

1       **GENDER ISSUES IN ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: A STUDY OF EQUIANO'S**  
2               **TRAVELS, NWAPA'S EFURU AND ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART**

6       **Abstract**

7       This paper appraises gender issues in alcohol consumption in Africa, in terms of  
8       processing and control using Oludah Equiano's autobiography- *Equiano's Travels*,  
9       Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. These three literary  
10       texts are thoughtfully chosen for the study, in view of the fact that Equiano  
11       pioneered African literature, and advanced by Flora Nwapa and Chinua Achebe in  
12       their debut, *Efuru* and *Things Fall Apart*, published in 1966 and 1958, respectively. In  
13       *Equiano's Travels*, published in 1789, Equiano is able to capture and document the  
14       Igbo lifestyle in its nativity. Scholars have attempted to look at the works of these  
15       literary titans from several perspectives and themes but, to the best of the  
16       knowledge of these researchers, they have not enquired into the Igbo lifestyle in  
17       alcohol consumption and given it the desired academic attention as amply  
18       presented in the literary works of these literary paragons and pathfinders, as the  
19       present study intends to do. While Achebe looks at the traditional humane living of  
20       Igbo society in the hinterland in its pre-colonial period, Nwapa discusses the lifestyle  
21       and folkways of Igbo Lake people of Oguta. Nwapa presents a segment of this Igbo  
22       society, which grants women access to alcoholic drink in the public, in sharp contrast  
23       to the rest of Igbo society that restricts women from drinking the same liqueur.  
24       Likely, the ample liberty and tremendous respect accorded to the female folk in  
25       Oguta Igbo subculture may be responsible for this, coupled with the fact that the  
26       river deity of the Lake, Uhamiri goddess, may have provided further evidence to the  
27       improved status accorded to women. Thus, Nwapa in the pages of her literary  
28       works, especially in *Efuru* and *One Is Enough*, brings to our doorstep the lifestyle and  
29       folkways of Oguta Lake people of Oguta, which enable women to enjoy this  
30       unrestricted liberty of self-expression and audacious access to alcoholic drinks at the  
31       profane gaze of men, as it were. Equiano, through his travails and escapades of  
32       slavery, shows the changing trends in alcohol drinking and culture especially the  
33       differences in female drinking cultures based on geography and climate. Today, the  
34       ethos of Igbo society has changed remarkably. The paper seeks to investigate these  
35       details using Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Nwapa's *Efuru* as well as *Equiano's*  
36       *Travels*, our texts of focus. The inquiry is essentially literary or library research.

37                               **Introduction**

38  
39       Staying together with peers of cognate age groups as leisure activity at a rich man's  
40       reception room, the Igbo people call *Obi* or *Obiezi*, or at a village square where  
41       communal matters are deliberated upon, is customary. This practice normally takes  
42       place when yams, the king of crops, have been planted or entered inside the ground

43 waiting harvesting. So there is less work to do in the farm or rigorous roles  
44 performed by men. The dominant edibles popular for consumption at such  
45 gathering are kola nuts and palm wine, in addition to maize and pear, *ube* fruit,  
46 which is usually munched together with maize. It is the customary practice of the  
47 Igbo. In their folkways, there are some commissions which when breached result in  
48 some sanction meted out to the offender. On folkways, *The Penguin Dictionary of*  
49 *Sociology* (2000: 138) states: "This concept ...describes everyday activities within a  
50 small-scale society which have become established and are socially sanctioned.  
51 Folkways differ from MORES in that they are less severely sanctioned and are not  
52 abstract principles."

53         The customary stress attached to kola nut and palm wine is indeed great,  
54 because each of these cultural edibles is not consumed anyhow. There are cultural  
55 dicta that must be observed – the due process – before their consumption, or else the  
56 non-initiate fouls customary lore. Of course, the traditional wine is of two types,  
57 namely, palm wine and up-wine (the Igbo call it *Nkwuenu* or *nkwuelu*); the up-wine  
58 is the type Christopher Okigbo (1975: 23) mentions in his *Labyrinths*, which he  
59 describes as *yester upwine*; it tastes sweet and tastes bitter. That is (*Nkwu enu, otoro*  
60 *uto, onuru inu*). *Nkwuenu* is costlier and more expensive wine than palm wine. The  
61 popular one, though, is palm wine, documented in *Equiano's Travells* and Nwapa's  
62 *Efuru*.

63         Evidence of the popularity and seeming sacredness of Igbo traditional wine  
64 and its consumption in a public place or where men are gathered is documented

65 thus by Anyachonkeya (2006: 63). Anyachonkeya, whose hometown is Omuma,  
66 immediate neighbours of Equiano's Isseke and Nwapa's Oguta, says:

67  
68 In a gathering...wine must be served  
69 by the youngest (male) in the audience.  
70 The wine must be served according to  
71 seniority, in age, and title-holding or  
72 initiation. Titleholders, initiates into  
73 **Ozo, Nze**, Chieftaincy, and others and  
74 those who have honoured their dead  
75 fathers in funeral and memorial  
76 ceremonies enjoy recognition, while  
77 those who have not these privileges do  
78 not "talk aloud" in such gatherings  
79 where wine is served.

80  
81 Anyachonkeya elucidates further:

82  
83 If a person brings wine to a people, the  
84 first cup will go to him who must first  
85 taste his wine before all else. Wine  
86 should not be poured in a cup which  
87 still contains some quantity of wine not  
88 yet drunk or finished. Discussions are  
89 not held over wine. If a person brings a  
90 gourd of palm wine to his host who  
91 perhaps in turn invites his kinsmen to  
92 (come and) witness *what his eyes are*  
93 *seeing*, for which he has something to  
94 request, ask or complain against, such a  
95 wine must be emptied first before he  
96 announces his mission....

97  
98 In fact, customary imperatives on traditional wine consumption are  
99 numerous depending on the Igbo subculture. Some of the features of the imperatives  
100 are captured by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*; which confirms the  
101 values attached to traditional wine and the cultural demands in the people's culture.

102 Moderate drinking was part of the Igbo traditional humane living. However,  
103 such intoxicants as rum, beer, gin and spirits accompanied Trans-Atlantic slave trade

104 and colonialism into Igbo land. But brewing historically dates back to Egyptian  
105 Empire, the world's cradle of civilization. Osiris was the god of wine. By 1690,  
106 England passed an Act of Parliament legalizing the distillation and consumption of  
107 Brandy and spirits from corn. By 1736, it was recorded that about one and half a  
108 million people drank over 18 million gallons of gin. Thus, there was legislation  
109 restraining excessive consumption of intoxicating liquor, because of the harmful  
110 effects of alcohol. The legislation was made to reduce the sale of gin by increasing  
111 taxation (Hanson, 2011).

112         The sailors who visited the coasts of Africa showed that they used gin to  
113 entice the native chiefs for exchange in slaves and probably because of its restriction  
114 in England. In the process, a dumping ground for a generation of drunkards was  
115 actualized (Okonkwo, 2013: 60). This marks the origin of alcohol use and  
116 consumption in large quantities into our area of study of the Igbo land. Basden  
117 (1966:60) concurs to this fact and says:

118

119                     In their primitive state, the Ibos were not  
120                     acquainted with any method of brewing  
121                     intoxicating liquor. They never made use of  
122                     corn or bananas for manufacturing beer or  
123                     spirits. Their favourite drink was and still  
124                     palm wine. This they extract from the tree, the  
125                     common oil palm or the *ngwo* (*raphiavinifera*).

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## 128                     **EEQUIANO'S NARRATIVES: THE IGBO AND EXTERNAL ALCOHOL** 129                     **INFLUENCE**

130         Equiano since 1789 informs us of his experience with alcohol on board  
131         slavery as a slave to the New World. He reminisces:

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One of the crew brought me a small portion of spirituous liquor in a wine glass; but being afraid of him, I would not take it out of his hand. One of the blacks therefore took it from him and gave it to me, and I took a little down my palate, which instead of reviving me, as they thought it would, threw me into the greatest consternation at the strange feeling it produced having never tested any such liquor before (*Equiano's Travels*, Chapter Three, 26).

144 Nevertheless, *Equiano's Travels* (quoted in Philip Curtin (Ed.,1968), informs us of the  
145 moderate drinking habits in pre-colonial Igbo society. According to him:

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They are totally unacquainted with strong and spirituous liquor and their principal village beverage is palm wine; this is got from a tree of that name, by tapping it at the top and fastening a large gourd on it; and sometimes on tree will yield three or four gallons in a night. When just dawn, it is of a most delicious sweetness; but in a few days it acquires a (sic) tarnish and more spirituous flavour; though I never saw anyone intoxicated by it.

158 Equiano has made a patriotic attempt to document his African heritage as he  
159 knew and saw it as a lad of eleven before the ill-fated hands of fate caught with him.  
160 His account injects local colour in his literary narrative, thus making for Africanness  
161 in African literature.

161

## 162 **ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AND ALCOHOL DRINKING CULTURE**

163

164 By implication, therefore, the traditional Igbo society did not accommodate  
165 drunkards, but admits moderate drinking to spice up life. In any case, Chinua  
166 Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveals Igbo drinking culture as well as gender sensitivity

167 that surrounds alcohol intake. In his account, men always drink two or three horns  
168 before inviting the womenfolk. The account has it that Nwakabie invited his eldest  
169 wife Anasi who took a horn from the husband, knelt down and drank a little and  
170 other wives followed suit based on age and status. Authorial voice of the novel  
171 reveals:

172                   When everyone had drunk two or three horns,  
173                   Nwakibie sent for his wives. Some of them  
174                   were not at home and only four came in. "Is  
175                   Anansi not in?" he asked them. They said she  
176                   was coming. Anasi was the first wife and the  
177                   others could not drink before her, and so they  
178                   stood waiting. Anasi was a middle-aged  
179                   woman, tall and strongly built. There was  
180                   authority in her bearing and she looked every  
181                   inch the ruler of the womenfolk in a large and  
182                   prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her  
183                   husband's titles, which the first wife alone  
184                   could wear. She walked up to her husband  
185                   and accepted the horn from him. She then  
186                   went down on one knee, drank a little and  
187                   handed back the horn. She rose, called him by  
188                   his name and went back to her hut. The other  
189                   wives drank in the same way, in their proper  
190                   order, and went away. The men then  
191                   continued their drinking and talking (*TFA*,  
192                   Chapter Three, 18, 19).

193  
194                   And the men as Achebe recorded continued drinking, we repeat the persona  
195 and intrusive omniscient narrator. The need to invoke Achebe's work to ascertain  
196 Equiano's realities and degree of faithful documentation of the Igbo past in his  
197 narratives has been discussed by relevant authorities in the field of humanities. One  
198 of such scholars writes as follows:

199                   Even though they were formed by oral story  
200                   telling both men have their contributions in  
201                   written stories, Equiano in the story of his  
202                   personal life and Achebe in fiction. Both men

203                   also use their narratives not only to explore  
204                   personal and fictive experiences but also to  
205                   recreate their societies and culture with care  
206                   and integrity and indirectly, to help  
207                   rehabilitate the image and the black world  
208                   under attack by anti-Black writers and  
209                   philosophers (Obiechina, 1996: 31).

210  
211                Alcohol consumption in the Igbo days of Equiano was in moderate  
212                proportion compared to contemporary Igbo society. The overall use of alcohol in  
213                Igbo culture varied especially in pre- colonial times. In most cases, alcohol played  
214                significant role in sexual satisfaction of newly married couples. It acts as catalyst to  
215                overall libidinal performance. It makes mortal man sober so much that a drunken  
216                fellow or one that has taken it in immoderate quantity depending on his  
217                constitution, voluntarily tells you everything the truth. That is why the father of one  
218                the authors of this essay used to say that when consumed water you don't tell the  
219                truth, but after consuming a good deal of alcohol, you tell the truth!

220                Achebe recorded that the dregs of palm wine *were* the reserve of men with  
221                jobs at hand. In other words, Achebe means that men who have just married new  
222                wives and desirous to have children drink the dregs of palm wine! Thus, the case of  
223                Igwelo, the eldest son of Nwakibie, confirms that. Again, our persona corroborates:

224  
225                   Everybody agreed that Igwelo should drink  
226                   the dregs. He accepted the half full horn from  
227                   his brother and drank it. As Idigo had said,  
228                   Igwelo had a job in hand because he had  
229                   married first wife a month or two before. They  
230                   think dregs of palm wine were supposed to be  
231                   good for men who were going into their wives  
232                   (*TFA*, Chapter. Three, 21).

233

234 Hence, it is believed that the palm wine served useful purpose for fertility and  
235 breastfeeding mothers. Another literal account of the first Igbo female novelist, Flora  
236 Nwapa, of course, asserts the relevance of palm wine to the nursing mothers, who  
237 have just given birth, as follows:

238  
239 That evening, Efuru complained that her  
240 breasts were not full. In fact they were getting  
241 dry. She was afraid her baby might die of  
242 starvation if there was no milk in her breast.  
243 Ajanapu was sent for at once, it is simple when  
244 I had my first baby, the same thing happened  
245 to me. You have to drink plenty of palm wine  
246 (*Efuru*, 1966 :33) .  
247

248 The mild intoxicating nature of palm wine, especially newly tapped morning  
249 palm wine, leads to the mention of it that it is almost a physical impossibility to get  
250 drunk on fresh palm wine. It is important to note that alcohol in pre-colonial Igbo  
251 society assumed relevance in Igbo ritual practice. Such socio-cultural changes in  
252 Basden's view destroyed some quaint old customs. According to him, to be offered  
253 whisky or German beer when paying a courtesy call on a native chief is an  
254 innovation greatly to be deplored, especially when compared with the old ceremony  
255 of sealing friendships by sharing kola nuts ( Basden, 1966: 33). Equiano notes that  
256 pouring libation was part of the people's culture for departed relations and for  
257 presiding over the conduct of the living as well as guarding them from evil (Curtin,  
258 1968: 173).

259 It has been recorded also that market days, festivals and activities during  
260 burial ceremonies, at times, are when the effects of drinking are more evident  
261 (Basden, 1921: 125).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the use of alcohol in pre-colonial African society



262 has been summarized to be closely linked with the economic and social events of the  
263 village such as harvest celebrations (such as new yam festival), family feasts and  
264 business agreements (Babor, 1986: 125). Let us come to the present and find out how  
265 Nwapa captures alcohol consumption in Oguta; but before then, let us first get  
266 acquainted with her background.

### 267 **FLORA NWAPA AND OGUTA COUNTRY HOME**

268

269 Flora Nwapa was born at Oguta (pronounced **Ugwuta**, by the indigenous  
270 people of the town) in Imo State of Nigeria on 13 January 1931. She went to the  
271 following educational institutions, where she obtained her academic certificates:  
272 C.M.S Central School, Lagos, 1936-1944; Elelenwa Girls' Secondary School, Port  
273 Harcourt, Rivers State, 1945-1948; C.M.S Girls School, Lagos, 1949-1950; University  
274 College, Ibadan, 1955-1957 and obtained B.A. degree (London). She also holds a  
275 diploma in Education from the University of Edinburgh, 1957-1958. She is the first  
276 Nigerian female novelist and publisher, (for she owned Tana Press, Enugu) and  
277 held numerous posts, such as Woman Education Officer (Queen's School, Enugu),  
278 1958-1962; Assistant Registrar (Public Relations), University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos,  
279 1962-1967 and Commissioner in the defunct East Central State during Ukpabi  
280 Asika Administration, 1970-1975, (Umeh, 1971: 272), as well as served as a Professor  
281 of Comparative Literature at the University of Maiduguri.

282 She married Gogo Nwakuche at the wake of the Nigerian Civil War in August  
283 1967. They had two children from the union, namely, Uzoma and Amede; but before

284 this period, she gave birth to Ejine Olga Nzeribe to Gogo Nzeribe, a charismatic  
285 union leader but they did not, however, marry (Umeh, 1971: 272).

286 Some of Flora Nwapa's publications include:

- 287 i. *Efuru*. London: Heinemann, 1966
- 288 ii. *Idu*. London: Heinemann, 1970
- 289 iii. *This Is Lagos and Other Stories*. Nwamife, 1971
- 290 iv. *Emeka Driver's Guard*. London: University of London Press, 1972
- 291 v. *Mammy Water*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1979
- 292 vi. *The Miracle Kittens*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1980
- 293 vii. *My Tana Colouring Book*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1979.
- 294 viii. *Adventures of Deke*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1980
- 295 ix. *Journey to Space*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1980
- 296 x. *Wives at War and Other Stories*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1980
- 297 xi. *My Animal Number Book*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1980
- 298 xii. *One is Enough*. Enugu: Flora Nwapa Books, 1982.
- 299 xiii. *Never Again*. Enugu: Tana Press 1984,
- 300 xiv. *Women Are Different*. Enugu: Tana Press, 1986.
- 301 xv. *Biography of Chief and Mrs. C.I. Nwapa*. (1980)
- 302 xvi. *Cassava and Rice Song*. (1986)
- 303 xvii. *Conversations*. (1993) and;
- 304 xviii. *The First Lady*. (1993) (Umeh, 272).

305

306 Chinua Achebe (2012: 13) in his book *There Was a Country: A Personal History*  
307 *of Biafra*, describes Flora Nwapa as follows:

308  
309 Flora Nwapa aided the Biafran war efforts in  
310 various capacities and after the conflict was  
311 over continued her service to her people in the  
312 Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the  
313 Ministry of Lands, Survey and Urban  
314 Development, and the Ministry of  
315 Establishment. She is remembered for her bold  
316 efforts at reconstructing many institutions that  
317 had been destroyed during the Nigerian-  
318 Biafran war.

319  
320 In her place of birth Oguta, Flora Nwapa was paramount. She contributed to  
321 the development of her community a great deal. In his book entitled *A Short Cultural*  
322 *History of Oguta*, Ndupu observes that: “she attracted the Government General  
323 Hospital to Oguta, the pontoon and “M.V Chinyere Boat”, Oguta Motel and Golf  
324 Course, when she was in office” (2001: 277). Oguta General Hospital was one of the  
325 best government-owned hospital in the defunct Eastern Region during that period,  
326 in terms of quality of staff, infrastructure and work efficiency.

### 327 **A BRIEF LOOK AT OGUTA IGBO SUBCULTURE AND STATUS ACCORDED** 328 **TO WOMEN**

329 Before we inquire into wine and gin distillation in Nwapa’s *Efuru*, it may be  
330 necessary to take a brief look at the subculture of Oguta or Ugwuta Ameshi, as the  
331 natives call their town in full. The knowledge of this incursion, it is hoped, will  
332 increase our awareness why women enjoy appreciative privileged status in the  
333 Ugwuta, quite unlike what we may find in the larger Igbo society or culture.

334           A careful reading of Nwapa's works will reveal that women and their affairs  
335 are a dominant theme in her works. This is so because Oguta people seem to value  
336 women more than they do of men. The gender superiority in favour of men enjoyed  
337 in the rest of Igbo society does not much apply. The water deity of Ogbuide (Oguta  
338 Lake), called *Uhamiri*, is a woman. The people revere this goddess tremendously.  
339 There is no wonder that Nwapa treats this deity with inestimable reverence,  
340 especially when she has the conviction that her inspiration or muse as a writer comes  
341 from Uhamiri. Again, Nwapa's natal home, where her parents lived, is beside the  
342 Lake, an edifice of their country home, the parents named *Erimeagwuagwu*, meaning  
343 inexhaustible treasure; apparently a gift and memento from Uhamiri water goddess.

344           Owing to the pleasant status women enjoy in Oguta, the people are proud  
345 and happy of their exploits in western civilization. The Oguta people will proudly  
346 reel out families in Oguta that are achievers – the Iyasaras', the Nwapas', the HPO  
347 Udoms', alias *Ogbuagu*, *Oshiji*, *Damanze*, *Ezeoneoruru*, (the two-time NPP Chairman in  
348 the Old Imo State and the founder and proprietor of Trinity High School and Obiako  
349 Memorial Commercial School, Oguta), the Nzimiros', the Okwuosas', etc, etc. They  
350 will tell you that the 1<sup>st</sup> woman medical doctor was Priscilla Nzimiro, whose name  
351 Priscilla Memorial Grammar School, Oguta, bears; the feats of Flora Nwapa as the 1<sup>st</sup>  
352 female novelist in Nigeria, the General Hospital, and others she attracted to Oguta as  
353 well as civil and public service positions she held, and lots more. The people will  
354 equally tell you of Justice Ifunanya Udom-Azogu, as among the earliest female  
355 Judges in Igbo land, and the only female student that passed through Trinity High  
356 School, Oguta, an Old Girl in a Boys' school!

357           Ngozi Anyachonkeya's town, Omuma, one of the authors, is of immediate  
358 neighbor of Ugwuta and had his five years post-primary education at Trinity High  
359 School, Oguta. Besides, he frequented the weekly Nkwo Market of Ugwuta during  
360 the Civil War, with his late mother and late elder sister, on foot, a journey of some  
361 three hours, from 4 am to 7 am.

362           It is of interest to observe that when Oguta fell to the Vandals, (the name  
363 Biafran soldiers called the Federal army), a spell of less than one week, the Ugwuta  
364 people took refuge at Omuma, where he hails from. We restate that their refugee  
365 stay at Omuma was brief, not more than one week, because the General of the  
366 People's Army, led Biafran troops, who routed the Vandals. Not a single soul of the  
367 Vandals survived, with their carcasses littering, en mass, on the Lake. The gun boast  
368 of the invaders was decimated. With this superlative victory, Ojukwu ordered  
369 Ugwuta people to return to their ancestral land until the sad capitulation of Biafra in  
370 1970. He is also of the same Oru macro clan with Oguta. So in this study, Oguta is  
371 used interchangeably with Ugwuta Ameshi, for they mean one and the same thing  
372 and name.

373           Obododimma Oha, a kinsman of one of the authors, who comes from another  
374 Oru community has also done a study on Nwapa. He corroborates our assertion on  
375 the appreciable status women enjoy in Oguta; the natal home of Nwapa; and other  
376 cognate details. He states: "Flora Nwapa's parents' house is by Ugwuta...Lake. Its  
377 location by the Lake seems to suggest something about the natural and supernatural  
378 inclinations of the great house which...is right inside the famous Erime Agwu Agwu  
379 Estate..." On the muse that gives Flora Nwapa her writing inspiration,

380 Obododimma Oha adds: "One of the elements of such inspiration is the female  
381 spirit, Uhamiri, who, in Ugwuta cosmology, is a giver of wealth and protector of  
382 Ugwuta."

383 He throws more light, as one of the authors rightly observed earlier, on the  
384 privilege accorded to women, which stemmed from the influence of the female deity  
385 of Uhamiri. He notes:

386  
387 Uhamiri has many devotees in Ugwuta, and  
388 her worship has very much affected a great  
389 part of Ugwuta culture and spiritual life. The  
390 respect accorded to the Woman of the Lake  
391 has also coincided with the feminization of  
392 some aspects of Ugwuta culture and valuation  
393 of femininity itself. It is also possible that  
394 respect for the deity who is a *Woman* has some  
395 direct links with this feminization process in  
396 terms of making men to adjust their thinking  
397 about womanhood positively, since they have  
398 experienced a woman's spiritual power. Since  
399 the woman of the Lake is believed to be ruling  
400 Ugwuta at the spiritual realm, there is an  
401 adjustment to femininity as a sustaining force  
402 in the culture. Indeed, Ugwuta women are  
403 allowed to hold the Ogbuefi title, and such  
404 titled women are highly respected, in spite of  
405 the dominance of masculinity in the culture  
406 (175, 176).

407  
408 Our exposition shades some light why the female gender enjoys privileged  
409 position in Oguta subculture especially when it comes to access to alcohol in the  
410 public. We agree with Obodimma Oha, who speculates the rationale for Nwapa's  
411 disposition and motivation in her frequent reference to Uhamiri, "the Woman of the  
412 Lake" in her literary publications, which "could therefore be properly understood

413 against the background of the cognitive position of the image in the culture and  
414 religious tradition of Ugwuta....(177)" Our search, though, continues.

415

#### 416 **GIN DISTILLATION IN FLORA NWAPA'S EFURU**

417 At the dawn of colonial rule in Nigeria, there was increased importation of  
418 alcohol brands at exorbitant prices that made people to resort to local gin distillation;  
419 the Igbo people call the local gin *kai-kai*. David Northrup (1978: 166) examines the  
420 arrival of 'demon rum' beginning from 1677 at the ports of Calabar up to the  
421 nineteenth century at the end of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which according to him,  
422 promoted the underdevelopment of Africa.

423 As part of its response to alcohol imperialism, Oguta people, as captured by  
424 Flora Nwapa, were engaged in alcohol distillation. Hence, the colonial government  
425 enacted a law declaring it illegal and prohibited its production or distillation. Uche  
426 Okonkwo, one of the researchers, harnessed his research material from Nwapa's  
427 *Efuru*, which enabled him to write his PhD thesis on *A Socio-Economic History of*  
428 *Alcohol Since 1890* and which has now been revised; the revised doctoral dissertation  
429 is entitled *Until They Arrived We Drank Palm Wine* and published by a reputable  
430 publishing firm in the New York city in 2013.

431 Flora Nwapa as a literary historian documented the spirited effort of Oguta  
432 people to resist colonial authorities from getting them arrested for distilling our local  
433 gin they branded *illicit*. In page 13 of *Efuru*, Efuru's mother-in-law offers their  
434 visitors homemade gin and it is documented thus:

435                   You will like the gin. My daughter cooks it in  
436                   the farm. When she finishes, she puts it in a  
437                   canoe in the dead of the night and paddles to  
438                   the town. When they come I hide them at the  
439                   back of my house and no policeman will see it.  
440                   She filled the *ganashi* and gave it to her visitor.  
441                   Efuru's mother-in-law drank in a gulp and  
442                   made a noise with her mouth. The woman  
443                   filled with the same *ganashi* and drank the gin  
444                   in a gulp also. It is a good gin. We shall  
445                   continue cooking our gin. I do not see the  
446                   difference between it and the gin sold in  
447                   special bottles in the shops (*Efuru*, 1966: 13).  
448

449                   The local gin is so much cherished and so continues to serve social purposes  
450                   in such social functions as marriages, funerals, festivals and rituals in Oguta. The  
451                   term *ganashi* is used in *Efuru* and *Idu*, the first two novels of Flora Nwapa in several  
452                   places. *Ganashi* is a small glass cup used for drinking indigenous made gin in Oguta  
453                   *Ameshi*. Its nearest meaning could be an imitation of glass cup.

454                   As shown in *Efuru*, the police continued to intensify effort to apprehend  
455                   people cooking gin in Oguta. In spite of their efforts, many factors contributed in  
456                   rendering their effort futile. Flora Nwapa documents that as follows:

457

458                   Serves the police right; Efuru said happily.  
459                   Why the Government does not allow us to  
460                   drink our home-made gin, I do not know. The  
461                   Government is strange. Does it know that it  
462                   cannot stop us from cooking gin, then the  
463                   white man's gin and his schnapps should be  
464                   sold cheap. We sell our gin two shillings or  
465                   something two shillings and six pence a bottle,  
466                   and they sell their gin and schnapps for many  
467                   shillings (*Efuru*, 56).  
468



469           The grievances expressed by *Efuru* and Gilbert end up with a remark that  
470 those caught for distilling gin, after being convicted and jailed, upon return (from  
471 jail) vowed to continue their lucrative and cultural trade or business. This is one area  
472 Flora Nwapa proves herself a historian rather than a novelist alone. Available  
473 records from the Nigerian National Archives Enugu has it that on February 14, 1936,  
474 Uzoka Ogbugburu of Oguta was fined £100 or 12 months imprisonment for cooking  
475 and distilling gin (National Archives, Enugu, July 23, 1936). In her usual historical  
476 narrative style, Flora documents various ways or tactics adopted by the people of  
477 Oguta to forestall future arrest by the police:

478                           I am sure you will like this gin. Nwabuzo had  
479 it buried in the ground last year when there  
480 was rumour that police men were sent to  
481 search her house. When policemen left,  
482 finding nothing, Nwabuzo was still afraid and  
483 left in the ground. A week later, she feel ill and  
484 was rushed to the hospital where she  
485 remained for six months. She came back a  
486 week ago. The gin is a very good one (*Efuru*,  
487 9).

488           Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* shows how indigenous people of Oguta resisted the  
489 imposition of foreign alcohol brand. Reasons for this resistance include to protest  
490 against the spurious claim of the colonial authorities that the local gin is not of good  
491 quality or of inferior quality than their foreign gin, and that it did not taste like  
492 foreign alcohol brands; that foreign gin was not dangerous to health as they claimed  
493 and much more cheaper when compared to foreign alcohol brand. Chima Korieh  
494 summarizes the legislation against homemade gin as that of a game of cat and  
495 mouse. According to him:

496

497 The prohibition was contested on many  
498 grounds, but particularly because the use of  
499 alcohol had been woven deeply on the social  
500 fabric of the local society. Locally  
501 manufactured spirit was also a cheap  
502 alternative to imported spirit at a period of  
503 severe economic depression (2013: 183).

504  
505

#### IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

506 From the foregoing, we observe that there is nothing absolutely wrong with our  
507 wines, not even our distilled gin we call *kai-kai*. As African writers and scholars, it is  
508 our sacred and patriotic duty to decolonize the jaundiced impressions of our  
509 heritage portrayed in bad light by the Imperators. We have known culture and  
510 civilization before the advent of the so-called civilization of the west. It is because of  
511 their prejudice that they discredit all vestiges of our civilization. Achebe's Igbo  
512 national epic - *Things Fall Apart* has opened our eyes that Africa *zuru ka emee*; they  
513 have all the potentialities as the west who go to the space but for the almost four  
514 centuries' Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade they imposed on us.

515 Africa has drama, literature, religion, philosophy, history, language, name it.  
516 Gone were the days when Joseph Conrad, Joys Carry and the likes of them we read  
517 in francophone and lusophone (Portuguese) literatures of Africa and *Equiano's*  
518 *Narratives* vilified and diminished the status of Africans. "Africa is not fiction. Africa  
519 is people, real people" indeed (Achebe, 2009: 157). In the light of this, African palm  
520 wine (or up-wine) reported or documented in Achebe's national epic or Flora  
521 Nwapa's *Efuru*, has all the active ingredients rich enough to treat our ailments,  
522 rejuvenate our longevity. The palm wine adds to the glamour and conviviality of  
523 our social functions. Such occasions are embellished further with our performing

524 arts and oral literature. Equiano admits this fact and says: “We are almost a nation of  
525 dancers, musicians, and poets.” He adds descriptively: “Thus every great event such  
526 as a triumphant return from battle or other cause of public rejoicing is celebrated in  
527 public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion”  
528 (3). Equiano has not exaggerated their heritage as skilful dancers. Anyachonkeya’s  
529 (2012: 81) ethnographic study of Isseke, the Igbo roots of Ekwealuo, reveals this fact  
530 that they are great dancers. Anyachonkeya reports:

531  
532 The socio-cultural realities in the contemporary Isseke vindicate Olaude Ekwealuo’s  
533 claim. This assertion has made the immediate neighbours of Isseke to call  
534 them *Isseke o maa egwu, amaghi oru!* This statement means that the Isseke  
535 people are skilful in and known for rich dance (vocabulary) rather than work.  
536 But today, (Isseke people) claim that they are not only reputed for dance, but  
537 also for hard work to make their mark in life.

538 The traditional drink of palm wine is also a familiar and cultural drink in Flora  
539 Nwapa’s Oguta. During the colonial Nigeria, Oguta people were proactive and  
540 innovative enough to produce distilled gin, which compared favourably with the  
541 colonially imported gin, so much that the hawks became jealous that they refused to  
542 believe that a good thing could come from Nazareth, and so branded our local gin  
543 illicit and subsequently banned and prohibited its production. The colonial racists  
544 also discovered to their chagrin that the locally distilled gin could mar their trade  
545 and in the process frustrate the importation of their imported gin. But Oguta people  
546 remained undaunted and intensified efforts to produce their indigenous gin; they

547 went underground and continued its production, in spite of enormous sanction the  
548 invaders placed on the 'offenders.'

549         The palm wine and *kai-kai* proved efficacious to the lifestyle of the people of  
550 the Lake. The drinks improved and brightened the health and euphoria of the  
551 natives. We should add that the people that live by the river make tremendous use  
552 of intoxicating drinks. They love merry a lot that at weekends you see them in one  
553 popular social function or the other where alcoholic drinks a used a great deal. Those  
554 who have lived in Lagos, Oguta, Onitsha, Afikpo, Owerri, (as one of the essayists)  
555 will confirm this observation. The glorification of fun and pleasure informs the  
556 saying of the Owerri that rather than to die in pain; it's better to die in sweet and  
557 pleasure-seeking quest (*Kama ihe ufu g'egbu m, ihe uto toogbue m*)! And Ugwuta  
558 people at the wake of missionary evangelism were alleged to have approached their  
559 clergy and requested him to remove the sixth commandment for them to begin  
560 coming to church (*Fada wepuruu ani iwu n'ishi, ka ani biama uka*)!

561         And for Efuru in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, who has been befallen with childless  
562 marriage, she needs palm wine or the local gin to remain sober or keep life going. In  
563 effect, palm wine is a popular cultural heritage of Oguta-Igbo subculture, hence its  
564 documentation in the novel by the trail blazer feminist writer, who disrupted  
565 African literary scene that had been male dominated until her literary bang in *Efuru*;  
566 and to convince her reader the high regard Ugwuta people have for women in their  
567 subculture she names the novel by the female, a name that is thematically  
568 significant. Nwanyi Efuru means "a woman of infinite beauty and delicacy, cannot  
569 be lost (Oko, 1997: 33)" <sup>27</sup> In expanding the semiotic scope of the meaning of Nwanyi

570 Efuru, Oko cites Engels, who provides further insight into the name. Engels states:  
571 “There is loving heroism in the name Nwanyi Efuru which means a woman is not a  
572 loss. Female power is charm, resilience and benevolence. Woman’s witchery is  
573 valued over male brute force in a trading community 1997: 33).” Virtually all the  
574 names Nwapa has given in her novels are meaningful (an assertion Oko does not  
575 query) as they go to enhance the status of women, apparently because of the  
576 dominion of the Woman of the Lake in the affairs and world view of Ugwuta  
577 Ameshi.

578         The only novel that is close to her maiden novel is Elechi Amadi’s *The*  
579 *Concubine*, whose heroine and principal character is Ihuoma, and who shares similar  
580 descent with a water goddess. The antonymous relations they share include  
581 authorships of opposite genders, for while Amadi presents Ihuoma as having  
582 mystical kinship marriage with her husband of the water deity; Efuru is connected  
583 with the water goddess of Ogbuide (Oguta Lake), Uhamiri. Again, whereas Amadi  
584 wrote from the point of view of male chauvinist; Nwapa wrote as a feminist and  
585 pathfinder, venturing into the area of endeavour her female folk never thought of  
586 treading. Helen Chukwuma has stated something similar to our observation. She  
587 says:

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No novel before (1966, the revolutionary year Nwapa disrupted the African literary scene with her debut *Efuru*) was named after a woman. The closest was Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine....*” Nwapa’s *Efuru* published the same year as *The Concubine* was a beautiful woman as beautiful, desirable and industrious as Ihuoma and also dogged by the tragic

598 influence of the supernatural. Both women live  
599 in the home traditional environment. Efurū,  
600 however, differs from *The Concubine* and the  
601 other novels.... Nwapa's literary domain is  
602 women (115).

603  
604 that has been of inestimable credit to her, for by so doing she succeeds in the  
605 vindication of her female folk that they are people too with similar endowments  
606 with their male folk; thus disrupting and rewriting history and putting the records  
607 straight where her male counterparts may have misrepresented women or  
608 exaggerated or even diminished their natural roles as child rearing and house-  
609 wifing.

610 Nwapa is a committed writer; she is poised to rewrite and redefine the status  
611 and image of the woman in a male dominated Igbo society. Thus, she uses the  
612 benign Ugwuta subculture that engenders womanhood as a launching pad to  
613 advance the cause of woman in African society. Nwachukwu-Agbada (1997: 51)  
614 adopts this viewpoint and observes:

615 From the very beginning of each of her five  
616 novels, and two volumes of short stories,  
617 Nwapa seemed to be saying to her reader that  
618 her task as a writer was to redefine the image  
619 of the Igbo woman as evidenced in her early  
620 novels, and to underscore the fate of  
621 womanhood in modern Nigeria and Africa as  
622 is discerned in her later works.

623  
624 From the foregoing, we infer that Nwapa is committed to challenge the status  
625 quo of men in her novels, the advancement of femininity; and in line with Igbo  
626 adage, you must first of all be good from home before proceeding to the outside.  
627 Since her Ugwuta ambience accepts and accords befitting status to woman, as a  
628 result of the positive influence of Uhamiri. She "has employed her novels in the

629 emancipation and reconstruction of femininity – the identity of the female” That is  
630 why in *Efuru* and *One Is Enough*, Nwapa has crafted them with those goals in view,  
631 writing as “someone who insists on being read” to advance her thesis (Ekpa, 1997:  
632 154).

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634

## CONCLUSION

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636 This inquiry has revealed the burning issues in alcohol consumption in Africa; it  
637 has been in the domain of men, in terms of processing, consumption and control.  
638 African literature was pioneered by Oladuah Equiano and advanced as well as  
639 blossomed by Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa as female pacesetter, through their  
640 trail-blazing novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Efuru*, published in 1958 and 1966,  
641 respectively.

642 In the Equiano’s debut and autobiography, *Equiano’s Travels*, published in  
643 1789, he is able to capture and document the Igbo culture and its lifestyle, in its  
644 nativity. Scholars have attempted to look at the works of these literary legends from  
645 several perspectives and themes, but may probably not have enquired into the Igbo  
646 lifestyle in alcohol consumption and given it the desired academic attention as  
647 amply presented in the literary works of these literary paragons and pathfinders as  
648 the present study.

649 While Achebe looks at the traditional humane living of Igbo society in the  
650 hinterland during its pre-colonial period, especially in Part One of the Igbo national  
651 epic, Nwapa discusses the lifestyle and folkways of the Igbo Lake people of Oguta.

652 Nwapa presents a segment or subculture of this Igbo society which grants women  
 653 access and publicity to alcoholic drink; this is in sharp contrast with the rest of Igbo  
 654 society that restricts women from drinking the same liqueur at the profane gaze of  
 655 men, the male-dominated Igbo society. Thus, in the fictive milieu of her literary  
 656 works, Nwapa brings to our doorstep the social life of Ogbuide Lake people of  
 657 Oguta as their women enjoy unrestricted liberty and audacity to alcoholic drinks.

658 Also Equiano, through the travails and escapades of a slave victim, shows the  
 659 changing trends in alcohol drinking and culture especially showing the differences  
 660 in female drinking limits as placed by culture based on geography and climate and  
 661 those of men, whose liberties are unrestricted and tremendous. Today, the ethos of  
 662 Igbo society has changed remarkably, conferring women more liberties.

663 The paper therefore has succeeded to investigate these details using Achebe's  
 664 *Things Fall Apart* and Nwapa's *Efuru* as well as *Equiano's Travels* as our texts we  
 665 beam our searchlight on. The inquiry is approached via literary or library research to  
 666 corroborate our evidence, hence our conclusions.

667 .

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