MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND CHIEFTAINCY CRISIS IN OGBOKUMA COMMUNITY, 1927 - 2025

GABRIEL, ILODE OGWUOR
Department of History and International Diplomacy,
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwu, Port Harcourt
oguor.gabriel@rsu.edu.ng 07037487219

INDEPENDENCE CHINONYE ENYINDAH
Department of History and International Diplomacy
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt
ice_enyindah@yahoo.com +234 (0) 8023092776, 08066595926.

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Abstract

Migration has been one of the most important forces shaping human societies across history. Communities evolve through movements of people who relocate in search of security, economic opportunities, social acceptance, and environmental stability. In many cases, however, migration also generate tensions, especially when new settlers interact with indigenous populations and begin to influence political and cultural institutions. This study examines the historical patterns of migration and settlement in the Ogbokuma community in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State and analyzes how these movements contributed to chieftaincy crises within the community. Drawing from oral traditions, archival materials, and secondary literature, the research traces the origin of the Ogbokuma people, the arrival of migrant settlers, and the transformation of the community into a multi-ethnic settlement. The study further investigates how demographic change, colonial administrative restructuring, and competition for political authority generated recurring disputes over chieftaincy succession. The findings reveal that while migration contributed significantly to the economic growth and cultural diversity of Ogbokuma, it also produced tensions over land ownership, ritual authority, and political legitimacy. The paper concludes that sustainable conflict resolution in Ogbokuma requires a balanced recognition of both indigenous rights and the contributions of migrant settlers to the community's development.

Introduction

Migration is a universal human experience that has shaped the development of societies from antiquity to the present day.[i] Throughout human history, people have moved from one region to another in search of food, security, economic opportunities, and social stability.[ii] In early human societies, migration was largely driven by environmental factors such as drought, famine, or the search for fertile land. However, in later periods, political, economic, and social factors such as trade, colonization, war, and cultural exchange became significant drivers of human mobility.[iii]

Migration can take various forms. Some movements are temporary, such as seasonal migrations undertaken by pastoral communities in search of grazing land, while others are permanent settlements that lead to the establishment of new communities. Migration may also be voluntary; where individuals move in pursuit of better opportunities; or involuntary: where people are forced to relocate due to war, slavery, persecution, or environmental disasters.[iv] The consequences of migration are equally diverse. While migration can foster economic development, cultural exchange, and social integration, it may also create tensions between host communities and migrant groups.

The history of Ogbokuma community in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State illustrates this complex relationship between migration and social transformation. Ogbokuma is part of the Abua ethnic group located within the Orashi region of the Niger Delta. Over the centuries, the community attracted migrants from neighboring ethnic groups due to its strategic geographical location, fertile agricultural land, and access to waterways that facilitated trade and communication.

The Abua people belong to the Central Delta linguistic group and speak dialects that share a common ancestral origin.[v] Oral traditions recorded in colonial documents suggest that the Abua people trace their ancestry to a founding figure named Abua and his wife Omake, who were believed to have given birth to several descendants that founded the villages of the Abua kingdom. Some traditions describe the Abua people as autochthonous inhabitants of the region, while others suggest that they migrated

[i] K. Eborka, "Migration and Urbanization in Nigeria from Pre-colonial to Post-colonial Eras: A Sociological Overview in *Migration and Urbanization in Contemporary Nigeria: Policy Issues and Challenges* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2021). Pp.15-54.

[ii] A. A. I. Asiwaju and M. Crowder (eds) "*In Protes against Colonial Rule in West Africa*", (London, Longman Group, Vol.5, No 3 1977, p.7).

[iii] F. B. Adamson and H. Thiollet, The Colonial Migration State, Vol.120, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2025.103270 accessed 22nd January 2025.

[iv] P. F. Adebayo and A. Y. Raji, Yoruba Traders in Cote D'Ivoire: A Study of the Role Migrant Settlers in the Process of Economic Relation in West Africa, *An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal Ethiopia*, Vol.3, No. 3, p. 137, 200.

[v] E. E. Efere and Kay Williamson, "Languages" In E. J. Alagoa and T. N. Tamuno, *Land and People of Nigeria,* (Port-Harcourt: Riverside Communications, 1989), p.47.

from areas such as the Benin Kingdom or the Igbo hinterlands several centuries ago.[vi]

Regardless of the exact origin, the Abua people established several settlements along the Sombreiro River; a major waterway that connected them with other communities in the Niger Delta. Among these settlements was Omo-Okogha, which later developed into the present-day Ogbokuma community.[vii] The strategic location of Ogbokuma along the Sombreiro River made it an attractive destination for migrants. The river served as a major transportation route linking the community with neighboring areas such as Degema, Abonnema, Bonny, Nembe, Okrika, Ikwerre, and other Abua settlements. This geographical advantage encouraged trade in agricultural produce, fish, palm oil, and other commodities, thereby attracting traders and settlers from various ethnic groups. Over time, migrants from communities such as Agba-Ndele, Degema, and other Abua settlements began to settle in Ogbokuma. The indigenous inhabitants initially welcomed these migrants and allowed them to integrate into the social and economic life of the community. However, as the population increased and migrants became more involved in political affairs, tensions began to emerge, particularly regarding leadership and succession to the traditional chieftaincy stool.[viii]

The chieftaincy institution in Ogbokuma historically served as the central authority responsible for governance, dispute resolution, and the preservation of cultural traditions. Chiefs played an important role in maintaining social order and representing the community in interactions with neighboring groups and colonial administrators. However, the increasing diversity of the population complicated the traditional succession system and led to disputes over who had legitimate authority to occupy the chieftaincy stool.[ix]

These disputes gradually evolved into recurring chieftaincy crises that affected the social, political, and economic stability of the community. In some cases, the conflicts led to the formation of factions within the community, the emergence of militant groups, and the disruption of development initiatives.

It is within this historical context that this study examines the relationship between migration, settlement patterns, and chieftaincy crises in the Ogbokuma community.

[vi] Efere and Williamson, "Languages"1989), p.47.

[vii] E. J. Alagoa, "The Eastern Delta", In E. J Alagoa "*A History of the Niger Delta: An Historical Interpretation of Ijo Ora tradition*. (Onyoma Research Publication, Doval Ventures Ltd, 2005), p.32.

[viii] G. I. Gabriel, Patterns of migration and settlement of different ethnic groups in Ogbokuma (Interviewed by Gabriel Ilode, February 23rd, 2025)

[ix] I. Akarakoro, Patterns of migration and settlement of different ethnic groups in Ogbokuma ((Interviewed by Gabriel Ilode, February 30TH 2025)

Conceptual Framework

Migration

Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another with the intention of settling either temporarily or permanently in the new location. Migration may occur within a country or across international boundaries and can be motivated by economic, social, political, or environmental factors. Scholars often categorize migration into several types, including voluntary migration, forced migration, rural-urban migration, and seasonal migration. Each type of migration reflects different a motivation and circumstance that influence human mobility.[x] In the context of the Ogbokuma community, migration occurred mainly within the Niger Delta region. Migrants from neighboring communities settled in Ogbokuma for reasons ranging from trade opportunities, fertile land for farming, and access to waterways for fishing and transportation.

Settlement

Settlement refers to the establishment of a permanent community in a particular terrotory, The process of settlement usually follows migration and involves the development of social networks, economic activities, and cultural institutions that sustain the community. Settlement can take various forms, including rural settlements, urban settlements, and peri-urban settlements.[xi] In rural communities like Ogbokuma, settlement patterns are often influenced by access to farmland, fishing grounds, and trade routes. The settlement of migrants in Ogbokuma gradually transformed the community into a multi-ethnic society where different groups interacted through trade, marriage, and cultural changes

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by migration theories, which include Push–Pull Theory, Forced Migration Theory, and Neoclassical Migration Theory, to explain the factors that influenced human mobility and settlement patterns of the Ogbokuma people in Abua.

Everett Lee's Push Pull Theory

The Push–Pull Theory, developed by Everett Lee, explains migration from the perspective of factors that push individuals away from their place of origin and factors that attract them to a new destination. Push factors may include unemployment, conflict, and environmental challenges, while pull factors may include economic opportunities, security, and better living conditions.[xii] In the case of Ogbokuma, pull factors such as fertile land, fishing opportunities, and trade networks attracted migrants from neighboring communities.

Forced Migration Theory

Forced Migration Theory explains situations where individuals or groups are compelled to leave their homes due to war, persecution, or social exclusion. In many African societies, individuals accused of crimes such as witchcraft were sometimes exiled from their communities

[x] E. S. Lee, "Theory of Migration", Demography, Vol. 3. No. 1, (1966), pp. 47-57

[xi] R. B. Mandal, "*Introduction to Rural Settlements* (New Delhi" Concept Publishing Company, 2001)

[xii] E. S. Lee, "A Theory of Migration", *Demography*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1966, pp. 47–57.

and forced to seek refuge elsewhere.[xiii] Historical accounts suggest that some migrants settled in Ogbokuma after fleeing conflicts or accusations of witchcraft in their original communities.

Neoclassical Theory

Neoclassical Theory views migration as a rational decision made by individuals seeking to improve their economic conditions. According to this theory, people move from areas with limited economic opportunities to regions where their labor can generate higher income.[xiv] This perspective helps explain why traders, fishermen, and farmers migrated to Ogbokuma, which offered abundant natural resources and access to regional trade networks.

Patterns of Migration and Settlement in the Ogbokuma Community

The history of Ogbokuma community reveal multiple layers of migration and settlement that contributed to the formation of the modern community. These patterns include ancestral migration, internal migration, trade-driven migration, and migration during the colonial era.

Ancestral Migration

The foundational migration in Ogbokuma's history is ancestral, originating from the movement of Otapha (Otami), the first son of Abua, who migrated southward from Ogbo-Abuan and settled along the Sombreiro River, founding the Otapha clan. Otapha fathered three sons: Okogha, Kegima, and Arupuor. These sons strategically settled in different locations, both for defense and territorial expansion.[xv] Okogha being the firstborn settled at Omo-Okogha sharing boundary with Ikwerre, Ekpeye, and other sister communities of Abua. While the youngest "Kegima" settled in the middle between Okogha and Arupuo the second son who settled at the outlet of the Sombrero River to bound with the people of Kalabari and Degema.

The descendants of Okogha formed the aboriginal families of Ogbokuma and played a central role in the cultural and political development of the community.

Internal Migration

Beyond ancestral settlement, Ogbokuma witnessed substantial internal migration, characterized by the movement of individuals in the Abua Kingdom. This migration pattern within the Abua kingdom also contributed to the population of Ogbokuma as it was driven by conflict resolution, environmental adaptation, and kinship integration.[xvi]

Individuals and families moved into the community due to conflicts, kinship relationships, and economic opportunities.

For instance, the Otaguaar Ibulu migrated from the family of Otaguaar in Emabu community of Emughan clan to settle in Ogbokuma in the late 18th century. He got married from the Oguor family and begot Oghiloony who begot Ekeregbe, Pasisi, and Umebu. Ekeregbe being the grandson of

[xiii] Lee, "A Theory of Migration"

[xiv] Lee, "A Theory of Migration".

[xv] F. Waribokor, Patterns of migration and settlement of different ethnic groups in Ogbokuma (Interviewed by Gabriel Ilode Ogwuor. February 30TH 2025)

[xvi] I. Akarakoro.

Otaguaar begot Chief Imilogh Godfrey Brown. They formed what is known to this day as the Oto-Ema family in Ogbokuma as part of the Okparapha subfamily. The reason for the migration of Otaguaar was attributed to a deity called *kama kama* of Emabu Community in Emoghan Clan of Abua. According to this account, it was a taboo in Abua for women to see the head of a wild beast, such as a lion, Whale, gorilla, and hippopotamus, among others, after it had been killed. Therefore, it was customary to cut off the head of such animals to be buried in the bush, or wrapped and brought to the shrine as a sign of dignity. In contrast, the body of such an animal can now be brought home for consumption or paraded by the hunter in the community to be acknowledged as a hero or a great hunter. It was believed that when women see the head of such animals, it meant they had seen the nakedness of the gods.

However, an Ekpeye man, who was called Nwekpe, who lived in Emabu community at a time, killed a Whale, known as *Oki* in the Abua dialect, in the Orashi River and brought it to the community without honouring the aforementioned rites. Both men and women saw the Whale, paraded it, and butchered it for consumption, thereby provoking the gods and bringing calamity upon the community, which resulted in sudden deaths. The foregoing forced people to desert the Emabu community in search of refuge. Although rights were performed to stop the sacrilegious calamity in Emabu Community, the study gathers that it was during this period that Otaguaar migrated from Emabu to Ogbokuma Community for safety.[xvii]

Ruben Nwogu of the Awara family in Ogbokuma community was said to have come from the Oto-kigbar family in Omelema Community of Abua Central. Through marriage, he migrated to Ogbokuma joining the Omo-Awara family.[xviii]

The Idakariari family of the Oliah subfamily in Okparapha was said to have migrated from Obraany Community in Emughan clan to form part of the Oliah family.

The Osuale family of Ukpu Sub family in the Okparapha group of families was said to have migrated from the Oko-Akeledien family of Serebia in Otapha clan to unite with the Ukpu family in Ogbokuma community.[xix]

These migrants were gradually integrated into the community through intermarriage, trade, and participation in communal activities.

Trade-Driven Migration

The location of Ogbokuma along the Sombreiro River made it an important trading center in the Niger Delta. The Adighi-Egbogh-Esdia (Elekendi) market attracted traders from Ikwerre, Kalabari, Ibaani, Okrika, Nembe, Bille, Degema, Kula, Ogbo-Abuan, and others from Ekpeye in then Ahoada Local Government Area. Even the European palm Oil/kernel merchants traded in this coastline market, where fish, palm oil, kernel, textiles, farm produce, and other goods. This created a multi-ethnic trading hub that promoted economic prosperity, intermarriage, and cultural exchange. attracted traders from various communities, including Kalabari, Ikwerre, Nembe, and Bonny.[xx]

[xvii] I. Akarakoro.

[xviii] F. Wariborkor.

[xix] I. Akarakoro.

[xx] H. Pasisi. Patterns of migration and settlement of different ethnic groups in

Trade activities in fish, palm oil, and agricultural produce created economic opportunities that encouraged migrants to settle permanently in the community.

For instance, Orubia Ogu of the Ukpu family in Okparapha hailed from Egamini in the Ikwerre ethnicity of Emuoha Local Government Area in Rivers State to settle at Ediiny in Ogbokuma community for farming. He was known for yam farming. Orubia Ogu begot Ugha, Ekparam, Obiranwu, and Godwin who begot MaCauley Godwin Orubia and others who formed part of the Ogbokuma community.

Also, the Oyeh sub-group in the Omo-Oguor family is another example of such migration pattern, Nwabueze was a slave owned and accommodated by Isinebu during the slave era who later became a foster son. Nwabueze begot Itari and Tapia to form part of the Oguor family of the Ozuum Aboriginal group.

Colonial-Era Migration

In pre-colonial Africa, societies were organized according to indigenous customs, traditions, and political systems, with communities exercising varying degrees of autonomy over their land, resources, and social structures. These societies ranged from centralized kingdoms to decentralized, community-based systems, reflecting diverse forms of governance. However, the colonial era introduced new migration dynamics driven by education, labor, and missionary activities.[xxi] It also marked a significant transformation, as Europeans powers imposed political, economic, and cultural control over territories introducing foreign systems of governance and legal framework, siting the first missionary church "St. Micheal Anglican Church of Ogbokuma" in 1911, St. Micheal School Ogbokuma 1935 and the Ogbokuma native court in 1936 as institutions aimed at restructuring societies to serve colonial interests. Ogbokuma's proximity to the coast made it the first Abua community to interact with Europeans. This early contact led to the emergence of Western-educated elites like late Chief Jack Omoni, William Odum, Godwin Orubia, Ichimezem Festus among others of Ogbokuma, who pursued formal education in Degema, Bonny, and Abonnema. Note that the Omo-Okugha community, which is said to be the ancestral home was domiciled across the Sombreiro River before they were forced to migrate to the old Ogbokuma community for safety, leaving their ancestral land for farming purposes. But because of the proximity to early schools and churches, the Ogbokuma people migrated again from old Ogbokuma to the new and present Ogbokuma in order to gain access to Western Education and colonial administration which reshaped traditional governance structures, including the chieftaincy institution.[xxii]

Colonial rule in Africa was largely driven by economic motives, leading to the systematic exploitation of land and natural resources for the benefit of European economies. In the Ogbokuma case, the colonial administrations restructured the political system and local economy to focus on the extraction of raw materials such as palm kernel and oil with its location at the shore of the Sombrero River. This

Ogbokuma, (Interviewed by the researcher, February 21,2025.)

[xxi] V. Chlouba, "*The Precolonial Origins of African Nationalism".* Published in Comparative Political Studies (SAGE Journals). 2026

[xxii] I. Akarakoro.

process often involved the introduction of forced labour, taxation systems, and strict control over trade. Indigenous economic systems were disrupted, as the people were compelled to produce for export rather than for local consumption, integrating the local economy into capitalist system in a dependent and unequal manner.[xxiii]

The colonial era introduced Western forms of knowledge, particularly through language and education. The English language became widely used as a medium of communication and instruction, especially within the educational system. This shift not only facilitated colonial administration but also strengthened foreign cultural and religious influence.[xxiv] Consequently, traditional belief systems and indigenous religions were undermined, leading to significant cultural transformation in Ogbokuma.

Although social structures existed in Ogbokuma before colonialism, the colonial period significantly altered and, in some cases, weakened them. Colonial authorities placed themselves at the top of the social hierarchy, subordinating local populations and restructuring existing systems to serve colonial interests.

The originality of the Uwema (Paramount ruler) stool is of the Oguor family of the Ozuum group of families also known as the aborigines. The Omo-kogha people for trade, safety and farming accommodated the migrant to settle both in Ediiny and Agbalama their fatherland. However, the slave attacks from external bodies and the Ibaani war with the Omo-kogha community brought about the dynamic shift from Omo-okogha to old Ogbokuma community with their occupants of Ediiny and Agbalama.

Worthy to note is the fact that the Agbalama and Ediiny land of settlement was allotted to the migrants by the Omo-kogha people, with a traditional treaty in which an oath taker remained in charge of the settlement. At the point of attacks on the Omo-kogha people, they advanced to a safer place that was seen to be difficult for accessibility by strangers. The demand of the migrant settlers to join the aborigines was considered for unity under the leadership of Chief Isinebu of the Oguor family who was the Paramount ruler of Omo-kogha community hence the name "Ogbokuma" was found.[xxv]

At the advent of colonial rule, Chief Isinebu was not deposed of his stool by the colonial administrators.Rather, after the proclamation of the native court in 1906 he was also elevated from paramount head of Omo-kogha and appointed warrant chief on 2nd May 1912 to double as a warrant chief and a member of the Abua native Court.[xxvi]

[xxiii] L.H. Gann and P. Duignan (eds), *Colonialism in Africa*, 1870–1960. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969-1975.

[xxiv] L.H. Gann and P. Duignan (eds), *Colonialism in Africa*

[xxv] Elder Willy Nwogu, Patterns of migration and settlement of different ethnic groups in Ogbokuma, (Interviewed by the Gabriel Ilode Ogwuor)11th April 2014.

[xxvi] National Archives, Enugu, *recognition of chiefs and warrant officers' appointments for Abua Native Court*, Rivprop 2/6/10726th January 1927

While in active service the issue of boundary disputes arose between the Agba-ndele and Omo-kogha people. Chief Isinebu instituted a suit in the Supreme Court of Nigeria, Degema province in 1927 as a plaintiff for himself and on behalf of the Omo-kogha and Ogbokuma people against Nwerenwo of Agba-ndele.[xxvii] This case came on the 27th of March 1927, and adjourned Sine die for plaintiff to produce the plan of land in dispute. Five months later the chief fell ill and died, hence the beginning of the crisis and the struggle against the royal family by a gang of interest groups, predominantly the migrant settlers over who would become the next ruler of the community.[xxviii]After the death of Chief Isinebu, Otaguaar's son Oghiiloony who was a nephew and messenger to Chief Isinebu was imposed by the migrants as a caretaker pending the burial of the late chief. He held this position with the aid of the interest groups even after the burial of the chief until 1951 when he died.[xxix]

Another round of fights for succession to the royal stool began between the royal family and the interest groups. This time some people from the Oguor family Mr Odim Iyo and Fubara Ookpor were intimidated and forcefully sent into exile. The crises deepened to the extent that a fourteen man caretaker committee was formed by the interest group, Chief Thomas Akari Oyekulom from the Oliah family, Chief Nelson Akari Okorogo from the Oliah family, Chief Harry Ogu Uwam Abile from the Omo-Ozuum family, Chief Daniel Abor Itari from Omo-Ozuum family, Chief Nelson Osisi from the Omo-Izaam family, Chief Ominigbo Isaac Opheeny from Izaam, Chief Ekefe Opina from the Awara family, Chief Nwogu Omoni from Awara family, Chief John Suotor from Omo-Oguor family, Chief Imiah Oye from the Omo-Oguor family, Chief Richard Pasisi Fibika from Keema family, Chief Inegi Oghiiloony Brown from Keema family, Chief Godwin Orubia from Ukpu family, Chief Pasisi Obiranwu Osuale from the Ukpu family, and none was a direct descendant of the Oguor family.

These issues remained unresolved till 1952 when the majority of migrants decided to invite one of their migrant grandsons, Chief Imilogh Godfrey Brown to come from Enugu as a military person enlisted for World War II and take over the stool of the Uwema of Ogbokuma community as guided by the fourteen-man member committee. There was no peace on the traditional stool and in 1999 Chief Imilogh Godfrey Brown constituted a seven-man committee to take charge of the affairs of the community with the instruction that none of his sons should be allowed to rule the community and that the stool should be returned to the rightful owners. A few months later, Chief Imilogh died and Chief E. T. Uwam of the seven-man committee was asked to stand as acting Uwema of the Ogbokuma community.[xxx]

After the burial of Chief Imilogh on 20th April 2000, Chief Imilogh's son Ipeghan Godfrey Ekeregbe and Chief Felix Omoni began agitating on who becomes the next Uwema of

[xxvii]National Archives, Enugu, *Chief Isinebu of Ogbokuma Vs Nwerenwu of Ndele.* Rivprof 8/7/101, 1927

[xxviii]National Archives, Enugu, *Affidavit of death*, M. P. No./677/35/1927:14th December 1927

[xxix]Biography of late Chief Geoffrey Imilogh Brown, 28th April 2000

[xxx] Chief M. Orubia, Patterns of migration and settlement of different ethnic groups in Ogbokuma, (interviewed by Gabriel Ilode Ogwuor) 11th April 2014.

the Ogbokuma Community between the Oto-Ema family and Ozuum group. Chief E. T. Uwam then constituted another seven-man fact-finding committee with terms to find out which family was the actual royal family of Ogbokuma.[xxxi] The committee members included Chief Humphery Ighoor – Chairman (Omo-Ozuum Family), Chief George Imiete Gabriel – Vice Chairman (Omo-Oguor Family), Chief Macaulay Godwin Orubia – Secretary (Ukpu Family), Chief Benjamin Igu – Member (Ema Family), Chief Tamuno Sokari – Member(Omo-Izaam Family), Chief Alapu Igbanibo – PRO (Omo-Awara Family), Chief Aselemi Igbani – Member (Oliah Family). Few months later, due to the inability of the committee to determine the actual royal family, Chief E. T. Uwam resigned his appointment as the caretaker on 15th September 2001. Mr Benjamin Igu pleaded with Felix Omoni to withdraw his ambition and allow Chief Ipeghan as the caretaker of the Ogbokuma community. In 2001, Chief Ipeghan was appointed acting Chief, a position he held till 19th June 2012 when he was accused of wizardry and went on self-exile to Ogbema community where he later died in 2012.[xxxii]

After the death of Chief Ipeghan Ekeregbe, Humphrey Pasisi and Samuel Umegbu began contesting for the stool and Samuel Omegbu was disqualified for stealing on the 5th of August 2012 and Humphrey Pasisi took over as caretaker from 2012-2016 and resigned. He wrote a letter, telling the community of his resignation as the Uwema of the community.[xxxiii] Thereafter, on the 24th of October 2016, Chief Alapu Ibanibo took over as acting Uwema, three months later he was kidnapped, at this point Chief George Imiete Gabriel was appointed caretaker of Ogbokuma community, he ruled the community till 2023 when he died. However, Hon. Ode Oladikpo Ogu became Abua/Odual Local Government caretaker chairman and formed a parallel government appointing Mr. Thankyou Uwam as his own caretaker of Ogbokuma community in 2017 during the rule Chief Geroge Imiete Gabriel.After the death of Thankyou in 2018, he (Hon. Ode) went further to bring Mr. Samuel Imeji Omebu in the same year as the acting Uwema, reemphasizing the parallel government in Ogbokuma community. in 2021, Hon. Ode and the interest group made attempts to installed Mr. Samuel Imeji Omebu as the substantive Uwema of Ogbokuma. It was at this point that some principal members of the community notably, Chief MaCauley Godwin Urubia, Chief George Imiete Gabriel, Chief Ogwuor Ilode Gabriel, Elder Itode Mark and Pst. Angel Uwani Uwam, stood against this planned coronation as Mr. Samuel Omebu had been fined in the past for stealing and went to the Abua Customary Court to stop such a move.[xxxiv] While the case for ongoing, the Omo-Uguor family filed an application for joinder in case number CCA/24/2021 to be recognized as the royal family. The court ruled in favor of the second claimant, thereby affirming the Omo-Oguor family as the royal family in Ogbokuma. In its final judgement on May 7th 2025, the court held

[xxxi] Minutes of Meeting, Ogbokuma Council of Chiefs, *Ogbokuma Chieftaincy Fact finding Committee*, 24th May 2001.

[xxxii] Minutes of Meeting, Ogbokuma Council of Chiefs, *Standing and Binding Order/Rules*, 19th June 2012.

[xxxiii] Chief G.I. Gabriel, *Migration Settlement and Chieftaincy conflicts,* (interviewed by Gabriel Ilode Ogwuor) 11th April 2014.

[xxxiv] Minutes of meeting of the Ogbokuma Council of Chiefs and Elders in Ogbokuma Townhall, Dated 5th August, 2012

against Mr. Samuel Imeji Umebu with a cost of 100,000 Naira fine and a perpetual injunction restraining him from further parading himself as a chief or a paramount ruler.[xxxv] Based on this judgement coupled with the death of Chief George Imiete Gabriel of the Omo-Oguor Family in 2023, Chief Ogwuor Ilode Gabriel of the Omo-Oguor royal family was declared and coronated as the current and legitimate paramount head of Omo-kogha and Ogbokuma people on the 11th day of May, 2025.

Effect of Migration and Settlement on Chieftaincy Conflicts

The interaction between indigenous inhabitants and migrant settlers created a complex social structure in Ogbokuma. While migration contributed to economic growth and cultural diversity, it also introduced tensions regarding political authority and land ownership. The chieftaincy institution became the focal point of these tensions because it represented both political leadership and cultural legitimacy. Migrant groups who had lived in the community for generations began to demand greater participation in political leadership. However, indigenous families insisted that the chieftaincy stool should remain within the original ruling lineage. Albeit, below are some consequences of chieftaincy crises in Ogbokuma community;

Political Instability within Ogbokuma Community

Political instability in Ogbokuma can be traced to the interaction between the aboriginal families and migrant settlers. Historically, the Oguor family of the Ozuum group, descendants of the Omo-Kogha people, were recognized as the original custodians of the land and traditional stool. The Omo-Kogha people accommodated migrant settlers such as the Ediiny and Agbalama group for purposes of trade, farming, and security. These settlements were governed through traditional agreements in which the Ozuum people retained political authority over the land and settlements.

However, over time, migrant groups who had become economically and socially integrated into Ogbokuma began to demand greater participation in leadership and governance. While the indigenous families insisted that the traditional stool belonged exclusively to the original ruling lineage, migrant descendants argued that their long-term contributions to the community's development entitled them to political inclusion. This disagreement created the foundation for political instability in Ogbokuma.

The colonial period intensified political instability in Ogbokuma. Colonial administrators introduced the warrant chieftaincy system, which altered traditional governance structures and centralized authority in selected individuals recognized by the colonial government. Chief Isinebu of the Oguor family, who was already the Paramount Head of Omo-Kogha and Ogbokuma, was officially appointed a Warrant Chief on 2 May 1912 and became a member of the Abua Native Court.

Although this appointment strengthened his authority, it also transformed the traditional stool into a position associated with colonial power, political influence, and access to administrative privileges. As a result, succession to the stool became increasingly contested. Political rivalry intensified after the death of Chief Isinebu in

[xxxv] Customary Court of Abua, *Chief Godwin M. Orubia and others Vs Mr. Samuel Omaebu*, CCA/24/2021.

1927 during the period of the land dispute between Omo-Kogha and Agba-Ndele.

Following his death, migrant interest groups allegedly imposed Oghiloony, the son of Otaguaar, as caretaker ruler despite objections from members of the royal Oguor family. This marked the beginning of organized political resistance against the traditional ruling lineage. The inability to establish an accepted succession process created a leadership vacuum and deepened divisions within the community.

One major manifestation of political instability in Ogbokuma was persistent factionalism. Different family groups and political interests formed alliances to control the traditional institution. Members of the royal Oguor family were reportedly intimidated and forced into exile during succession disputes. This weakened the legitimacy of traditional authority and encouraged the emergence of rival political camps.

The formation of the fourteen-man caretaker committee further reflected the breakdown of centralized traditional leadership. Significantly, none of the committee members were direct descendants of the Oguor family, despite the claim that the family was the rightful royal lineage. This development reinforced accusations that migrant settlers and their allies were attempting to seize political control of the community.

The invitation of Chief Imilogh Godfrey Brown in 1952 to become Uwema of Ogbokuma also intensified the crisis. Although he was accepted by migrant groups, opposition persisted among indigenous families who questioned the legitimacy of his claim to the stool. Consequently, the community experienced prolonged disputes, repeated caretaker administrations, and continuous power struggles.

Ogbokuma further experienced frequent changes in leadership and the inability to maintain a stable succession system. After the death of Chief Imilogh Godfrey Brown, several caretakers and acting rulers emerged, including Chief E. T. Uwam, Chief Ipeghan Godfrey Ekeregbe, Humphrey Pasisi, Chief Alapu Ibanibo, Chief George Imiete Gabriel, and others.

These transitions were often accompanied by controversy, protests, allegations of illegitimacy, and community division, violence and insecurity became part of the political process. For example, Chief Alapu Ibanibo was reportedly kidnapped shortly after assuming office as acting Uwema. Political rivalries also resulted in parallel administrations, such as the appointment of separate caretakers by local government authorities.

The absence of a universally accepted traditional constitution or succession arrangement created uncertainty and weakened governance within the community. As leadership disputes continued, the authority of traditional institutions declined, and political instability became deeply rooted in Ogbokuma's social structure.

Another important dimension of political instability in Ogbokuma is the increasing reliance on courts to resolve traditional disputes. Chieftaincy matters that were previously settled through customary processes became subjects of prolonged legal battles.

The legal contest over the royal stool culminated in Suit No. CCA/24/2021, in which the Oguor family sought judicial recognition as the rightful royal family of Ogbokuma. The court eventually ruled in favor of the Oguor family based on oral testimony and documentary evidence presented before the court. Although

the judgment provided some degree of legal clarification, it also revealed the extent to which political instability had transformed traditional leadership into a matter of litigation and factional competition. Dependence on external legal institutions weakened communal consensus and demonstrated the erosion of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Economic Decline in Ogbokuma Community

The history of migration and settlement in the Ogbokuma community had profound effects on the economic development of the area. While migration initially promoted trade expansion, population growth, and cultural interaction, prolonged chieftaincy disputes and political instability later contributed significantly to the economic decline of the community. The struggle for traditional authority, especially between the indigenous royal lineage and migrant-descended interest groups, weakened the social and economic foundations of Ogbokuma.

Historically, Ogbokuma was an important commercial center because of its strategic location along the Sombreiro River. The Adighi-Egbogh-Esidia (Elekendi) market attracted traders from neighboring ethnic groups and communities such as Kalabari, Ikwerre, Nembe, Bille, Degema, Okrika, and Bonny. Fish, palm oil, palm kernel, textiles, and agricultural products were exchanged, making the community economically vibrant.

However, the prolonged chieftaincy conflicts gradually discouraged trade and commercial activities. Political instability created insecurity within the community, causing traders and investors to avoid the area. The absence of stable leadership also weakened the organization and regulation of markets, thereby reducing economic productivity. Over time, the once-thriving Elekendi market lost its regional importance as traders shifted their commercial activities to more peaceful neighboring communities.

Agriculture was another important source of livelihood in Ogbokuma. The fertile lands surrounding the community supported the cultivation of cassava, yams, plantain, vegetables, and palm produce. Fishing activities along the Sombreiro River also contributed greatly to household income and food supply.

However, political instability in Ogbokuma discouraged external investment and government development projects. Investors and government agencies are often reluctant to invest in communities where disputes over leadership and land ownership remain unresolved. The persistent disagreements over the traditional stool created uncertainty regarding community representation and decision-making.

As a consequence, Ogbokuma experienced slow infrastructural development compared to neighboring communities. Roads, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and modern market structures remained inadequate. Some government and oil-related development opportunities were either delayed or diverted to more politically stable communities in the region. This explains why there is no functional court and schools, and hospitals in Ogbokuma community at present. The efforts which would have been channeled towards attracting these developments were rather channeled towards resolving chieftaincy crisis. Even multinational companies like Zircon Marin Limited a sub-contractor of Aradel Holdings Plc to Ogbokuma serves as a host to its facility and operation

decided to deal with a particular family undermining the leadership of the community.

The prolonged chieftaincy disputes also contributed to youth restiveness and unemployment. Many young people became involved in factional politics and communal struggles rather than productive economic activities. The lack of stable leadership and economic opportunities increased frustration among the youth population.

This situation encouraged rural-urban migration, as many young people left Ogbokuma in search of employment and better living conditions in cities such as Port Harcourt, Yenagoa, and Lagos. The migration of energetic and educated youths further weakened the local economy because the community lost valuable human resources needed for development.

Economic development in traditional African societies often depend on communal cooperation and collective participation in development projects. In Ogbokuma, the divisions created by migration-related political disputes weakened social cohesion and communal trust.

Families and groups became divided along ancestral and migrant lines, making collective decision-making difficult. Community development initiatives, communal labor systems, and local economic cooperation gradually declined because different factions pursued separate interests. This weakened the ability of the community to mobilize resources for economic progress.

Impact on Education and Human Capital Development

Although colonial contact initially brought educational advancement to Ogbokuma, the prolonged crises later affected educational development negatively. Leadership disputes diverted attention away from educational investment and youth empowerment. Economic hardship also reduced the ability of many families to sponsor formal education for their children.

Consequently, illiteracy, unemployment, and low human capital development became more visible within the community. The decline in education further limited the capacity of the community to compete economically with more stable neighboring communities.

Social Division Among the Families in Ogbokuma Community

The history of migration and settlement in Ogbokuma community significantly shaped the social structure of the community and contributed to persistent divisions among families. Although migration enriched Ogbokuma economically and culturally, it also created deep tensions concerning identity, political authority, land ownership, and traditional leadership. These divisions became more pronounced around the institution of the chieftaincy stool, which symbolized both political power and ancestral legitimacy.

One of the major sources of social division in Ogbokuma arose from the distinction between the aboriginal families and migrant settler families. The Oguor family of the Ozuum group, descendants of the Omo-kogha people, regarded themselves as the original owners of the land and custodians of the traditional stool. According to oral traditions, the Omo-kogha people initially accommodated migrant settlers in areas such as Agbalama and Ediiny for purposes of trade, farming, and mutual protection.

Over time, however, many migrant families became fully integrated into the community through intermarriage, economic activities, and participation in communal affairs. Families such as the Oto-Ema family, Ukpu family and Oliah family. Settlers like Agbagiri, Otaguarr and Idakariari family, and others established themselves socially and economically within Ogbokuma. Despite this integration, the question of who possessed legitimate rights to political leadership remained unresolved.

The indigenous families insisted that the chieftaincy stool belonged exclusively to the Oguor royal lineage because they were the original founders and custodians of the community. On the other hand, migrant-descended families, having lived in the community for generations, demanded equal participation in leadership and governance. This disagreement gradually created a social divide between "aboriginal" families and "settler" families.

The death of Chief Isinebu marked a turning point in the intensification of social divisions within Ogbokuma. Before his death, Chief Isinebu served both as Paramount Ruler and Warrant Chief under colonial administration, thereby unifying traditional authority and colonial recognition in one office. His death in 1927 created a vacuum in leadership that exposed underlying tensions among the families.

The appointment of Oghiloony, son of Otaguaar, as caretaker ruler by influential migrant interest groups was strongly opposed by members of the Oguor family. The royal family viewed this action as an attempt by migrant families to seize control of the traditional stool. This event deepened mistrust between the indigenous royal lineage and other influential families within the community.

Subsequent struggles over succession further polarized the community. Some members of the Oguor family were reportedly intimidated and forced into exile, while political alliances emerged among various families to control community leadership. The establishment of the fourteen-man caretaker committee reflected the extent of the division, as the committee was dominated by non-Oguor families. To the royal lineage, this was evidence of organized political marginalization.

The repeated use of caretaker committees instead of permanent traditional rulers contributed greatly to instability and social fragmentation in Ogbokuma. Different families aligned themselves with competing leaders and political factions, thereby weakening communal unity.

The installation of Chief Imilogh Godfrey Brown in 1952 further complicated social relations because he was viewed by many as representing migrant interests rather than the aboriginal royal lineage. Although he ruled for decades, opposition to his legitimacy persisted. This prolonged conflict produced factions within the community, with some families supporting the ruling structure while others continued to challenge it.

Even after Chief Imilogh's death, disagreements continued regarding who should occupy the stool. Various caretaker leaders emerged, including Chief E. T. Uwam, Chief Ipeghan Ekeregbe, Humphrey Pasisi, Chief Alapu Ibanibo, and Chief George Imiete Gabriel. Each leadership transition generated new disputes and alliances among families, thereby reinforcing social divisions.

Another major factor contributing to social division was the issue of landownership and territorial rights. Since the Omo-kogha people

claimed to be the original settlers, they regarded themselves as owners of the ancestral lands, while migrant families were viewed as beneficiaries of settlement agreements.

The boundary dispute between Omo-kogha and Agba-ndele during the reign of Chief Isinebu reflected the importance of land in community politics. Control over land was closely linked to traditional authority, economic resources, and social status. Consequently, disagreements over land ownership often intensified disputes between indigenous and migrant-descended families.

Colonial administration also contributed to division among the families. The introduction of warrant chiefs and colonial courts altered traditional political structures and empowered certain individuals over others. Colonial authorities often recognized leaders based on administrative convenience rather than strict adherence to indigenous customs.

This colonial interference weakened traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms and encouraged competition for political recognition. Families began to seek legitimacy not only through customary tradition but also through colonial and later governmental support. This dual struggle for traditional and political authority deepened rivalries among families.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The history of the Ogbokuma community demonstrates the profound impact of migration on its social, economic, and political institutions. Over time, the community evolved from a small ancestral Omo-Kogha settlement into a multi-ethnic society shaped by trade, cultural exchange, colonial influences, and external interactions.

This study examines the relationship between migration, settlement patterns, and the chieftaincy crisis in the Ogbokuma community in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State. It traces the historical development of the community from its indigenous origins to a complex society influenced by various waves of migration, including ancestral movements, trade-driven migration, internal displacement, colonial-era changes, and the settlement of marginalized groups. Using historical and qualitative methods, the study relies on oral interviews and secondary sources to analyze these dynamics.

Findings reveal that migration significantly contributed to the economic growth, cultural diversity, and social transformation of Ogbokuma, particularly through trade activities along the Sombrero River and interaction with neighboring communities. However, these developments were accompanied by structural challenges. The influx of migrant groups altered traditional systems of authority, leading to tensions over land ownership, identity, and political power. The chieftaincy institution, originally rooted in lineage and indigenous legitimacy, became increasingly contested, resulting in persistent disputes, factional divisions, and political instability.

Furthermore, the study highlights the enduring impact of colonial rule, which introduced new systems of governance, economic exploitation, and cultural change that weakened indigenous institutions. Colonial economic policies restructured local production toward resource extraction, while Western education, language, and religion reshaped the cultural landscape. These transformations

contributed to social stratification and the erosion of traditional authority.

In the post-colonial period, internal divisions among family groups, unequal access to community resources, and a lack of inclusive representation have further undermined governance. Since the death of Chief Isinebu in 1927, Ogbokuma has experienced prolonged leadership instability, weakening its traditional political hierarchy compared to other communities within the Abua Kingdom.

The study also identifies significant economic decline linked to poor leadership, unresolved land disputes, and administrative challenges. The neglect of key economic institutions, such as the once-thriving Elekendi coastal market, and ongoing conflicts over the royal stool have hindered development and community cohesion.

The study concludes that while migration and external influences contributed to the growth and diversification of the Ogbokuma community, they also generated complex challenges, including social division, political instability, and economic decline. It emphasizes the need for inclusive governance, strengthened traditional institutions, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms to promote peace, justice, and sustainable development in line with the goals of modern governance frameworks.

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2	F. Waribokor	**Male**	**82**	**Farmer**	Ogbokuma Community, Abua/Odual LGA	May 30, 2025
3	G. I. Gabriel	**Male**	**83**	**Civil servant**	Ogbokuma Community, Abua/Odual LGA	May 17, 2025
4	G. I. Gabriel & E. T. Uwam	**Male** **Male**	**83** **92**	**Civil servant**	Ogbokuma Community, Abua/Odual LGA	February 2, 2022

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