on them the final authority the clan heads submits to, as far as the affairs of the district is concerned. While the clan heads that is the Taarus oversees the affairs of their respective clans and are also the custodians of the culture, the Ohis ensures that the Taarus' activities are carried out in line with the norms and traditions of the land. This therefore, makes the Ohis the rallying point of unity at the district level. Prior to the creation of the Ohi institution, some clans were always at loggerhead, either on the account of seniority claims or demographic advantage, which left the district without a unifying figure. But with the creation of the institution, that is gradually becoming a thing of the past. This is because as the district traditional head, the Ohis are to ensure unity at in their

[29]. Salihu Oyibo. How Ohi Stool Emerged. Blueprint Daily Newspaper, No. 1116, 19th January 2016.
[30]. A. E. Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in South-eastern Nigeria, 1891-1929, (London: Longman, 1972). 25.
[31]. Interview with IsmailaGaniyu, 48 years, Bricklayer/Traditionalist, Obehira, 12/11/2025.

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respective district, which is a part of their roles as encoded in the laws of the State.[32]

The Ohis are also engaged in efforts to ensure the linkage of the ancestral traditions with contemporary social life. In this wise, some of the Ohis have been in the front burners to ensure that traditions are not just maintained, but continued to be upheld. For instance, Opewu, alludes that he has been involved in purification sacrifices and priestly assignment on behalf of his district, to avert impending dangers, such as famine and violence within the districts. He posits to have taken the lead and carried along the Taarus in his district. To him, the latest of such endeavours, was when he led the clan heads and the chief priest to offer sacrifices in the groves, on the hill of Obangede, and as a sign that the sacrifices were accepted by God known as *Ohomorihi*, was the heavy downpour of rain contrary to the expectations of the people.[33]

Still interrogating the Ohis as rallying point of unity in their clans, Okatahi, sees the stool itself as a rallying point for the district. To him, prior to the establishment of the Ohi stool, most districts have been much divided, which is due to the republican nature of the people, where every clan is autonomous, with no clear cut leaders at the district level. But the Ohi has become a rallying point and a symbol of unity among clans in the districts. He further stated that the fact that the stool is a rotational one that all the clans would occupy when it is their turn, gives the people a sense of belonging and the desire to naturally honour, regards and respect the position of the Ohi.[34]

Cultural Custodians: As earlier stated, the history of the people is deeply rooted in their culture, which they express through a variety of events and lifestyle, this include festivals marriages, greetings and others. A major aspect of the peoples culture is evident in their festivals, such as Ekuechi, (night masquerade), Eche-ane, (masquerade festival in celebration of the women folks) and Eche-ori, (new yam festival), usually celebrated by Ihima and Eganyi districts.[35] It has became quite disturbing that in recent times, the celebration of these festivals have been marred with gross violence, involving either the masquerades or their followers and supporters, resulting into the infliction of injuries and pains on innocent people, some of whom may be visitors, strangers and passers-by. This trend was beginning to threaten the continuity of and the celebration of the festival, as bans had been placed on the celebration over and over again.[36] As observed by Amoka, while recalling his experience, masquerades, their supporters and followers formed the habit of flogging and inflicting injuries on innocent people who have no business in their activities. To him, what their ancestors passed over to them as a heritage, was become an instrument of afflictions and unleashing mayhem to people.[37] This development

[32]. Interview with IsmailaGaniyu, 48 years, Bricklayer/Traditionalist, Obehira, 12/11/2025.
[33]. Interview with H.R.H. Umar MommohJimohOpewu, 57 years, Ohi of Eika, Abobo, 06/11/22025.
[34]. Interview with H.R.H.IsahMammanOkatahi, 68 years, Ohi of Okene, Okene, 05/11/2025.
[35]. Interview with Yunusa Lamidi, 57 years, Traditionalist, Ageva/Obehira, 18/12/2025.
[36]. Interview with Yunusa Lamidi, 57 years, Traditionalist, Ageva/Obehira, 18/12/2025.
[37]. AbdelghaffarAmoka. The Ebira Culture, the Masquerades, and the Needed Reform. An Online Publication, www.https://ebiraculture.ng. 09/06/2025. Retrieved on 20/12/2025.

is thereby, threatening the continuity of an important aspect of the peoples culture. The Ohis have resolved that the celebration of these festivals is done under a peaceful atmosphere and ensuring the observance of the needed rites and admonishing the Taarus to perform their roles, by insisting that the celebration must be done under peaceful atmosphere and sanctions or punishment be meted on offenders during such celebration. This moves by the Ohis is indicative of their efforts in preserving the cultural values of Ebira people.

Oral Traditions, Language And Historical Values: Oral tradition is a core aspect of a peoples heritage and identity, hence, its place is paramount in preserving their culture, as observed by Brodowicz, Oral tradition provides a sense of identity, a place in one's community, and empowers one with a sense of history and understanding of local issues, therefore, the control and preservation of such common heritage, may directly suffice in protecting ones cultural identity.[38] He further stressed, that oral tradition and its expressions in domains encompasses an enormous variety of spoken forms including proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, chants, songs, dramatic performances and more and such expressions are used to pass on knowledge, cultural and social values and collective memory. They play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive.[39]

Similarly, the Ohis have shown the desire in harmonizing and preserving the history of the people as depicted by oral traditions. As observed by Achuja,[40]Okatahi[41] and Opewu,[42]Ohi of Ajaokuta, Okene and Eika respectively, the oral traditions on the history of the people have been presented in dissimilar narratives. They observed that for some reasons, some versions have been laced with biases to suit personal interest. This, the Ohi of Ajaokuta stated that he had suggested to the Ohinoyi (Paramount Ruler), an idea the Ohinoyi has subscribed to and promised that in due course, historians from Ebira land would be invited to execute this project. This, he believed would address distortions and preservation of the oral history of the people. The effort is aimed at not just preserving the culture of the people, but creating a consciousness in the mind of the people about their identity, as captured by Marcus Garvey, "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots."[43]

Another move taken by the Ohis in preserving the cultural heritage of the people is in the preservation of their language; the language Ebira is facing a serious threat due to civilization and the emigration of the people in search of

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[38]. Mateusz Brodowicz, "The Significance of Oral Tradition in Preserving Cultural Heritage". www.https//onlinepublications. 28th February, 2025. Retreived on 13/12/2025.
[39]. Mateusz Brodowicz, "The Significance of Oral Tradition in Preserving Cultural Heritage". www.https//onlinepublications. 28th February, 2025. Retreived on 13/12/2025.
[40]. Interview with H.R.H. Isah Musa Achuja, 66 years, Ohi of Ajaokuta, Eganyi, 07/11/2025.
[41]. Interview with H.R.H.IsahMammanOkatahi, 68 years, Ohi of Okene, Okene, 05/11/2025.
[42]. Interview with H.R.H. Umar MommohJimohOpewu, 57 years, Ohi of Eika, Abobo, 06/11/22025.
[43]. Marcus Garvey. Brainy Quotes.com Brainy Media Inc. https//www.brainyquotes.com/quotes/. 365148. Retrieved on 13th December, 2025.

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greener pastures. The Ohi of Adavi stressed that English language is posing a challenge to Ebira language particularly among young people in the land, some of them communicate more in English than their native language. He further alleged that some parents are complicit in the matters, because they communicate with their wards in English language, rather than in Ebira. This trend, he regarded as disturbing because should it continue, the language may face extinction. In this vein, the Ohishave been engaging their subjects and advocating on the need to take deliberate steps in ensuring that parents communicate with their children in the mother tongue and to encourage children to do likewise to protect the language from going into extinction.[44]

Opewu, stated that he has been advocating the need for Ebira language to not only be taught passively, but and should be taught as a subject and be integrated into the core academic curriculum of schools in the area, just like the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo languages are being taught in both primary and secondary schools across Nigeria, and being studied in universities. This he claim is a major responsibility of traditional rulers, because they are closest to the people in terms of grass-root interactions.[45]

Okatahi, in his account has played host to some Ebira bodies and association and ensured that their interaction has always been in Ebira language, this he stated is deliberate to ensure that the language remain the means of communication in relating with his subject,whether home or outside. Example of such is the visit by the Ebira Peoples Association and National Association of Ebira Students (NAES).[46]In similar vein, Ireyi, who played host to Ebiras in diaspora under the umbrella of E.P.A, Kaduna chapter, shortly after his installation, recalled that he admonished them on the need to visit their home land more frequently, and in doing so, they should allowed their children born in the diaspora to tag along in order to get familiar with their land of ancestry. To him, one of the ways to achieve this is by constantly communicating with their children and among themselves in the Ebira language[47] It therefore, suggest that the Ohis may have initiated the moves in the preservation of the culture of the people in the aspect of sustaining the Ebira language, a major factor that unify the people.

Religion, Ritual and Ceremonial Functions: Religion is an integral part of the Ebira peoples which predates their migration to the present location. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the people practiced a form of African traditional religion with a central focus on a god called *Ohomorihi*, the rain-maker who lives in the sky. Rites are performed to appease the god whose attributes include, rewarding good people and punishing evildoers. They rely on the assistance of intermediary deities known as *Ori*.The *Ori* is believed to reside

[44]. Interview with H.R.H. Mohammed Bello Ireyi, 71 years, Ohi of Adavi, Ogaminana, 06/11/2025.
[45]. Interview with H.R.H. Umar MommohJimohOpewu, 57 years, Ohi of Eika, Abobo, 06/11/22025.
[46]. Interview with H.R.H.IsahMammanOkatahi, 68 years, Ohi of Okene, Okene, 05/11/2025.
[47]. Interview with H.R.H. Mohammed Bello Ireyi, 71 years, Ohi of Adavi, Ogaminana, 06/11/2025.

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in specific locations such as hilltops, groves, and caves. These sacred places serve as meeting points between humans and deity.[48]

Yusuf, revealed that on several occasions, he had led the Taarus in the district alongside the priest to offer sacrifices in appeasing the gods to protect the people from dangers, their farmers and farmland from external incursions. This he believed has kept the people under the protective eyes of *Ihineba*, the king of the sky.[49] He further stated that while the Muslims and Christians were offering their prayers for the land, the traditional religious aspect was not neglected. He explained that as it stands, the Ohi are the custodians of the people's cultural heritage, being the heads of the traditional council in the district. The Ohis ensures and supervises the constant observance of rites and rituals as required by the gods of the land and ancestors, in ensuring peace, unity and prosperity of the people.[50]From Opewu, Yusuf and other accounts, it suggests that the Ohis are quite familiar with the traditional religion of the people, which is an integral aspect of their civilization and culture. They take the lead in the worship and practices as required, and without hindering the practice of the Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Islam.

Clothing: Clothing is a visible aspect of the people's culture and reflected in their dressing. The people have a unique style of fabric *Itinochi* made in looms called *oguntoro.* Most Ebira women are involved in this industrial activities that has spanned centuries and handed down from one generation to the other.[51]One of the major ways the Ohis have adopted in preserving the dressing style and fabrics of the people, is in taking the lead by showing example. Okatahi, opine that *Itinochi* is beyond just clothing, it was a visual expression of the people's identity, status, and ancestral connection. The dressing is worn alongside local beads hung around the neck and wrist, used as finger rings, indicating splendour and royalty, as every son of the soil is a considered a prince due to their republican nature.[52]

Yusuf, further stressed on the dressing style of the people as one aspect of the peoples culture that globalization has not threatened, rather *Itinochi* is gaining global acceptance, as it is worn by both Ebiras and some non Ebiras, and is now being celebrated annually, tagged the *Itinochi* revolution. He stated that the fact that they, the Ohis wear it constantly is indicative of efforts in its preservation.[53] The people of Ebira land sew suits, T-shirts, babanrigas, (a flowing male garment), caftans for male, shoes and variety of styles for female from *Itinochi.* Beyond just fashion, *Itinochi* is mostly worn by both brides and grooms during

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[48]. M. J. Adeiza. Traditional Religion of Ebira People.www.https://ebiraonlinemedia.Retrieved on 20/2/2025.
[49]. Interview with H.R.H. Architect Attah Yusuf, Ohi of Okengwe, 50 years, Upogoro, 08/11/2025.
[50]. Interview with H.R.H. Architect Attah Yusuf, Ohi of Okengwe, 50 years, Upogoro, 08/11/2025.
[51]. Fortune OmuyaSalawu, "Itinochi Clothing as a Catalyst for Cultural Expression and Identity." True Verdict Magazine.Vol. 23, July 13th 2025.7.
[52]. Interview with H.R.H.IsahMammanOkatahi, 68 years, Ohi of Okene, Okene, 05/11/2025.
[53]. Interview with H.R.H. Architect Attah Yusuf, Ohi of Okengwe, 50 years, Upogoro, 08/11/2025.

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wedding ceremonies. They are worn for the traditional marriages and receptions. It gives them a unique identity typifying their origin. Opewu, added that as an Ohi, he usually advocate that the youths in his district should always carry themselves in a way that reflect their origin and not allow foreign outfits to completely take over their dressings.[54] It suffices to assume that the peoples' culture of dressings, styles and attires are being preserved through the several advocacy made the Ohis.

Moral and Social Authority: The Ohis advocate for the importance of their heritage to a wider audience and educate younger generations about their history and customs through various channels, including traditional storytelling and potentially modern platforms like digital media, as most of them have social media pages and handles. For instance, the Ohi of Ihima, has published a book on the dangers and ills of drug abuse and ingestion of substance as part of his advocacy against engaging in social vices by the youths in his district and by extension, Ebira land.[55] The book which is made available free to youths, ward heads, schools and individuals, this he claim will instill morals, ethical values and mobilization towards the social well-being and cultural values to his generation and the upcoming ones.

For Ireyi, as part of his efforts to encourage moral uprightness within his domain, emphasized the non-partisanship of traditional institution. This is to allow traditional authority guide the communities towards harmony, social responsibility, and tolerance, transcending political divides. He encouraged the Taarus to imbibe such gestures, if they would be fair in discharging their duties as clan heads. He further admonished them to always rally their communities support for development projects e.g., schools, health centers, and infrastructure and humanitarian aid, creating shared goals and collective action, instead of aligning with politicians, which may present them as being bias, hence, becoming difficult to counsel the young ones. He also at intervals address the public on the need to uphold morals ethics, especially among the youth, also warning against vices in the communities.[56]

Yusuf adding credence to the above, sees his stool as one who the Almighty has bestowed the privilege of playing a key role in reinforcing ethical norms, promoting moral integrity, and maintaining social order within his domain. He equally uphold justice, equity, and communal well-being, acting as role models and spiritual leaders in his community. The Ohi plays the role of an arbiter of justice, and his efforts in mitigating, settling and resolving disputes and conflicts, has given the people a sense of belonging, fairness in the district. At several instances, he had mediated in family feuds, community crisis, farm disputes and it likes to ensure social harmony and instilling morals among

[54]. Interview with H.R.H. Umar MommohJimohOpewu, 57 years, Ohi of Eika, Abobo, 06/11/22025.
[55]. H.R.H. Alh. Ahmed AbdulraheemOgido. Hard Drugs Destroys. (Okene: Harok Prints. 2024). 2-4
[56]. E. Ikenga-metuh. Religion and Morality in Traditional African Beliefs: Assessment of a view point", in West African Religion, 18(1), Department of Religion, UNN. 1979. 54.

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people in his districts.[57] This further re-enforces his resolve to instill morals and live an exemplary life for all categories of people in his district.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the study revealed that the creation of the Ohi stool was a response to the yearning of the people of the land which dated to decades ago. The agitations went through some turbulence, rejections, and neglects by previous administrations of both the old Kwara State and the early days of Kogi State. However, the administration of his Excellency, Alhaji Ibrahim Idris and Dr. Philip Salawu, eventually gave it the desired attention and nod. Upon the approval of the State House of Assembly, the dream came to fruition. It also shows clearly, the process of appointing an Ohi as enabled by the law, which include the composition of the council of kingmakers, drawn from various clans in the districts. The study further revealed how the Ohis have played crucial roles in preserving the cultural values of the people by being symbolic representations of the people, preservation of oral tradition, language and historical values, among others.

[57]. Interview with H.R.H. Architect Attah Yusuf, Ohi of Okengwe, 50 years, Upogoro, 08/11/2025.

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