

1 GENDER ISSUES IN ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION: A STUDY OF *EQUIANO'S*
2 *TRAVELS*, *NWAPA'S EFURU* AND *ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART*
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5

6 **Abstract**

7 This paper appraises gender issues in alcohol consumption in Africa, in terms of
8 processing and control using Oladuah 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 could capture and document the Igbo
14 lifestyle in its nativity. Scholars have attempted to look at the works of these literary
15 titans from several perspectives and themes but, to the best of the knowledge of
16 these researchers, they have not enquired into the Igbo lifestyle in alcohol
17 consumption and given it the desired academic attention as amply presented in the
18 literary works of these literary paragons and pathfinders, as the present study
19 intends to do. While Achebe looks at the traditional humane living of Igbo society in
20 the hinterland in its pre-colonial period, Nwapa discusses the lifestyle and folkways
21 of Igbo Lake people of Oguta. Nwapa presents a segment of this Igbo society, which
22 grants women access to alcoholic drink in the public, in sharp contrast to the rest of
23 Igbo society that restricts women from drinking the same liqueur. Likely, the ample
24 liberty and tremendous respect accorded to the female folk in Oguta Igbo subculture
25 may be responsible for this, coupled with the fact that the river deity of the Lake,
26 Uhamiri goddess, may have provided further evidence to the improved status
27 accorded to women. Thus, Nwapa in the pages of her literary works, especially in
28 *Efuru* and *One Is Enough*, brings to our doorstep the lifestyle and folkways of
29 Ogbuide Lake people of Oguta, which enable women to enjoy this unrestricted
30 liberty of self-expression and audacious access to alcoholic drinks at the profane
31 gaze of men, as it was. Equiano, through his travails and escapades of slavery, shows
32 the changing trends in alcohol drinking and culture especially the differences in
33 female drinking cultures based on geography and climate. Today, the ethos of Igbo
34 society has changed remarkably. The paper seeks to investigate these details using
35 Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Nwapa's *Efuru* as well as *Equiano's Travels*, our texts
36 of focus. The inquiry is essentially literary or library research.
37

38 **Introduction**

39
40 Staying together with peers of cognate age groups as leisure activity at a rich man's
41 reception room, the Igbo people call *Obi* or *Obiezi*, or at a village square where
42 communal matters are deliberated upon, is customary. This practice normally takes
43 place when yams, the king of crops, have been planted or entered inside the ground
44 waiting harvesting. So there is less work to do in the farm or rigorous roles
45 performed by men. The dominant edibles popular for consumption at such
46 gathering are kola nuts and palm wine, in addition to maize and pear, *ube* fruit,
47 which is usually munched together with maize. It is the customary practice of the

48 Igbo. In their folkways, there are some commissions which when breached result in
49 some sanction meted out to the offender. On folkways, *The Penguin Dictionary of*
50 *Sociology* (2000: 138) states: "This concept ...describes everyday activities within a
51 small-scale society which have become established and are socially sanctioned.
52 Folkways differ from MORES in that they are less severely sanctioned and are not
53 abstract principles."

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

64 Evidence of the popularity and seeming sacredness of Igbo traditional wine
65 and its consumption in a public place or where men are gathered is documented
66 thus by Anyachonkeya (2006: 63). Anyachonkeya, whose hometown is Omuma,
67 immediate neighbours of Equiano's Isseke and Nwapa's Oguta, says:

68 In a gathering,...wine must be served by the youngest (male) in the audience. The
69 wine must be served according to seniority, in age, and title-holding or initiation.
70 Titleholders, initiates into Ozo, Nze, Chieftaincy, and others and those who have
71 honoured their dead fathers in funeral and memorial ceremonies enjoy recognition,
72 while those who have not these privileges do not "talk aloud" in such gatherings
73 where wine is served. In the Equiano's debut and autobiography, *Equiano's Travels*,
74 published in 1789, he is able to capture and document the Igbo culture and its
75 lifestyle, in its nativity. Scholars have attempted to look at the works of these literary
76 legends from several perspectives and themes, but may probably not have enquired
77 into the Igbo lifestyle in alcohol consumption and given it the desired academic
78 attention as amply presented in the literary works of these literary paragons and
79 pathfinders as the present study. The traditional humane living of Igbo society in the
80 hinterland during its pre-colonial period, especially in Part One of the Igbo national
81 epic, *Nwapa* discusses the lifestyle and folkways of the Igbo Lake people of Oguta.

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83 Anyachonkeya elucidates further:

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

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

97 Moderate drinking was part of the Igbo traditional humane living. However,
98 such intoxicants as rum, beer, gin and spirits accompanied Trans-Atlantic slave trade
99 and colonialism into Igbo land. But brewing historically dates back to Egyptian
100 Empire, the world's cradle of civilisation. Osiris was the god of wine. By 1690,
101 England passed an Act of Parliament legalising the distillation and consumption of
102 Brandy and spirits from corn. By 1736, it was recorded that about one and half
103 million people drank over 18 million gallons of gin. Thus, there was legislation
104 restraining excessive consumption of intoxicating liquor, because of the harmful
105 effects of alcohol. The legislation was made to reduce the sale of gin by increasing
106 taxation (Hanson, 2011).

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

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

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119 **EEQUIANO'S NARRATIVES: THE IGBO AND EXTERNAL ALCOHOL**
120 **INFLUENCE**

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122 Equiano since 1789 informs us of his experience with alcohol on board slave ship as a
123 slave to the New World. He reminisces:

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

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

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

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

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

By implication, therefore, the traditional Igbo society did not accommodate drunkards, but admits moderate drinking to spice up life. In any case, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveals Igbo drinking culture as well as gender sensitivity that surrounds alcohol intake. In his account, men always drink two or three horns before inviting the womenfolk. The account has it that Nwakibie invited his eldest wife Anasi who took a horn from the husband, knelt down and drank a little and other wives followed suit based on age and status. Authorial voice of the novel reveals:

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

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

Even though they were formed by oral storytelling both men to have their contributions in written stories, Equiano in the story of his personal life and Achebe in fiction. Both men also use their narratives not only to explore personal and fictive experiences but also to recreate their societies and culture with care and integrity and indirectly, to help rehabilitate the image and the black world under attack by anti-Black writers and philosophers (Obiechina, 1996: 31).

Alcohol consumption in the Igbo days of Equiano was in moderate proportion compared to contemporary Igbo society. The overall use of alcohol in

Comment [U1]: Is this the same as Anansi?
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185 Igbo culture varied especially in pre-colonial times. In most cases, alcohol played a
186 significant role in the sexual satisfaction of newly married couples. It acts as catalyst
187 to overall libidinal performance. It makes mortal man sober so much that a drunken
188 fellow or one that has taken it in immoderate quantity depending on his
189 constitution, voluntarily tells you everything (the truth). That is why the father of
190 one the authors of this essay used to say that when the consumed water you don't
191 tell the truth, but after consuming a good deal of alcohol, you tell the truth!

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

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198 Everybody agreed that Igwelo should drink the dregs. He accepted the half full horn
199 from his brother and drank it. As Idigo had said, Igwelo had a job in hand because he
200 had married first wife a month or two before. They think-thought dregs of palm wine
201 were supposed to be good for men who were going into their wives (*TFA*, Chapter.
202 Three, 21).

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

207 That evening, Efuru complained that her breasts were not full. They were getting
208 dry. She was afraid her baby might die of starvation if there was no milk in her
209 breast. Ajanapu was sent for at once, it is simple when I had my first baby, the same
210 thing happened to me. You have to drink plenty of palm wine (*Efuru*, 1966
211 :1966:33).

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

223 It has been recorded also that market days, festivals and activities during
224 burial ceremonies, at times, are when the effects of drinking are more evident
225 (Basden, 1921: 125).¹¹ Nevertheless, the use of alcohol in pre-colonial African society
226 has been summarised to be closely linked with the economic and social events of the
227 village such as harvest celebrations (such as new yam festival), family feasts and
228 business agreements (Babor, 1986: 125). Let us come to the present and find out how
229 Nwapa captures alcohol consumption in Oguta; but before then, let us first get
230 acquainted with her background.

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233 FLORA NWAPA AND OGUTA COUNTRY HOME

234 Flora Nwapa was born at Oguta (pronounced **Ugwuta**, by the indigenous
235 people of the town) in Imo State of Nigeria on 13 January 1931. She went to the
236 following educational institutions, where she obtained her academic certificates:
237 C.M.S Central School, Lagos, 1936-1944; Elenwa Girls' Secondary School, Port
238 Harcourt, Rivers State, 1945-1948; C.M.S Girls School, Lagos, 1949-1950; University
239 College, Ibadan, 1955-1957 and obtained B.A. degree (London). She also holds a
240 diploma in Education from the University of Edinburgh, 1957-1958. She is the first
241 Nigerian female novelist and publisher, (for she owned Tana Press, Enugu) and
242 held numerous posts, such as Woman Education Officer (Queen's School, Enugu),
243 1958-1962; Assistant Registrar (Public Relations), University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos,
244 1962-1967 and Commissioner in the defunct East Central State during Ukpabi
245 Asika Administration, 1970-1975, (Umeh, 1971: 272), as well as served as a Professor
246 of Comparative Literature at the University of Maiduguri.

247 She married Gogo Nwakuche at the wake of the Nigerian Civil War in August
248 1967. They had two children from the union, namely, Uzoma and Amede; but before
249 this period, she gave birth to Ejine Olga Nzeribe to Gogo Nzeribe, a charismatic
250 union leader but they did not, however, marry (Umeh, 1971: 272).

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

253 Flora Nwapa aided the Biafran war efforts in various capacities and after the conflict
254 was over continued her service to her people in the Ministry of Health and Social
255 Welfare, the Ministry of Lands, Survey and Urban Development, and the Ministry of
256 Establishment. She is remembered for her bold efforts at reconstructing many
257 institutions that had been destroyed during the Nigerian-Biafran war.

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259 In her place of birth Oguta, Flora Nwapa was paramount. She contributed to
260 the development of her community a great deal. In his book entitled *A Short Cultural*
261 *History of Oguta*, Ndupu observes that: "she attracted the Government General
262 Hospital to Oguta, the pontoon and "M.V Chinyere Boat", Oguta Motel and Golf
263 Course, when she was in office" (2001: 277). Oguta General Hospital was one of the
264 best government-owned hospitals in the defunct Eastern Region during that period,
265 in terms of the quality of staff, infrastructure and work efficiency.

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267 A BRIEF LOOK AT OGUTA IGBO SUBCULTURE AND STATUS ACCORDED 268 TO WOMEN

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

275 A careful reading of Nwapa's works will reveal that women and their affairs
276 are a dominant theme in her works. This is so because Oguta people seem to value

277 women more than they do of men. The gender superiority in favour of men enjoyed
278 in the rest of Igbo society does not much apply. The water deity of Ogbugide (Oguta
279 Lake), called *Uhamiri*, is a woman. The people revere this goddess tremendously.
280 There is no wonder that Nwapa treats this deity with inestimable reverence,
281 especially when she has the conviction that her inspiration or muse as a writer comes
282 from Uhamiri. Again, Nwapa's natal home, where her parents lived, is beside the
283 Lake, an edifice of their country home, the parents named *Erimeagwuagwu*, meaning
284 inexhaustible treasure; apparently a gift and memento from Uhamiri water goddess.

285 Owing to the pleasant status women enjoy in Oguta, the people are proud
286 and happy of their exploits in western civilisation. The Oguta people will proudly
287 reel out families in Oguta that are achievers – the Iyasaras', the Nwapas', the HPO
288 Udoms', alias *Ogbuagu, Oshiji, Damanze, Ezeoneoruru*, (the two-time NPP Chairman in
289 the Old Imo State and the founder and proprietor of Trinity High School and Obiako
290 Memorial Commercial School, Oguta), the Nzimiros', the Okwuosas', etc, etc. They
291 will tell you that the 1st woman medical doctor was Priscilla Nzimiro, whose name
292 Priscilla Memorial Grammar School, Oguta, bears; the feats of Flora Nwapa as the 1st
293 female novelist in Nigeria, the General Hospital, and others she attracted to Oguta as
294 well as civil and public service positions she held, and lots more. The people will
295 equally tell you of Justice Ifunanya Udom-Azogu, as among the earliest female
296 Judges in Igbo land, and the only female student that passed through Trinity High
297 School, Oguta, an Old Girl in a Boys' school!

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

303 It is of interest to observe that when Oguta fell to the Vandals, (the name
304 Biafran soldiers called the Federal army), a spell of less than one week, the Ugwuta
305 people took refuge at Omuma, where he hails from. We restate that their refugee
306 stay at Omuma was brief, not more than one week, because the General of the
307 People's Army, led Biafran troops, who routed the Vandals. Not a single soul of the
308 Vandals survived, with their carcasses littering, en mass, on the Lake. The gun boast
309 of the invaders was decimated. With this superlative victory, Ojukwu ordered
310 Ugwuta people to return to their ancestral land until the sad capitulation of Biafra in
311 1970. He is also of the same Oru macro clan with Oguta. So in this study, Oguta is
312 used interchangeably with Ugwuta Ameshi, for they mean one and the same thing
313 and name.

314 Obododimma Oha, a kinsman of one of the authors, who comes from another
315 Oru community has also done a study on Nwapa. He corroborates our assertion on
316 the appreciable status women enjoy in Oguta; the natal home of Nwapa; and other
317 cognate details. He states: "Flora Nwapa's parents' house is by Ugwuta...Lake. Its
318 location by the Lake seems to suggest something about the natural and supernatural
319 inclinations of the great house which...is right inside the famous Erime Agwu Agwu
320 Estate..." On the muse that gives Flora Nwapa her writing inspiration,
321 Obododimma Oha adds: "One of the elements of such inspiration is the female

322 spirit, Uhamiri, who, in Ugwuta cosmology, is a giver of wealth and protector of
323 Ugwuta.”

324 He throws more light, as one of the authors rightly observed earlier, on the
325 privilege accorded to women, which stemmed from the influence of the female deity
326 of Uhamiri. He notes

327 Uhamiri has many devotees in Ugwuta, and her worship has very much affected a
328 great part of Ugwuta culture and spiritual life. The respect accorded to the Woman
329 of the Lake has also coincided with the feminisation of some aspects of Ugwuta
330 culture and valuation of femininity itself. It is also possible that respect for the deity
331 who is a *Woman* has some direct links with this feminisation process in terms of
332 making men adjust their thinking about womanhood positively since they have
333 experienced a woman's spiritual power. Since the woman of the Lake is believed to
334 be ruling Ugwuta at the spiritual realm, there is an adjustment to femininity as a
335 sustaining force in the culture. Indeed, Ugwuta women are allowed to hold the
336 Ogbuefi title, and such titled women are highly respected, in spite of the dominance
337 of masculinity in the culture (175, 176).

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339 Our exposition shades some light why the female gender enjoys a privileged
340 position in Oguta subculture especially when it comes to access to alcohol in the
341 public. We agree with Obodimma Oha, who speculates the rationale for Nwapa's
342 disposition and motivation in her frequent reference to Uhamiri, "the Woman of the
343 Lake" in her literary publications, which "could therefore be properly understood
344 against the background of the cognitive position of the image in the culture and
345 religious tradition of Ugwuta....(177)" Our search, though, continues.

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347 **GIN DISTILLATION IN FLORA NWAPA'S *EFURU***

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

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

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

367 You will like the gin. My daughter cooks it on the farm. When she finishes, she puts
368 it in a canoe in the dead of the night and paddles to the town. When they come I
369 hide them at the back of my house and no policeman will see it. She filled the *ganashi*
370 and gave it to her visitor. Efuru's mother-in-law drank in a gulp and made a noise
371 with her mouth. The woman filled with the same *ganashi* and drank the gin in a gulp
372 also. It is a good gin. We shall continue cooking our gin. I do not see the difference
373 between it and the gin sold in special bottles in the shops (*Efuru*, 1966: 13).

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

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

383 Serves the police right; Efuru said happily. Why the Government does not allow us
384 to drink our home-made gin, I do not know. The Government is strange. Does it
385 know that it cannot stop us from cooking gin, then the white man's gin and his
386 schnapps should be sold cheap. We sell our gin two shillings or something two
387 shillings and six pence a bottle, and they sell their gin and schnapps for many
388 shillings (*Efuru*, 56).

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

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

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

412 The prohibition was contested on many grounds, but particularly because the use of
413 alcohol had been woven deeply on the social fabric of the local society. Locally
414 manufactured spirit was also a cheap alternative to imported spirit at a period of
415 severe economic depression (2013: 183).

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417 IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

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

428 Africa has drama, literature, religion, philosophy, history, ~~language and~~
429 ~~language~~, name it. Gone were the days when Joseph Conrad, Joys Carry and the
430 likes of them we read in francophone and lusophone (Portuguese) literatures of
431 Africa and *Equiano's Narratives* vilified and diminished the status of Africans.
432 "Africa is not fiction. Africa ~~is people~~ is people, real people" indeed (Achebe, 2009:
433 157). In the light of this, African palm wine (or up-wine) reported or documented in
434 ~~Achebe's national~~ Achebe's national epic or Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, has all the active
435 ingredients rich enough to treat our ailments, ~~rejuvenate~~ rejuvenate our
436 longevity. The palm wine adds to the glamour and conviviality of our social
437 functions. Such occasions are embellished further with our performing arts and oral
438 literature. Equiano admits this fact and says: "We are almost a nation of dancers,
439 musicians, and poets."
440 He adds descriptively: "Thus every great event such as a
441 triumphant return from battle or other cause of public rejoicing is celebrated in
442 public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion"
443 (3). Equiano has not exaggerated their heritage as skilful dancers. Anyachonkeya's
444 (2012: 81) ethnographic study of Isseke, the Igbo roots of Ekwealuo, reveals this fact
445 that they are ~~great dancers~~ great dancers. Anyachonkeya reports The socio-cultural
446 realities in the contemporary Isseke vindicate Olaude Ekwealuo's claim. This
447 assertion has made the immediate neighbours of Isseke to call them *Isseke o maa*
448 *egwu, amaghi oru!* This statement means that the Isseke people are skilful in and
449 known for rich dance (vocabulary) rather than work. But today, (Isseke people)
450 claim that they are not only reputed for dance, but also for hard work to make their
451 mark in life.

451 The traditional drink of palm wine is also a familiar and cultural drink in Flora
452 Nwapa's Oguta. During colonial Nigeria, Oguta people were proactive and
453 innovative enough to produce distilled gin, which compared favourably with the
454 colonially imported gin, so much that the hawks became jealous that they refused to
455 believe that a good thing could come from Nazareth, and so branded our local gin
456 illicit and subsequently banned and prohibited its production. The colonial racists
457 also discovered to their chagrin that the locally distilled gin could mar their trade

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458 and in the process frustrate the importation of their imported gin. But Oguta people
459 remained undaunted and intensified efforts to produce their indigenous gin; they
460 went underground and continued its production, in spite of enormous sanction the
461 invaders placed on the 'offenders.'

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

474 And for Efuru in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, who has been befallen with childless
475 marriage, she needs palm wine or the local gin to remain sober or keep life going. In
476 effect, palm wine is a popular cultural heritage of Oguta-Igbo subculture, hence its
477 documentation in the novel by the trail blazer feminist writer, who disrupted
478 African literary scene that had been male-dominated until her literary bang in *Efuru*;
479 and to convince her reader the high regard Ugwuta people have for women in their
480 subculture she names the novel by the female, a name that is thematically
481 significant. Nwanyi Efuru means "a woman of infinite beauty and delicacy, cannot
482 be lost (Oko, 1997: 33)" ²⁷ Hin expanding the semiotic scope of the meaning of
483 Nwanyi Efuru, Oko cites Engels, who provides further insight into the name. Engels
484 states: "There is loving heroism in the name Nwanyi Efuru which means a woman is
485 not a loss. Female power is charm, resilience and benevolence. Woman's witchery is
486 valued over male brute force in a trading community 1997: 33." Virtually all the
487 names Nwapa has given in her novels are meaningful (an assertion Oko does not
488 query) as they go to enhance the status of women, apparently because of the
489 dominion of the Woman of the Lake in the affairs and world view of Ugwuta
490 Ameshi.

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

501 No novel before (1966, the revolutionary year Nwapa disrupted the African literary
502 scene with her debut *Efuru*) was named after a woman. The closest was Elechi
503 Amadi's *The Concubine*.... " Nwapa's *Efuru* published the same year as *The*

504 *Concubine* was a beautiful woman as beautiful, desirable and industrious as Ihuoma
505 and also dogged by the tragic influence of the supernatural. Both women live in the
506 home traditional environment. Efuru, however, differs from *The Concubine* and the
507 other novels.... Nwapa's literary domain is women (115).

508
509 that has been of inestimable credit to her, for by so doing she succeeds in the
510 vindication of her female folk that they are people too with similar endowments
511 with their male folk; thus disrupting and rewriting history and putting the records
512 straight where her male counterparts may ~~have misrepresented~~ have misrepresented
513 women or exaggerated or even diminished their natural roles as child rearing and
514 house-wifing.

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

520 From the very beginning of each of her five novels, and two volumes of short stories,
521 Nwapa seemed to be saying to her reader that her task as a writer was to redefine
522 the image of the Igbo woman as evidenced in her early novels, and to underscore
523 the fate of womanhood in modern Nigeria and Africa as is discerned in her later
524 works.

525
526 From the foregoing, we infer that Nwapa is committed to challenge the status
527 quo of men in her novels, the advancement of femininity; and in line with Igbo
528 adage, you must first of all be good from home before proceeding to the outside.
529 Since her Ugwuta ambience accepts and accords befitting status to woman, as a
530 result of the positive influence of Uhamiri. She "has employed her novels in the
531 emancipation and reconstruction of femininity – the identity of the female" That is
532 why in *Efuru* and *One Is Enough*, Nwapa has crafted them with those goals in view,
533 writing as "someone who insists on being read" to advance her thesis (Ekpa, 1997:
534 154).

535 536 CONCLUSION

537
538 This inquiry has revealed the burning issues in alcohol consumption in Africa; it has
539 been in the domain of men, in terms of processing, consumption and control. African
540 literature was pioneered by Oladuah Equiano and advanced as well as blossomed by
541 Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa as female pacesetter, through their trail-blazing
542 novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Efuru*, published in 1958 and 1966, respectively. Nwapa
543 presents a segment or subculture of this Igbo society which grants women access
544 and publicity to alcoholic drink; this is in sharp contrast with the rest of Igbo society
545 that restricts women from drinking the same liqueur at the profane gaze of men, the
546 male-dominated Igbo society. Also, Equiano, through the travails and escapades of a
547 slave victim, shows the changing trends in alcohol drinking and culture especially
548 showing the differences in female drinking limits as placed by a culture based on
549 geography and climate and those of men, whose liberties are unrestricted and

550 tremendous. Today, the ethos of Igbo society has changed remarkably, conferring
551 women more liberties. The paper, therefore, has succeeded to investigate these
552 details using Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Nwapa's *Efuru* as well as *Equiano's*
553 *Travels* as our texts we beam our searchlight on. The inquiry is approached via
554 literary or library research to corroborate our evidence, hence our conclusions.
555

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