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## HISTORICAL STUDIES

### Nkpor:

# *Origins, Migration, Institutions, Shrines, and Historical Memory*

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE  
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NKPOR

# Nkpor: Origins, Migration, Institutions, Shrines, and Historical Memory

By Idenze Ezeme · Historical Studies · Ozikoro.com

Nkpor originates from the Igbo word “nkpogho,” which means “repositioning.” From this, one can understand the history of the people who moved from where they originally lived.

Nkpor is a town with lots of history and culture located in the Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. In 2007, the estimated population of this settlement was 109,377. It is bounded by Onitsha to the west, Oze to the north, and Ogidi and Umuoji to the east. The southern boundary is with Obosi.

History is often narrated from perspectives that may not always align. For Nkpor, as with many Igbo towns, historical and anthropological documentation is interwoven with myth, memory, debate, and later reinterpretations. A serious historical account therefore requires the careful reading of multiple traditions, earlier write-ups, elders’ testimonies, and documented disputes, allowing facts, counter-facts, theses, and antitheses to stand side by side. Where accounts differ, they must be presented transparently and left to posterity for informed judgement.

The history of Nkpor cannot be understood through casual narration or selective memory. It is a history preserved through oral tradition, ritual practice, genealogical consciousness, shrine custodianship, festivals, and administrative records. Like many Igbo communities, Nkpor history contains facts, legends, debates, and contested interpretations. These are not weaknesses; they are evidence of a living civilisation conscious of its past.

This account does not attempt to erase disagreements or harmonise disputes artificially. Where Nkpor history debates itself—whether on genealogy, shrine rotation, or village precedence—those debates are recorded as part of the historical reality.

01

## Nri Ancestry and the Ezeogu Lineage

Nkpor belongs to the wider Eri-Nri civilisational stream. Tradition holds that Eri was the primordial ancestor. His son Nri migrated from Eri-aka and settled at the present site of Nri, from which the Nri ritual and political influence radiated across the Idemili area.



Limca Road, Nkpor. Photo: Jide O.

The dominant historical tradition affirms that Abatete, Umuoji, and Nkpor are cognate communities, sharing a common origin traceable to Nri. This position is supported by multiple authorities, including Ibemesi (1995), Ifemesia (1978), Nwosu (2012), and earlier

ethnographic traditions.

At the centre of this lineage stands Ezeogu, a man who migrated from Nri and settled at Abatete. Ezeogu begat three sons:

- Omaliko (Ezeigwe) – first son
- Oji Okodu – second son
- Dimudeke (also known as Ideke) – third son

Ezeogu died at Abatete. The three sons became the founding ancestors of three sibling towns: Abatete, Umuoji, and Nkpor.

It is sometimes said that Edogu was the father of Dimudeke; this usage treats Edogu as a composite ancestral figure, not a literal father. The direct genealogical link is Edogu → Ezeogu → Dimudeke.

As population increased and arable land became constrained at Abatete, dispersal became necessary. In accordance with Igbo inheritance custom, Omaliko, as first son, remained at Abatete and became its founder. Oji Okodu migrated with his descendants and founded Umuoji. Dimudeke (Ideke) led his group further westwards and ultimately founded Nkpor, east of the River Niger.

## 02

# Dimudeke as Founder and Ancestral Figure

Nkpor traditions consistently identify Dimudeke as the father and founder of Nkpor. Over time, his status transcended that of a mere progenitor and entered the realm of ancestral veneration. A shrine was established in his honour, and ritual custodianship rotated among the five villages of Nkpor, beginning from Umusiome, the head village.

In each village hosting the Dimudeke shrine, the highest Ozo-Idi title holder was appointed Chief Priest. Similar practices existed in Abatete

and Umuoji, where Omaliko and Oji respectively received parallel ancestral honour.

With changing religious consciousness, later generations argued for a transition from worship to veneration, recognising Dimudeke as a great ancestor rather than a deity, while retaining his central place in Nkpör's collective memory.

**03**

## Migration from Abatete and Early Nkpör Settlements

As Abatete expanded, population growth placed pressure on land resources. By the principle of primogeniture, Omaliko, as first son, inherited the ancestral home and remained in Abatete. Oji and Dimudeke, together with their followers, migrated.

All nine arms of Umusiome, including Akuzo, were in the vanguard of Nkpör's migration from Abatete. Their first settlement point was Abor Nkpör / Okpuno Nkpör.

From there, Nkpör people moved further westwards, creating a vacuum later occupied by Umuoji settlements such as Abidi, Uruegbe, and Umuazu Umuoji. Portions of Umusiome/Akuzo and Ububa (Obofia) remain located in areas now occupied by Umuoji.

**04**

## Second Movement and the Akuzo-Nkpör-Agu Axis

A later movement resulted in the present settlement pattern:

- Akuzo and much of Umusiome occupied Enugo Umusiome and Ogbe-Etiti Umusiome.
- Okwu-Ani shrine (Nkpör) was domiciled at Ogbe-Etiti, with Egbeugulu of Akuzo serving as Chief Priest.
- Ezeani was the high priest, followed by Okafor Enyimba, Ananti, Okeru Okafor, all of Egbeugulu kindred.

05

## The Five Villages of Nkpör

Nkpör is composed of five villages, each named after one of Dimudeke's sons:

- Umusiome
- Isingwu
- Ububa
- Amafor
- Mgbachu

These villages are not isolated entities but form an integrated socio-political and ritual system. A strong ethos of brotherhood underpins their cohabitation, captured in the saying that every Nkpör man is his brother's keeper.

06

## Umusiome: Structure, Meaning, and Internal Organisation

"Umusiome" is not a personal name but a linguistic construction derived through vowel assimilation from forms such as Umu-Isiome, where the vowel "U" swallows "I", resulting in Umusiome.

Umusiome consists of two principal units:

- Akuzo
- Ezenubosi

These are augmented by three additional kindreds:

- Odume
- Umu-Ogu
- Umu-Dimalor

Together, they form nine arms (Akanato) of Umusiome.

- Egbeugulu
- Esesili
- Nwania
- Ezeonwu
- Arinze
- Ezekwem

These nine arms express unity and solidarity through cohesion from the extreme northern to the extreme southern boundaries.

Strangers and migrants were historically absorbed into existing units, shedding former identities and tracing lineage retrospectively to the founding ancestor.

07

## Ezenubosi, Kingship, and Igweship

Ezenubosi emerged as a particularly powerful unit within Umusiome and Nkpor as a whole. Tradition holds that Ezenubosi decreed that Igweship in Nkpor should rotate within the lineage of his second son, Arinze.

- Nnonu
- Enechi

- Akam

To this day, Igweship has rotated among the three families of Umu-Arinze.

Ezeonwu, first son of Ezenubosi, serves as kingmaker and Igwe's right-hand man (Nnodobe Eze).

Other villages and kindreds, including Akuzo and the rest of Umusiome, do not participate directly in the selection or installation of the Igwe, though they attend installation ceremonies with dances and cultural observances.

The late Igwe, C.A. Ibegbunam II, is from the Enechi family.

08

## Introduction of Chieftaincy Titles into Nkpör

Chieftaincy titles were not indigenous to early Nkpör. They were introduced by Udeze Nwania, who brought the system from Igala & Benin via Onitsha.

- Udeze Nwania assumed the title Onowu (Prime Minister).
- His second-in-command, titled Oga, was an Umusiome man.
- He appointed one head chief per village, designated Ichie-Ume, and empowered each to install village chiefs.
- Isingwu: Ogene title given to Oraekwuotu Okeleke Ezeakaibie (Isingwu-Ukwu).
- Ububa: Ichie-Ume given to Iwealor of Umu-Ezeagim (with later disputes involving Okeke Ugoka family).
- Amafor: Ichie-Ume given to Obiegbunam Molokwu of Ezegbunu.
- Mgbachu: Ichie-Ume vested in Onwukwe of Onyesom.

Traditional administration rested on the Igwe, Onowu, four Ichie-Ume,

and chiefs drawn from each village.

09

## Nwania and the Founding of Nkpor-Agu (Mgboko)

Nwania, the third and last son of Akuzo, plays a decisive role in Nkpor-Agu history.

- He explored and discovered the Nkisi stream and its environs.
- He established the Nkisi shrine and became its Chief Priest.
- Other Akuzo kindreds later joined him, forming Akuzo Nkpor-Agu / Akuzo Mgboko.

Nwania, father of Odebeatu, Udeze, and Ezeme, is therefore recognised as the founder of Mgboko Nkpor / Nkpor-Agu.

Other families who joined later include Ezeonwu and Ezekwem.

Some individuals (e.g. Ikezue and Onwughulu of Ezekwem) initially joined through maternal ties but later re-established their original lineage identity.

When Nwania moved to Akuzo, some families followed him; others remained in Ogbe-Etiti or relocated to Enugu Umusiome. Many eventually joined Odume people at Enugwu.

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## Dispersal of Akuzo People: Enugwu and Egbenu

Following the Akuzo movement to the Akuzo axis, the corridor

between Umusiome and Akuzo (Enugwu-Egbenụ) opened for settlement.

- The earliest settlers in Enugwu were Odume people.
- Some Akuzo families remaining in Umusiome joined Odume at Enugwu.
- Enugwu and Egbenụ later became inseparable quarters of Umusiome, though administratively placed under Mgboko Nkpor Development Union (from about 1996).

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## Nkpor Shrines and Ritual Life

Nkpor possessed a complex shrine system, including but not limited to:

Nkpor religion traditionally recognises multiple deities, each with defined locations:

- Idemili – Amafor
- Ogwugwu – Ububa
- Udo – Umusiome
- Ajana – Enugwu Nkpor
- Eke – Ububa
- Okwu-Ani – Ogbe-Etiti (Akuzo axis)
- Dimudeke shrine (rotational custodianship, later neglected)
- Nkisi shrine (founded and priested by Nwania)
- Okwu-Ani shrine
- Village-based ritual centres linked to Iwa Ji, Ime Ntu, Ozo initiation, Alo Mmuo, Ikenga, Agwu, Alom Chi, Ofor, and masquerade cults (Ima Mmuo)

Neglect of the Dimudeke shrine in Mgbachu, custodial disputes, and the burning of shrine objects by a descendant of Anachuna triggered protests and letters to the Igwe-in-Council, highlighting tension

between tradition and modern sensibilities.

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## Dimudeke as Deity, Shrine Rotation, and Crisis

To honour their founder, Nkpor people elevated Dimudeke to deity status, established a shrine, and instituted rotational custodianship among the five villages, beginning with Umusiome. In any host village, the highest Ozo-Idi title holder served as chief priest.

Over time, this system deteriorated. Custodianship remained in Mgbachu for decades, passing from Ilechukwu to Anachuna Ndibe. After Anachuna's death, the shrine was neglected, and its figurines were eventually destroyed by one of his sons.

Efforts to transfer custodianship to Umusiome were resisted. The Oba family of Umusiome formally protested their unwillingness to assume responsibility. This crisis led to calls for reform.

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## Political and Social Institutions

Nkpor governance historically and contemporarily includes:

- Igwe-in-Council (judicial authority)
- Nkpor Development Union (NDU) – central executive body
- Umu-Okpu Nkpor – women's administrative and protest body
- Omenana group – custodians of ritual law and cleansing

The Umu-Okpu, composed of Nkpor daughters married to Nkpor men, possessed real administrative power and could protest decisions

deemed unjust.

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## Festivals and Collective Memory

Nkpor villages are united through a centrally coordinated ritual calendar, with villages taking turns from Akuzo/Umusiome to Mgbachu.

Ozo title-taking, Alo-Mmuo, Ime-Ntu, masquerade initiation (Ima-Mmuo), Iwaji, Ikenga, Agwu, Ime-Mgbagbogho, Alom-Chi, Ofor and Alor, Orummuo festival, Olisa feast, Enemma carnival, Ilo-Ani, and Dimudeke observances. Festivals include:

- Olummuo festival
- Olisa feast
- Enemma carnival
- Dimudeke Day (proposed)

Dimudeke Day is envisioned not as ancestral worship but as a civic-cultural remembrance of Nkpor's founding migration and shared ancestry.

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## External Relations and Rejected Aro Claims

Claims that Okoli Otie of Arochukwu founded Abatete, Umuoji, or Nkpor are rejected in the sources. Okoli Otie belonged to the trading Aro involved in slave trafficking, employing Abam, Ada, and Ohafia warriors. Historical accounts, including P.N. Uchendu, record that Abam warriors attacked Abatete and were repelled with assistance

from Umuoji and Nkpor. These raids were for slave capture, not settlement.

Nkpor, Abatete, and Umuoji paid Nru (homage) to Nri, not to Arochukwu, reinforcing their Nri origin. Traditional titles of Eze and Ozo in Nkpor predate colonial influences and reflect Nri heritage. The first Eze Nkpor was installed around 1560, with Mmegbuanaeze Nnonu I installed in 1620.

Nkpor's history is one of migration from Nri, structured dispersal from Abatete, ritual consolidation, and complex internal differentiation, particularly within Umusiome and Akuzo. Figures such as Dimudeke, Ezenubosi, and Nwania are not interchangeable symbols but occupy distinct historical roles—founder, lawgiver, priest, and pioneer.

Any serious account of Nkpor must therefore recognise Nwania's foundational role in Nkpor-Agu (Mgboko), the multi-layered shrine system, and the institutional evolution of authority, without erasing disputes, contradictions, or later reinterpretations. This is the only way to preserve Nkpor history faithfully for posterity.

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## Education and Infrastructure



Anambra State School of Nursing



Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Teaching Hospital School of Nursing, Nkpor



11. Cor Mariae Girls Secondary, Nkpor-Agu

17

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



# Ozi Ikòrò

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