

Migration history of Oforola people in Imo state and its archaeological implication

Abstract

The study of migration is essential in archaeology due to its impact on historical information and archaeological data. This research focuses on documenting the migration history of Oforola indigenes, the reasons for their migration, and the effects on archaeological records. Ethno archaeological and historical methods were employed to study the present life of the people and decipher the past culture and archaeological remains. An ethnographic survey, observation, and in-depth interviews of 30 knowledgeable individuals, including farmers, elders, hunters, titled men, chief priests, and herbalists, were conducted to gather information on the history and migration of the people, their settlement patterns, and the effect of migration on their culture. The data retrieved were analysed and interpreted from an archaeological context. The results showed that the Oforola people migrated due to the presence of specific animals in the area, land crisis leading to conflicts with neighbouring communities, and food scarcity. This migration had significant effects on archaeological studies, including the loss of historic identity and changes in indigenous healing practices to new occupations such as hunting and farming.

Keywords: migration, archaeology, migrant and Imo state.

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Introduction

Migration has become a way of life for humans over the years due to the human desire for survival and meeting daily needs. People leave their original homes and move to new destinations for survival. Ballyn¹ suggests that migration occurs as a result of violence or the drive for survival. The International Organization for Migration^{2,3} advocates that the movement of people involves family migration as well as the migration of refugees, displaced individuals, and economic migrants. Migrants frequently cite improving their economic condition as their primary motivation.⁴ Economic migrations are not always the result of difficult economic conditions; people who are more financially successful tend to be more mobile. People move to improve their lives and opportunities, or because they cannot adequately provide for their families or make use of their skills. Other factors such as famine, severe climatic change, civil war, nation-state wars, territorial annexation, imperial expansion, and persecution based on gender, race, or ethnicity have also compelled people to seek new homes.^{1,5} Migration has become a way of life for humans over the years due to the human desire for survival and meeting daily needs. People leave their original habitats and move to new destinations for survival reasons, rather than as a social process. Migration occurs as a result of violence or the drive for survival. The movement of people involves every aspect, including family migration, as well as the migration of refugees, displaced individuals, and economic migrants. Migrants frequently state that improving their economic condition is their primary motivation. Economic migrations are not always the result of difficult economic conditions; rather, people who are more financially successful tend to be more mobile. People move to improve their lives because there are limited opportunities or resources for them to invest in or build upon in their original country. They also move because they cannot adequately provide for their family or make use of their skills. They relocate due to observing others in their social network doing so and realizing that it is an additional means of generating income. Other factors such as famine, severe climatic change, civil war, nation-

state wars, territorial annexation, imperial expansion, and persecution based on one's gender, race, or ethnicity have all compelled people to seek new home.¹ Many people and groups are forced to leave their native countries to survive, and many of them could be considered refugees. This is especially true for people fleeing war-torn regions, genocidal regimes, and nations where human rights are not respected. Migration is always a factor, whether as a result of conflict or the need to survive. There are individuals who resist pressure, but they are often ejected from social and legal benefits within their country and may become stateless due to a law or circumstance that has stripped them of their nationality. As climatic changes and natural disasters have increased, people have fled, either temporarily or permanently, as long as it allows them to live comfortably. Migration can take place within a person's own country or outside it, and migrants often adapt to new environments for their survival, causing overpopulation in some cities. However, it is widely agreed that migration has also affected cultural evolution, even though it is difficult to identify archaeologically.

In summary, migration has historically been overlooked by archaeologists due to a lack of theory and methods to incorporate migration into the study of cultural change, rather than because migration is considered unimportant.⁶ From a processual perspective, migration can be seen as a process that develops in a predictable manner once it begins, influenced by social organization, trade relationships, and transportation technology.⁶ Today, migration still occurs for specific reasons. It is often driven by negative (push) factors in the home region and positive (pull) factors in the destination region, as well as acceptable transportation costs.⁷ However, historical migration movements have primarily been short-distance, with long-distance movements being less traceable and often relying on oral transmission of information. While culture change may result from migration, it can also be influenced by trade. Migration has long been a significant aspect of human life, and documenting migration history is crucial, whether migration is intentional or involuntary. The evolution

of human life has brought about significant changes over time. It's important to consider how the present generation becomes aware of these changes. Written documents play a crucial role in preserving the history of mankind. They help make sense of oral traditions within a community and facilitate the sharing of knowledge. Scholarly and scientific publications heavily rely on documentary research.⁸ Unfortunately, there are no written documents about the history of these villages, which heavily rely on oral tradition. Some individuals even show little interest in preserving this tradition. Migration is a well-studied aspect of human behaviour that has lacked attention as a subject of research.⁴ The absence of historical documentation regarding the migration of these people raises concerns about the loss of indigenous knowledge, especially when the elderly, who hold valuable information through oral tradition, pass away. Modernization has led many to believe that oral traditions are no longer necessary, resulting in a lack of understanding about their origins. For example, in a village in Oforola, conflicting accounts of their origins have caused issues. If this information were documented, it would serve as a valuable reference and aid research efforts significantly.

This research aims to identify the factors or events that have triggered the migration of these people, as well as how this migration has impacted both the migrants and the host community, including their respective cultures. It also seeks to document the migration history of Oforola to prevent the extinction of indigenous knowledge as a result of modernization and civilization.

The study area

The research was done in Oforola town in Owerri West which serves as an inhabitation area for aborigines. Oforola is located in the Southern Eastern State of Imo state in Owerri West Local Government Area. Their geographical location is at Latitude 5°25'28" N and Longitude 6°55'36" E. Oforola is made up of nine villages Umueke, Umuagubiam, Umuadu, Umuogide, Oboagwa, Amoji, Umuimeka, Amaku and Umuezeroke. Oforola was together with Okuku and was later separated and it became a community on its own because of push and pull migration. The climate of the study area includes the wet and dry season. They have forest vegetation. The area has trees like pear (*Dacryodes edulis*), coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), guava (*Psidium guajava*), and orange (*Citrus sinensis*), oil bean (*Pentaclethra macrophylla*) scattered around the town. (Figure 1)

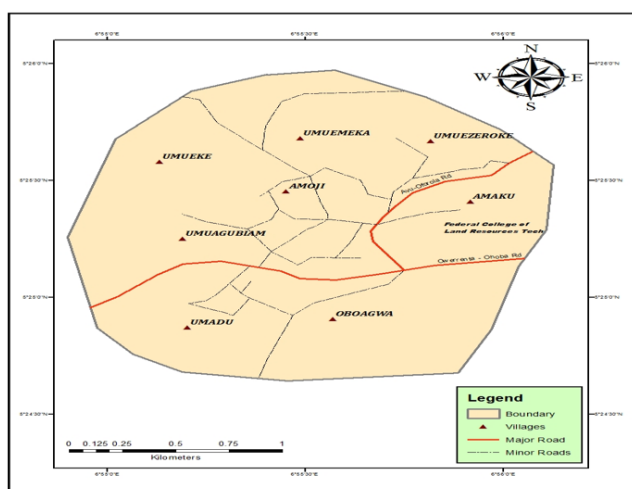


Figure 1 Map of Oforola, the study area.

Research method

The study utilized a qualitative research method in order to focus on understanding the reasons behind events and how they occurred, rather than just counting the number of occurrences. The research involved methods such as observation, in-depth interviews, and collecting relevant published and unpublished data to examine the migration of people and the underlying reasons for their migration. This approach was chosen to provide a deeper understanding of the subject matter

Results

a) Migration history of Oforola people in Imo state

Eke Uduma was the first person who migrated to Oforola and settled. He was from Ngor Okpala and he settled in Umueke village. The name of the village was coined by him. He was a hunter and hunted in so many places until hunting took him to the forest of Oforola and he started enjoying the area because of the massive land area. Each hunting day was filled with games. Instead of moving to and fro from Ngor Okpala to Oforola, he decided to settle in Oforola. His children were Ekenduma, Eke Ohia, Ezu, Adu, Ogide, Ibeagwa, Orji, Imeka, Aku, and Ezumoke, because he was the first to settle in Oforola, he was nicknamed Egbuhie-Ebi.^{9,10}

According to informant Mrs. Chinonye Ugorji she said:

“A man from Nwangele called Obiam migrated and saw he was making progress in his newly found location. He gave birth to a son called Agu and the village was named after both son and father. The village was called Umuagubiam”.

Another informant Mr. Lambert Ezekwe said that there were ten (10) migrants in Oforola which are as follows;

“It was Eke Nduma and Eke Ohia the son of Eke Nduma that was the second migrant that settled in Oforola after their father. The two Eke's settled at Ubiala and Uhu in Umuagubiam. The brothers had a problem and Adu migrated to the present-day Umuadu. Although Adu and Ezu had been in Umuagubiam, the people of Oforola still view Ezu and Adu as the fifth migrants because they occupied a village. Eke Uduma left some religious traditions which Eke Ohia adopted”.

The third migrant was Ogbuchi and his people who came from Olokwu and settled in Oboagwa village. The people were known for indigenous dance and music which they performed during the worship of Nwodora gods. They had a deity called Alanzonu which was later renamed as Ala Umuejike. Umuagubiam was the headquarters of the traditional religion of Oforola. They also engaged in the hunting of antelope (Opi Nta) before farming activities took place.

The fourth migrant that came to Oforola was Ogide and his wife and they settled in Umuogide. He named the village after his name. He welcomed a stranger called Eboh and his wife to his compound because he was living alone with his wife. After his death, Eboh inherited all his properties and bear his name. When other kindred came, they bore Ogide's name. The majority of people who later migrated were made up of people from Ngor Okpala and Amuzari and they settled at Umuogide.

The fifth migrant to the community was Adu who was named after the Umuadu community. Adu has a deity called Otakpuru. He made his shrine more powerful than his brother's by adding twenty-eight (28) different spirits to his deity that made it more powerful, including a special sacrifice that was made to his god which included human sacrifice. His deity started disturbing and for peace to be

maintained, one deity must relocate. He was escorted out of the village (Umuagubiam) and was the first person to be escorted out of his residence. He was nicknamed Edufuru and they resided in the present day Umuadu. Umuadu becomes Otakpuru Oforola because of the presence of Adu's god a powerful deity. Otakpuru Oforola became responsible for keeping the calendar for other villages of Oforola and alerting them of dates for festivals. Umuadu was the first traditional ruler of Oforola. They practiced a cultural dance called Ogbom which is performed during the Iheuzo festivals. They donated part of their land to the church presently.^{11,12}

The Ngwa people were the sixth migrants who settled in Amoji village. Amoji village is the smallest village in Oforola. After the Ngwa had settled in, people joined them later from Amaku village.¹³

The seventh migrants were the people from Ohaji and Obiti and they settled in Umu Imeke for some time.

Aku who was also known as Umuejabakor was the first to reside in Amaku followed by others. He was the eighth migrant and he came from Abakoro Umuegwu Ohaji.

Egbema was the ninth migrant and he migrated from Egbema, in Ohaji. Some people later joined him and they migrated from Mbari.

Ezu lived in a village and named it Umuezuroke and they were the last migrant, later some people joined him from Ohaji and Mbari. Ezu brought his gods and called them ala (a female deity).^{14,15}

b) Reasons for migration of Oforola people in Imo state

According to the oral tradition, Eke Nduma migrated to Oforola due to his hunting activities. Although the people of Ngor Okpala were primarily farmers and also engaged in the processing of ripe palm fruit (*Igba Nkwu*) and healing, Eke Nduma was not interested in these occupations rather he prefers hunting. According informants Mr. Lambert Ezekwe and Mr. Ethelbert, Eke Nduma was attracted to the vast land and quiet environment of Oforola, as well as the abundance of game for hunting. After observing the area over time, he decided to migrate to Oforola, bringing his people.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

Umuimeka was named after a man called Imeka. He had three children: Ndum, Ikeokeu, and Odura, who lived in a place called Obiti, but life in Obiti did not favor them. They struggled to secure enough food or make a living. In search of better opportunities, they moved to Umuogba and tried to start afresh by acquiring land and property. However, things did not improve, and they felt the need to find greener pastures. They considered migrating to an undeveloped area, and eventually settled in Oforola. They observed that the land was vast with small population, and the people were accommodating. Despite not having experience in hunting, they had to adapt to farming, as the residents were mainly farmers. Another group of migrants from Ngwu sought refuge in Oforola due to a hunger crisis caused by the reputation of the Ngwa people as human eaters.^{19,20} Those who migrated to Oforola did so to escape for their lives and found that they could survive in Oforola since the main occupation of the people was farming out of necessity, not because human flesh was desirable, but because of the hunger crisis. Additionally, individuals like Ogide and his wife fled to Oforola to escape the devastating conflict in Ngor Okpala. They found the people of Oforola to be accommodating and settled in Umueke village. Eke Nduma invited them to live closer and establish a place called Umu-ogide. Overall, the Oforola community was welcoming and supportive, providing opportunities for the newcomers to rebuild their lives.²¹

The people of Oforola still practiced internal migration. This is evident in the story of Adu and his brother Ezu, who used to live together. They worshipped different gods and had different practices.²²⁻²⁴ Their gods were in conflict with each other, and as a result, Adu was driven out of Umuezu. He then claimed unoccupied land and established it as his territory. Many people flocked to him because of his power and the sense of security he offered. Therefore, migration to Oforola was primarily driven by crises, with war and hunger being the main reasons. Those who could not sustain themselves in their homeland migrated to Oforola, as the region was still developing. Additionally, individuals who felt their lives were in danger in their original homes fled to Oforola to escape the threat.

c) Archaeological implication of migration

The phenomenon of migration in this particular region has significant archaeological implications, particularly with regards to the loss of identity. This loss encompasses cultural, economic, behavioural, and occupational shifts. The primary driver of migration, with the exception of Ekenduma who migrated due to his passion for hunting, was the prevailing crisis, resulting in a loss of their original identities and lineage. Consequently, the act of migration led to the dispersion of family lineages and the initiation of new ones. For instance, Eke Nduma, upon migrating, severed ties with his original family to establish a new lineage. Furthermore, the transition from Ngor Okpala to Oforola redefined their sense of belonging and familial relationships. Such relocations prompted stringent societal regulations that is marriage from Ngor Okpala to avoid the risk of inadvertent incest, a taboo in Igbo tradition.²⁵

The culture of the people has changed over time. The people of Ngor Okapla are the major migrant to Oforola. All their cultures were not carried to Oforola. For example, in Ngor Okpala, there are many cultural practices that are very essential. Although Christianity have interfered on them; some cultural practices like not going to farm on market days, there must be a celebration of new yam festival before new yam could be harvested and placed in the ban. At every cultural activities, Iwo Oji (breaking of kolanut) by the eldest man must take place, this has brought every kindred in Ngor Okpala together. During marriage ceremony, the family of the bride welcomes the in laws with a special dance peculiar to them which symbolise acceptance. However, all these cultural practices were not practiced in Oforola even till now apart from the new yam festival (*iri iji*). The migrants could not continue with their cultural practices in the new environment rather they accept the new practices to avoid jeopardizing the peace of the land for the sake of their culture. All kindred were living happily and adapted to the general culture they met where they migrated. In the present area (Oforola) marriages are done in close doors except the groom wants it to be done in a bigger way. Dancing was no longer done by the bride family. It is done by other women. This only happen when the bride mother is a prominent member of the women. Farming activities is not limited to any unforeseen circumstance, unlike in Ngor Okpala where market days are not for farming. Oforola people farm a lot even down to Christmas period, there farming depends on the individual and not communal like Ngor Okpala. In Oforola there is nothing like Iwo Oji a cultural practice in Ngor Okpala.^{26,27} Likewise indigenous dances, Oforola people have their own cultural dance called Egwu Ogene or Egwu Ukwu. This dance is different from dance in Ngor Okpala. Egwu Ogene or Egwu Ukwu dance happens only during August meeting or when a special guest visits Oforola both young and old including men engage in the dance. The behaviour of migrants has changed over time, this as a result of the type of

environment they found themselves which has fashioned their life style and culture. It has also resulted to loss of culture, for instance, Ugede dance, a female dance in Ngor Okpala that cannot be dance in Oforola Imagine people who migrated and had the gift for dancing are not opportune to dance anymore. Such dance has been lost in the new environment. In Ngor Okpala Women are usually servants of the gods and chosen at random. But in Oforola, migrants are left with the interested to serve the gods or not. In the original place before migration, knowing that faming is a communal activity, a lots of communal cooking is done when farming is over to thank the gods for the successful farming activity but in the present environment, such practices is not observed.

Migrants have two options in respect to occupation which include farming and hunting. Many migrants came to the new environment with the intention to continue with their indigenous skills but sometime the new environment may not provide the condusive environment and resources needed in continuing the skill. For example, in Ngor Okpala, there is a particular tree called "Enimaeru" which is yellowish, they use the bark to treat malaria (Iba in Igbo) when soaked in palm wine or Ogogoro. It can also be used to cure "n'cha n'anya". N'cha n'anya is a sickness that discolourizes the eye. Although, they treat other sickness but these two are the major sickness they were known by other communities to treat. This tree (*Enimaeru*) is not available in Oforola this has affected their indigenous technology on traditional healthcare system. Although it seems the sickness is not common in Oforola the people of Ngor Okpala have lost this technology and have embraced a new technology that is not their culture. Many of them have to start learning how to farm or hunt down animals. As time went by, the idea of producing local medicine was irrelevant as the villager have to settle for orthodox medicine. The archaeological implication of this migration is the loss of important and productive indigenous technology which would have been enhanced for community growth and culture identity. Farming and hunting are good occupation but it is not common with the Oforola. In Ngor Okpala farming is their major source of livelihood, acquiring a farmland is never a challenge as kindred are ready to share theirs to accommodate other kindred. Traditional healthcare system would have distinguished Ngor Okpala and more knowledge from other communities but their movement to Oforola has resulted to the loss of the knowledge which they would have developed more and practice more other new healing technology. Presently the medicinal tree is loss and cannot be found in a new environment.^{28,29}

Discussion

Migrant is defines as an individual who lives permanently or temporally in a country they were not born in.¹ For migration to occur, there must be movement away from the original location where they are based. Migration can happen within a state that is from Ngor Okpala to Oforola. Migration must happen because it is makes up the human life. People don't just move without carrying their material culture, ideas, belief system to the new environment. They believe it would help them stay in a particular place until they can find their feet again. For migration to occur, distance is key. People tend to grow weary if the distance is a long one. Many migrants stop half way and joins the community they didn't plan to join. Others die on the way and at the end history will record only the people who migrated and forgot those that were not lucky enough. The distance a migrant wants to cover in order to settle is not restricted as far as he is moving away from his original location. According to Lee, no matter how short or long or how difficult or easy, migration must be viewed looking at the

origin of migrants, destination and what would have pushed people into migrating. The people that migrated to Oforola had their origin, that is the place where they came from before they came to settle in Oforola and majority were from Ngor Okpala. War and hunting pushed their migration into Oforola. All Oforola earliest settlement were migrants but their offspring became citizens of Oforola by birth.

According to Burmeister,²⁸ material culture provides clues to the origin of the population group that made use of it. Apart from Eke Nduma and the second migrant who were able to have brought down their material cultures like the hunting instrument, every other migrated to Oforola because of the crisis they were faced with. They must have run away from their original destination without carrying anything to represent their formal culture. While some migrants are passing through communities, they must have come across material cultures that would help them make their journey easy. For instance, the people picked up jars for storing water so they do not get dehydrated as they are migrating. They might have carried so much with them to store water and then got to Oforola and still made use of it because of its relevance. The jars must definitely carry a mark that will make people know their identity and their culture. One cannot connote meaning and say because of the presence of this material culture, the tribe possessing that object has once lived in the land. Another instance is when migrant is still looking for where to settle. The longer the journey, the more the loads they possess are reducing. They might come to a conclusion to abandon some of their material culture in that environment and keep moving. Judging with the material culture, one might say that the group migrated to the community not knowing that the group passed that area. To a great extent, material culture does not depict the idea of migration. It gives hint on why an object that is not associated with the community was found and present and what led to the acquiring or disposing of that material culture. People that migrated into Oforola did not bring in any foreign material. Most came empty handed and the people helped them for a period of time before they can stand on their own. Materials relating to the people of Ngor Okpala was absent so one could hardly tell if the migrants were from Ngor Okpala or they have been living in Oforola for a long time.³⁰

Burmeister state that the central significance in migration behaviour is age. According to the migration history of Oforola people, no body migrated because of their age. Migrants needed a place where they will be free from crisis which include war and hunger. Any age can migrate as far as you are willing to do all that is needed of you in the new destination.

Burmeister stated that for diffusionism, migration is a key concept, mobility been seen as a major cause of cultural change. Migrants do not have the power to do what they like culturally in their new destination. They have to adhere to strict rules and culture facing them. Their movement to a new destination changes their belief system automatically. Oral traditions will no longer contain history of where they came from until they settled in the land. Their oral tradition will only focus on their current destination. As time goes by, many of them will begin to forget history of their formal destination and stick to the history of their present culture. In Oforola, people who had history of Ngor Okpala are no more. Their children are not even told that they migrated from somewhere. The earliest settlement decided to die with the information. Many inhabitants of Oforola thinks that their fore fathers founded Oforola and others came to join not knowing that every indigene in Oforola migrated. This will bring double story when it comes to migration history. One of my informants sees Obiam as the

second migrant and another saw the two sons of Eke Nduma (namely Eke Nduma and Eke Ohia) as the second migrant. All this will only happen when it is few persons that knows this history and most times this history tends to be false because migrants who migrated late would want to say they migrated early and their names were not recorded amongst the early men. Since migration history is not said, there is evidence of people being biased. Some taboos in their formal destination are usually welcomed in the new destination. The people would at some point avoid those laws but as they continued staying in that destination, they will join in the information or practice they saw as taboos from the place they migrated to.³¹

In Ravensteins laws of migration, he stated that females are more migratory than males. This law tends to be non-accurate and not applicable in Oforola. Migrants were mostly male. No oral tradition proved the migration of a woman alone. The only thing oral tradition said about women and migration was that it is either they are migrating with their husband or they are migrating in group where there is the head of the group and the head is usually a man. This law functions in some part of the world although but it has no relevance in Oforola. It was obvious that during that period, women wanted to stay safe and survive and they allow men led them to a place that is safe and sound. They had high hopes of protection since they were with the men.

Lee examines that the motivation for migration which are the push and pull factor. The push factor gingers migration while the pull factor is present at the site one is migrating to. Lee also stated that migration can occur if the reason for migrating (push) can be achieved in the destination (pull). Oforola experienced push and pull migration. The main reason of migrant migrating to Oforola was because of passion and crisis in their original destination. Hunger and war were the major reason and they needed to run for their dear lives to a place where they can be comfortable and stress free so they can stay alive. Migrants do not just see a land with little or no population and dwell there. They check if they can cope with this environment. If they cannot, they will start thinking of plans on how to migrate to another destination. Out of fear, most of them will settle in a destination they never planned for and in the long run they tend to fall in love with the area.

The archaeological implication is the loss of cultural continuity. Migrating into a new environment or destination will disable every cultural lifestyle that can aid progress in that new destination. Some cultural materials might be viewed as taboos in the destination area. For example, in the original destination of a migrant, a snake is seen as a bad omen and must be killed. In the new environment, snake is worshipped. Migrants might not want to migrate because of how favourable the new destination is to them. They will just continue in the way of the new destination. Ngor Okpalas are known to be healers but the people in Oforola from Ngor Okpala stopped that practice. There was no record that it was even practiced for a day. Most migrant might give the excuse of the absence of the Erumaeru tree in Ngor Okpala in Oforola but if they wanted to continue in that culture they would have been approved because it will serve everybody in the community. One can also say that the healing of that sicknesses was not for everybody. It might be in the hands of special people and they were not part of the migrant. In as much as migration has tampered with individuals' knowledge, migrant should not relent in using their indigenous knowledge wherever they find themselves especially when that knowledge will promote tourism, develop a community and build up individual financially.

Conclusion

Migration itself has a way of affecting human lives both positively and negatively. It brings changes that affects human lives, indigenous knowledge and how it has so far allowed migrants to settle for what others have put in place before their coming. This study views the content if migration and its archaeological implication. The study showed the negative impact of migration on migrants (especially those who had no hunting ideas about farming and hunting) and the positive impact of migration on both the host community and the migrant (peace of mind in the new destination). Migration history has not been documented in Oforola and this work will help document their migration history. This study reveals that the migration history of Oforola people started in the 15th century and the various reasons for this migration is hunting, hungry and war. The archaeological implication is the loss of identity, culture, belief system to a borrowed one and the loss of indigenous knowledge system to a new one that they are not conversant with.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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