



# **Gender Issues in Alcohol Consumption: A Study of Equiano's Travels, Nwapa's *Efuru* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart***

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper appraises gender issues in alcohol consumption in Africa, in terms of processing and control using Oludah Equiano's autobiography- *Equiano's Travels*, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. These three literary texts are thoughtfully chosen for the study, in view of the fact that Equiano pioneered African literature, and advanced by Flora Nwapa and Chinua Achebe in their debut, *Efuru* and *Things Fall Apart*, published in 1966 and 1958, respectively. In *Equiano's Travels*, published in 1789, Equiano capture and document the Igbo lifestyle in its nativity. Scholars have attempted to look at the works of these literary titans from several perspectives and themes but, to the best of the knowledge of these researchers, they have not enquired into the Igbo lifestyle in alcohol consumption and given it the desired academic attention as amply presented in the literary works of these literary paragons and pathfinders, as the present study intends to do. While Achebe looks at the traditional humane living of Igbo society in the hinterland in its pre-colonial period, Nwapa discusses the lifestyle and folkways of Igbo Lake people of Oguta. Nwapa presents a segment of this Igbo society, which grants women access to alcoholic drink in the public, in sharp contrast to the rest of Igbo society that restricts women from drinking the same liqueur. Likely, the ample liberty and tremendous respect accorded to the female

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folk in Oguta Igbo subculture may be responsible for this, coupled with the fact that the river deity of the Lake, Uhamiri goddess, may have provided further evidence to the improved status accorded to women. Thus, Nwapa in the pages of her literary works, especially in *Efuru* and *One Is Enough*, brings to our doorstep the lifestyle and folkways of Ogbuide Lake people of Oguta, which enable women to enjoy this unrestricted liberty of self-expression and audacious access to alcoholic drinks at the profane gaze of men, as it was. Equiano, through his travails and escapades of slavery, shows the changing trends in alcohol drinking and culture especially the differences in female drinking cultures based on geography and climate. Today, the ethos of Igbo society has changed remarkably. The paper seeks to investigate these details using Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Nwapa's *Efuru* as well as *Equiano's Travels*, our texts of focus. The inquiry is essentially literary or library research.

*Keywords: Gender issues; alcohol consumption; self-expression; alcohol drinking.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is interested in the literary representations of alcohol consumption among women in Igbo societies from the pre-colonial era to the early post-independence period. It posits that the involvement of women in drinking in Oguta's public sphere has played a significant role in checkmating patriarchy. Furthermore, it appraises women alcohol consumption in Oguta in contrast to the rest of the Igbo society that restricts women from drinking the same liqueur. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* was published in 1966. Scholars have attempted to look at the works of this literary icon from several perspectives and themes but the angle of women alcohol consumption has not received the academic attention it deserves. The need to look at Flora's book beyond fiction is the focus of this paper. Existing scholarships about Oguta women, culture and society by Jell-Bahlsen [1] and Jell-Bahlsen [2] did not refer to alcohol consumption. This research explores how uniformity in the consumption of alcohol by males and females in Oguta has checkmated against the dominance of patriarchy as major decisions in Igbo society are taken while drinking. The study is essentially a literary critique or library research but the qualitative method of research has also been employed. Furthermore, the participant observation method has been used since the authors studied and hail from the same area/Igbo clan known as Oru.

Staying together with peers of cognate age groups as a leisure activity at a rich man's reception room, what the Igbo people call *Obi* or *Obiezi*, or at a village square where communal matters are deliberated upon, is customary. This practice normally takes place when yams, the king of crops, have been planted. At this time there is less work to do on the farm. The

dominant item for consumption at such gathering are kola nuts and palm wine, in addition to maize and pear, *ube* fruit, which is usually munched together with maize. It is the customary practice of the Igbo. In their folkways, there are some commissions which when breached result in some sanction meted out to the offender. On folkways, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* [3] states: "This concept ...describes everyday activities within a small-scale society which have become established and are socially sanctioned. Folkways differ from MORES in that they are less severely sanctioned and are not abstract principles."

The customary value attached to kola nut and palm wine is indeed great because each of these consumable items is not taken anyhow. There are cultural dicta that must be observed – the due process – before their consumption, or else the non-initiate fouls customary lore. Of course, the traditional wine is of two types, namely, palm wine and up-wine (the Igbo call it *Nkwuenu* or *nkwuelu*); the up-wine is the type Christopher Okigbo [4] mentions in his *Labyrinths*, which he describes as *yester upwine*; it tastes sweet and tastes bitter. That is (*Nkwu enu, otoro uto, onuru inu*). *Nkwuenu* is costlier and more expensive wine than palm wine. The popular one, though, is palm wine, documented in Olaudah *Equiano's Travels* and Nwapa's *Efuru*.

Evidence of the popularity and seeming sacredness of Igbo traditional wine and its consumption in a public place or where men are gathered is documented thus by Anyachonkeya [5]. Anyachonkeya, whose hometown is Omuma, immediate neighbours of Equiano's Isseke and Nwapa's Oguta, says:

In a gathering,...wine must be served by the youngest (male) in the audience. The wine must

be served according to seniority, in age, and title-holding or initiation. Titleholders, initiates into Ozo, Nze, Chieftaincy, and others and those who have honoured their dead fathers in funeral and memorial ceremonies enjoy recognition, while those who have not these privileges do not “talk aloud’ in such gatherings where wine is served.

Anyachonkeya elucidates further:

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

## 2. ALCOHOL DRINKING IN SELECTED CREATIVE WORKS

Customary imperatives on traditional wine consumption are numerous depending on the Igbo subculture. Some of the features of the imperatives are captured by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*; which confirms the values attached to traditional wine and the cultural demands in the people’s culture.

Moderate drinking was part of the Igbo traditional humane living. However, such intoxicants as rum, beer, gin, and spirits accompanied Trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism into Igbo land. However, brewing historically dates back to the Egyptian Empire, the world’s cradle of civilization. By 1690, England passed an Act of Parliament legalizing the distillation and consumption of Brandy and spirits from corn.

By 1736, it was recorded that about one and half a million people drank over 18 million gallons of gin. Thus, there was legislation restraining excessive consumption of intoxicating liquor, because of the harmful effects of alcohol. The legislation was made to reduce the sale of gin by increasing taxation [6].

The sailors who visited the coasts of Africa showed that they used gin to entice the native chiefs in exchange for slaves and probably because of its restriction in England. In the process, a dumping ground for a generation of drunkards was actualized [7]. This marks the

origin of alcohol use and consumption in large quantities into our area of study of the Igbo land. Basden [8] concurs to this fact and says: “the Ibos were not acquainted with any method of brewing intoxicating liquor. They never made use of corn or bananas for manufacturing beer or spirits. Their favourite drink was and still palm wine. This they extract from the tree, the common oil palm or the *ngwo* (raphiavinifera).”

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

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).

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

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.

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 drank two or three horns before inviting the womenfolk. The account has it that Nwakabie 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, Nwakabie 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 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 argues:

Even though they were formed by oral story telling both men 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 Igbo culture varied especially in pre-colonial times. In most cases, alcohol played significant role in sexual satisfaction of newly married couples. It acts as catalyst to overall libidinal performance. It makes mortal men sober so much that a drunken fellow voluntary tells you everything the truth. That is why the father of one the authors of this essay used to say that when consumed water you don't tell the truth, but after consuming a good deal of alcohol, you tell the truth!

Achebe recorded that the dregs of palm wine were the reserve of men with jobs at hand. In

other words, Achebe means that men who have just married new wives and desirous to have children drink the dregs of palm wine! Thus, the case of Igwelo, the eldest son of Nwakibie, confirms thus:

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

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

That evening, Efurū complained that her breasts were not full. In fact they were getting dry. She was afraid her baby might die of starvation if there was no milk in her breast. Ajanapu was sent for at once, it is simple when I had my first baby, the same thing happened to me. You have to drink plenty of palm wine [9].

The mild intoxicating nature of palm wine, especially newly tapped morning palm wine, leads to the mention of it that it is almost a physical impossibility to get drunk on fresh palm wine. It is important to note that alcohol in pre-colonial Igbo society assumed relevance in Igbo ritual practice. Such socio-cultural changes in Basden's view destroyed some quaint old customs. According to him, to be offered whiskey or German beer when paying a courtesy call on a native chief is an innovation greatly to be deplored, especially when compared with the old ceremony of sealing friendships by sharing kola nuts [8]. Equiano notes that pouring libation was part of the people's culture for departed relations and for presiding over the conduct of the living as well as guarding them against evil [10].

It has been recorded also that market days, festivals and activities during burial ceremonies, at times, are when the effects of drinking are more evident [8]. Nevertheless, the use of alcohol in pre-colonial African society has been summarized to be closely linked to the economic and social events of the village such as harvest celebrations like new yam festival, family feasts and business agreements [11].

### 3. FLORA NWAPA EFURU AND ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN OGUTA

Flora Nwapa was born in Oguta (pronounced Ugwuta, by the indigenous people of the town) in the Imo State of Nigeria on January 13, 1931. She is the first Nigerian female novelist and publisher, (for she owned Tana Press, Enugu) and held numerous posts, such as Woman Education Officer (Queen's School, Enugu), 1958-1962; Assistant Registrar (Public Relations), University of Lagos, 1962-1967 and Commissioner in the defunct East Central State during Ukpabi Asika Administration, 1970-1975, [12], as well as served as a Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. Chinua Achebe in his book *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, describes Flora Nwapa as follows:

Flora Nwapa aided the Biafran war efforts in various capacities and after the conflict was over continued her service to her people in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Lands, Survey and Urban Development, and the Ministry of Establishment. She is remembered for her bold efforts at reconstructing many institutions that had been destroyed during the Nigerian-Biafran war (2012:13).

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

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

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

people seem to value women more than they do of men. The gender superiority in favour of men enjoyed in the rest of Igbo society does not much apply here. The water deity of Ogbuide (Oguta Lake), called *Uhamiri*, is a woman. The people revere this goddess tremendously. It is no wonder that Nwapa treats this deity with inestimable reverence, especially when she has the conviction that her inspiration or muse as a writer comes from Uhamiri. Again, Nwapa's natal home, where her parents lived, is beside the Lake, an edifice of their country home, the parents named *Erimeagwuagwu*, meaning inexhaustible treasure; apparently a gift and memento from Uhamiri water goddess. Sabine acknowledged that: "Nwapa has throughout her oeuvre invoked the goddess, Ogbuide. In The Lake Goddess, she finally reemerges in her original glory. Her powers and mysteries shine, once again, to brighten women's path" [1].

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

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

Uhamiri has many devotees in Ugwuta, and her worship has very much affected a great part of Ugwuta culture and spiritual life. The respect accorded to the Woman of the Lake has also coincided with the feminization of some aspects of Ugwuta culture and valuation of femininity itself. It is also possible that respect for the deity who is a *Woman* has some direct links with this feminization process in terms of making men to adjust their thinking about womanhood positively, since they have experienced a woman's spiritual

power. Since the woman of the Lake is believed to be ruling Ugwuta at the spiritual realm, there is an adjustment to femininity as a sustaining force in the culture. Indeed, Ugwuta women are allowed to hold the Ogbuefi title, and such titled women are highly respected, in spite of the dominance of masculinity in the culture (Obododimma, 1977:175, 176).

Our exposition shades some light on why the female gender enjoys privileged position in Oguta subculture especially when it comes to access to alcohol in the public. We agree with Obodimma Oha, who speculates the rationale for Nwapa's disposition and motivation in her frequent reference to Uhamiri, "the Woman of the Lake" in her literary publications, which "could therefore be properly understood against the background of the cognitive position of the image in the culture and religious tradition of Ugwuta....(Obododimma,1977:177)

#### 4. GIN DISTILLATION IN FLORA NWAPA'S EFURU

At the dawn of colonial rule in Nigeria, there was an increase in the importation of alcohol brands at exorbitant prices. This prices made people resort to local gin distillation; what the Igbo people call the local gin *kai-kai*. David Northrup [13] examines the arrival of 'demon rum' beginning from 1677 at the ports of Calabar up to the nineteenth century at the end of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which according to him, promoted the underdevelopment of Africa.

As part of its response to the imposition of foreign alcohol brands, Oguta people, as captured by Flora Nwapa, were engaged in local alcohol distillation. Hence, the colonial government enacted a law declaring it illegal and prohibited its production or distillation. Flora Nwapa as a literary historian documented the spirited effort of Oguta people to resist colonial authorities from getting them arrested for distilling local gin they branded *illicit*. In page 13 of *Efuru*, Efuru's mother-in-law offers their visitors homemade gin thus:

You will like the gin. My daughter cooks it in the farm. When she finishes, she puts it in a canoe in the dead of the night and paddles to the town. When they come I hide them at the back of my house and no policeman will see it. She filled the *ganashi* and gave it to her visitor. Efuru's mother-in-law drank in a gulp and made a noise with her mouth. The woman filled with the same *ganashi* and drank the gin in a gulp also. It is a good gin.

We shall continue cooking our gin. I do not see the difference between it and the gin sold in special bottles in the shops [9].

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

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

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

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

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

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* shows how indigenous people of Oguta resisted the imposition of foreign alcohol brand. Reasons for this resistance

include protesting against the spurious claim of the colonial authorities that the local gin is not of good quality or of inferior quality than their foreign gin. Second is to kick against the claim that locally made gin did not taste like foreign alcohol brands; that foreign gin was not dangerous to health as they claimed and much cheaper when compared to foreign alcohol brand. Chima Korieh summarizes the legislation against homemade gin as that of a game of cat and mouse. According to him:

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

## 5. IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

From the foregoing, we observe that it is neither absolutely wrong with our wines, nor *kai-kai*. In the light of this, African palm wine (or up-wine) reported or documented in Achebe's national epic or Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, has all the active ingredients rich enough to treat our ailments, rejuvenate our longevity. The palm wine adds to the glamour and conviviality of our social functions. Such occasions are embellished further with our performing arts and oral literature. Equiano admits this fact and says: "We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets." He adds descriptively: "Thus every great event such as a triumphant return from battle or other cause of public rejoicing is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion" (3). Equiano has not exaggerated their heritage as skillful dancers. Anyachonkeya's (2012: 81) ethnographic study of Isseke, the Igbo roots of Ekwealuo, reveals this fact that they are great dancers. Anyachonkeya reports:

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

The traditional drink of palm wine is also a familiar and cultural drink in Flora Nwapa's

Oguta. During colonial Nigeria, Oguta people were proactive and innovative enough to produce distilled gin. The colonialists also discovered to their chagrin that the locally distilled gin could mar their trade and in the process frustrate the importation of their imported gin. But Oguta people remained undaunted and intensified efforts to produce their indigenous gin; they went underground and continued its production, in spite of enormous sanctions the colonialists placed on the 'offenders.'

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 people. We should add that the people that live by the river make tremendous use of intoxicating drinks. Palm wine is a popular cultural heritage of Oguta-Igbo subculture, hence its documentation in the novel by the trailblazer feminist writer, who disrupted African literary scene that had been male-dominated until her literary bang in *Efuru*; and to convince her reader the high regard Ugwuta people have for women in their subculture she names the novel by the female, a name that is thematically significant. Nwanyi Efuru means "a woman of infinite beauty and delicacy, cannot be lost [15]" In expanding the semiotic scope of the meaning of Nwanyi Efuru, Oko cites Engels, who provides further insight into the name. Engels states: "There is loving heroism in the name Nwanyi Efuru which means a woman is not a loss. Female power is charm, resilience, and benevolence. Woman's witchery is valued over male brute force in a trading community 1997: 33)." Virtually all the names Nwapa has given in her novels are meaningful (an assertion Oko does not query) as they go to enhance the status of women, apparently because of the dominion of the Woman of the Lake in the affairs and world view of Ugwuta Ameshi.

The only novel that is close to her maiden novel is Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, whose heroine and principal character is Ihuoma, and who shares similar descent with a water goddess. The anonymous relations they share include authorships of opposite genders, for while Amadi presents Ihuoma as having mystical kinship marriage with her husband of the water deity; Efuru is connected with the water goddess of Ogbuide (Oguta Lake), Uhamiri. Again, whereas Amadi wrote from the point of view of male chauvinist; Nwapa wrote as a feminist and pathfinder, venturing into the area of endeavour her female folk never thought of treading. Helen

Chukwuma has stated something similar to our observation. She says:

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

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

Nwapa is a committed writer; she is poised to rewrite and redefine the status and image of the woman in a male dominated Igbo society. Thus, she uses the benign Ugwuta subculture that engenders womanhood as a launching pad to advance the cause of woman in African society. Nwachukwu-Agbada [16] adopts this viewpoint and observes:

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

From the foregoing, we infer that Nwapa is committed to challenging the status quo of the centrality of men in her novels, the advancement of femininity; and in line with Igbo adage, you must, first of all, be good from home before proceeding to the outside. Since her Ugwuta ambiance accepts and accords befitting status to women, as a result of the positive influence of Uhamiri. She "has employed her novels in the emancipation and reconstruction of femininity – the identity of the female" That is why in *Efuru* and *One Is Enough*, Nwapa has crafted them with those goals in view, writing as "someone

who insists on being read" to advance her thesis [17].

## 6. CONCLUSION

Nwapa presents a segment of the Igbo society, which grants women access to alcoholic drinking in the public. Likely, the ample liberty and tremendous respect accorded to the female folk in Oguta Igbo subculture may be responsible for this, coupled with the fact that the river deity of the Lake, Uhamiri goddess, may have provided further evidence to the improved status accorded to women. Thus, Nwapa in the pages of her literary works, especially in *Efuru* shows the lifestyle and folkways of Ogbuide Lake people of Oguta, which enable women to enjoy this unrestricted liberty of self-expression and audacious access to alcoholic drinks at the profane gaze of men, as it were

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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