

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 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 can 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.

38 **Introduction**

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 *nkwuenu*); 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.

82
83 Anyachonkeya elucidates further:

84
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....

92

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 a
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).

117 118 119 **EEQUIANO'S NARRATIVES: THE IGBO AND EXTERNAL ALCOHOL** 120 **INFLUENCE**

121
122 Equiano since 1789 informs us of his experience with alcohol on board slaveship 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).

130
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.

139

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

144

145

146

147

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

149

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

158 When everyone had drunk two or three horns, Nwakibie sent for his wives. Some of
159 them were not at home and only four came in. "Is Anansi not in?" he asked them.
160 They said she was coming. Anasi was the first wife and the others could not drink
161 before her, and so they stood waiting. Anasi was a middle-aged woman, tall and
162 strongly built. There was an authority in her bearing and she looked every inch the
163 ruler of the womenfolk in a large and prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her
164 husband's titles, which the first wife alone could wear. She walked up to her
165 husband and accepted the horn from him. She then went down on one knee, drank a
166 little and handed back the horn. She rose, called him by his name and went back to
167 her hut. The other wives drank in the same way, in their proper order, and went
168 away. The men then continued their drinking and talking (*TFA*, Chapter Three, 18,
169 19).

170

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

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

182

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

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 one
190 the authors of this essay used to say that when the consumed water you don't tell the
191 truth, but after consuming a good deal of alcohol, you tell the truth!

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

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

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

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

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

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

229

230 **FLORA NWAPA AND OGUTA COUNTRY HOME**

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

244 She married Gogo Nwakuche at the wake of the Nigerian Civil War in August
245 1967. They had two children from the union, namely, Uzoma and Amede; but before
246 this period, she gave birth to Ejine Olga Nzeribe to Gogo Nzeribe, a charismatic
247 union leader but they did not, however, marry (Umeh, 1971: 272).

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

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

255

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

263

264 **A BRIEF LOOK AT OGUTA IGBO SUBCULTURE AND STATUS ACCORDED** 265 **TO WOMEN**

266

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

272 A careful reading of Nwapa's works will reveal that women and their affairs
273 are a dominant theme in her works. This is so because Oguta people seem to value
274 women more than they do of men. The gender superiority in favour of men enjoyed
275 in the rest of Igbo society does not much apply. The water deity of Ogbuide (Oguta
276 Lake), called *Uhamiri*, is a woman. The people revere this goddess tremendously.

277 There is no wonder that Nwapa treats this deity with inestimable reverence,
278 especially when she has the conviction that her inspiration or muse as a writer comes
279 from Uhamiri. Again, Nwapa's natal home, where her parents lived, is beside the
280 Lake, an edifice of their country home, the parents named *Erimeagwuagwu*, meaning
281 inexhaustible treasure; apparently a gift and memento from Uhamiri water goddess.

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

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

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

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

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

335

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

343

344 GIN DISTILLATION IN FLORA NWAPA'S *EFURU*

345

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

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

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

364 You will like the gin. My daughter cooks it on the farm. When she finishes, she puts
365 it in a canoe in the dead of the night and paddles to the town. When they come I
366 hide them at the back of my house and no policeman will see it. She filled the *ganashi*

367 and gave it to her visitor. Efuru's mother-in-law drank in a gulp and made a noise
368 with her mouth. The woman filled with the same *ganashi* and drank the gin in a gulp
369 also. It is a good gin. We shall continue cooking our gin. I do not see the difference
370 between it and the gin sold in special bottles in the shops (*Efuru*, 1966: 13).

371

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

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

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

386

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

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

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

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

413

414 IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

415

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

425

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

446

447 The traditional drink of palm wine is also a familiar and cultural drink in Flora
448 Nwapa's Oguta. During colonial Nigeria, Oguta people were proactive and
449 innovative enough to produce distilled gin, which compared favourably with the
450 colonially imported gin, so much that the hawks became jealous that they refused to
451 believe that a good thing could come from Nazareth, and so branded our local gin
452 illicit and subsequently banned and prohibited its production. The colonial racists
453 also discovered to their chagrin that the locally distilled gin could mar their trade
454 and in the process frustrate the importation of their imported gin. But Oguta people
455 remained undaunted and intensified efforts to produce their indigenous gin; they
456 went underground and continued its production, in spite of enormous sanction the
457 invaders placed on the 'offenders.'

457

458 The palm wine and *kai-kai* proved efficacious to the lifestyle of the people of
the Lake. The drinks improved and brightened the health and euphoria of the

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

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

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

496 No novel before (1966, the revolutionary year Nwapa disrupted the African literary
497 scene with her debut *Efuru*) was named after a woman. The closest was Elechi
498 Amadi's *The Concubine*.... " Nwapa's *Efuru* published the same year as *The*
499 *Concubine* was a beautiful woman as beautiful, desirable and industrious as Ihuoma
500 and also dogged by the tragic influence of the supernatural. Both women live in the
501 home traditional environment. Efuru, however, differs from *The Concubine* and the
502 other novels.... Nwapa's literary domain is women (115).

503

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

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

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

520

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

530

531 CONCLUSION

532

533 This inquiry has revealed the burning issues in alcohol consumption in Africa; it has
534 been in the domain of men, in terms of processing, consumption and control. African
535 literature was pioneered by Oladuah Equiano and advanced as well as blossomed by
536 Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa as female pacesetter, through their trail-blazing
537 novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Efuru*, published in 1958 and 1966, respectively. Nwapa
538 presents a segment or subculture of this Igbo society which grants women access
539 and publicity to alcoholic drink; this is in sharp contrast with the rest of Igbo society
540 that restricts women from drinking the same liqueur at the profane gaze of men, the
541 male-dominated Igbo society. Also, Equiano, through the travails and escapades of a
542 slave victim, shows the changing trends in alcohol drinking and culture especially
543 showing the differences in female drinking limits as placed by a culture based on
544 geography and climate and those of men, whose liberties are unrestricted and
545 tremendous. Today, the ethos of Igbo society has changed remarkably, conferring
546 women more liberties. The paper, therefore, has succeeded to investigate these
547 details using Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Nwapa's *Efuru* as well as *Equiano's*
548 *Travels* as our texts we beam our searchlight on. The inquiry is approached via
549 literary or library research to corroborate our evidence, hence our conclusions.

550

551 **REFERENCES**

552

553 Abergrombie, Nicholas, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner. (2000). *The Penguin*
554 *Dictionary of Sociology*. London: The Penguin Group.

555 Achebe, Chinua. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

556(*The Education Of A British-Protected Child: Essays*). New York: Alfred A.
557 Knopf.

558(2012). *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: The
559 Penguin

560 Books.

561 Agbada-Nwachukwu, J. O. J. (1997). "Stability and Change in Flora Nwapa's
562 Femnitude." In *Calabar Studies in African literature: Flora Nwapa, Critical perspectives*.

563 By Eko, Ebele, Julius Ogu and Emelia Oko. Eds. Calabar: University of Calabar
564 Press: (51-65).

565

566 Anyachonkeya, Ngozi. (2006). *Omuma Heritage: A Literary Approach To The Historical,*
567 *Anthropological And Sociological Investigation Of A People*, Owerri: Chukwuemeka
568 Printers and Publishers.

569(2011). A Discourse Analysis Of The Linguistic And Ethnographic Heritage
570 Of Equiano's World in *Oladuah Equiano (Olu-uda Ekwuonuo in Contemporary Igbo*

571 *studies Discourse*. By Iwuchukwu, B. Chima and Uche U. Okonkwo. Eds. Lagos:
572 Grace Anasiudu Press: (67-88).

573 Babor, T. I. (1986). *Alcohol, Customs and Rituals*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

574 Chukwuma, Helen. (1994). "Flora Nwapa is different." In *Feminism in African*
575 *literature: Essays*. By Chukwuma Helen. Ed. Enugu: New Generation Books: (115-

576 130).

577 Curtin, Philip. (1968) "The Early Travels of Oladuah Equiano." In *Africa remembered*.

578 Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin.

579 Basden, G. T. (1966). *Among Ibos of Nigeria*. London: Frankcass and Co Ltd.

580 Ekpa, Anthonia Akpabio. (1997). "Discourse, language and the reconstruction of
581 femininity in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and *One is Enough*.." In *Calabar studies in African*

582 *literature: Flora Nwapa, Critical perspectives*. By Eko, Ebele, Julius Ogu and Emelia
583 Oko. Eds. Calabar: University of Calabar Press: (153-174).

584 *Equiano, Oladuah. (1968) "The early travels of Oladuah Equiano." In Philip Curtin
585 (ed). *Africa remembered*. By Curtin, Philip. Ed. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin

586 Press.(pages where the article appears)?????

587 Equiano, Oladuah. (1996). *Equiano's travels*. Essex: Heinemann Educational Books.

588 Hanson, D. J. *History of alcohol and drinking in (sic) the world,*

589 <http://ww.2.potodam.edu/hansod/controversies/1114796842.htm> accessed 13 may
590 2011

591 Korieh, C.J. (2003). "Alcohol And Empire: Illicit Gin Prohibition And Control In
592 Eastern Nigeria." In *African economic history, No: 31*.

593(2013). *The Way We Lived: Essays On Nigerian History, Gender And Society*.

594 NewJersey: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing.

595

596 NAE (Hereafter National Archives Enugu) RIVPROF 2/1/16 File no. C.68 Vol.2 (July
597 23, 1936) 'Illicit Distillation' Acting Senior Commissioner of Police, Owerri Province
598 to the Resident, Owerri Province.
599(27 October, 1940). NAE RIVPROF 2/1/17 District Office Degema to the
600 Senior President Owerri Province.
601 Ndupu, A. O. (2001). *A Short Cultural History of Oguta*. Enugu: Snaap Publishers.
602 Northrup, David. (1978). *Trade without rulers: Pre colonial economic development in*
603 *South Eastern Nigeria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
604 Nwapa, Flora. (1966). *Efuru*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
605 Obiechinna, Emmanuel. (1994) "Ncheteka: The story, memory and continuity in Igbo
606 culture." *Ahiajoku lecture*. Owerri: Ministry of Information, Culture, Youths and
607 Sports.
608 Oha, Obododimma. (1997) ."Flora Nwapa and the semiotic of the Woman of the
609 lake." In *Calabar studies in African literature: Flora Nwapa, Critical perspectives*. By Eko,
610 Ebele, Julius Ogu and Emelia Oko. Eds. Calabar: University of Calabar Press: (175-
611 190).
612 Okigbo, Christopher. (1975). *Labyrinths: Poems*. London: Heinemann Educational
613 Books, Ltd.
614 Oko, Emelia. (1997). "Women, The Self-Celebrating Heroine: The Novels Of Flora
615 Nwapa." In *Calabar studies in African literature: Flora Nwapa, Critical perspectives*. By
616 Eko, Ebele, Julius Ogu and Emelia Oko. Eds. Calabar: University of Calabar Press:
617 (33-50).
618 Okonkwo, Uche Uwaezuoke. (2013) "A Socio-Economic History of Alcohol in
619 Southeastern Nigeria Since 1890". PhD Thesis University of Lagos.
620 Umeh, Marie. (2005). "'Flora Nwapa: The traveler'" in *Esi Sutherland-Addy and*
621 *Aminata*
622 *Diaw*.2005 .In *Women writing Africa: West Africa and the Sahel*. New York: The Feminist
623 Press