Application of Indigenous Technology in the Production of *Ufofop* (Local Dry Gin) in Pre-Colonial Annang and the Vicissitudes of Colonial and Post-Colonial Developments

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Abstract

This study focuses on the development and utilisation of indigenous technology for the production of gin – *ufofop* by the Annang people of present day Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. This is of historical significance because it challenges the Euro-centric views expressed by western scholars such as Schum Peter, which hold that Africans were passive recipients of development from outside and, therefore, had no inventions worthy of historical attention. This school of thought believed that Africans were bereft of the capacity to engage technology in production processes and to transmute raw materials into refined products in any significant way. In order to set the records straight, Africanists scholars have given some attention to the development of indigenous technology in African societies. This study is an effort in this direction and draws attention to the Annang experience. The thrust of the paper is to examine the application of indigenous technology by the Annang people in the production of *Ufofop* indigenous gin and how this was affected by the developments of colonial and post-colonial era. The paper explores the technique, usage, marketing and consumption of the locally brewed gin and how the product was intrinsically linked to the socio-economic milieu of the Annang society and its changing fortunes over the years. The study relied on information obtained from oral interviews conducted at Ikot Ekpene, Abak, and Uyo, colonial documents from the National archives Enugu and some secondary materials. The study reveals that the raw materials, tools and the production techniques of *Ufofop* were, indeed, indigenous to the people, just as it was a factor in indigenous trade, rituals, recreation and social communion. It also reveals how colonial rule inhibited the development of the industry and its remarkable resilience and resurgence during the post-colonial period

Introduction

Alcohol production and consumption has a long history in Nigeria, and its use is common in all the cultural groups in the country. It is one of the most available psychoactive substances in the country, and it is consumed either in the form of traditional beverages (e.g., *burukutu*, *pito*, *emu funfun,* palm-wine, *ogogoro and ufofop*) or as western lager beer, wine or spirituous liquors (e.g., brandy, whisky and gin). In many parts of the country, the production and consumption of alcoholic beverages was organized around traditional

rituals, festivals and other social activities, which included social arrangements around marriages, childbearing and child-naming, and settling of quarrels between families and communities. Presenting or offering alcoholic beverage was also an expression of hospitality to guests.

In earlier centuries Western alcoholic beverages were introduced into Nigeria by explorers, who initially brought them as gifts for African chiefs. Later on, especially during the transatlantic slave trade, these alcoholic beverages became part of the articles of trade used in exchange for slaves and other exports from the West African coast. This was the foundation for the eventual introduction of alcohol as a commercial product in modern international trade between Nigeria and Europe. It has been argued that abuse of alcohol became prominent during the colonial period with the increased and wide use of western alcoholic beverages that were sweetened and usually had higher alcohol content than the local beverages, thereby, encouraging abuses.

Alcoholic beverages featured prominently in traditional Annang society. Another local alcoholic beverage peculiar to the southern parts of Nigeria which Annang was a part off is palm wine. Palm wine was tapped from the raffia and oil palm trees and it was a popular drink among the Annang. A distillate of palm wine - a spirit with high alcohol content called *ufofop* in Annang, the focus of this paper.

The historical significance of this indigenous gin also lies in the fact that it was banned by the British colonial administrators as part of attempts to control the West African liquor trade. Because it was considered an illicit gin, its production went underground, but was never really halted. In response to the desires of the people the independent Nigerian government, lifted the ban on its production and sale**.** In view of the fact that not much work has been done on the processes of distillation of palm wine to *Ufofop* (local dry gin), in Annang, this paper attempts an examination of the subject within the context of indigenous technology.

Geography and People of Annang

The world Annang is used to describe the people, their language, and their territory. They occupied the North-Western territory of *Akwa Ibom* State of Nigeria. It is located within the Cross River Basin between latitudes 40.25' and 70 North and longitudes 70.15' and 90.30' East (Essien, 2013). The pre-colonial Annang was made up of thirty-six *Ikpaisong* (clans /chiefdoms) which included Adiasim, Ekpenyong Atai, Ikpe, Odoro Ikot, Okon, Ukana, Amanyam, Ikot Abia, Nto Edino, Obot Akara, Abak/Midim, Ibesit Nung Ikot, Ito Ika, Ika Annang, Obong, Uruk, Utu, Afaha Adat Ifang, Afaha, Ukanafun, Abak, Ediene, Afaha Obong, Midim, Obio Akpa, Ekparakwa, Ibesit, Inen, Nung Ita, Nung Ikot, Otoro (Ekong, 2001). Each of these chiefdoms had its own independent political institutions headed by a chief (*Okuku*). In this respect, there were thirty six *Okuku* in Annang. During the colonial period, the Annang were majorly found in Ikot *Ekpene* and *Abak* Division in Calabar

Province, while some Annang area extends to approximately 150 square miles in the north of *Opobo* Division in Rivers Province with sixty eight villages (Essien, 2013). These communities were brought together by a common cultural bond and they all look up to *Afaha Obong* as their cradle and origin and as their traditional headquarters, where the Annang supreme deity is situated (Toby, 2017). The North of Annang is bounded by *Ini* and *Ikono* Local Government Areas in *Akwa Ibom* State of Nigeria, and Ikot *Abasi* Local Government Area of *Akwa* Ibom State of Nigeria is her Southern neighbour. The West is bounded by *Ngwa* and *Azumini* people of *Abia* and *Ndoki* people of Rivers States of Nigeria, while the East is bounded by Uyo and *Mkpatenin* Local Government Areas of *Akwa Ibom* State of Nigeria. Geographically, Annang lies in almost entirely in the thick rain forest palm belt of Southern Nigeria. The area has a level landscape covered by relatively low vegetation and myriads of palms. There is a mean annual rainfall of 2030- 2540mm. Annang has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons. The wet season spans between March and October when the monsoon winds blow from the South-West. The dry season spans between November and February when the harmattan (*ekarika*) blows from the North-East.At present, Annang is the second largest ethnic group in *Akwa Ibom* State, occupying an area of about 2331 square km inhibited by more than one million people. (National Population Census, 2006)

They are culturally homogenous ethnic group. The Annang are found in eight of the present thirty-one Local Government Areas in *Akwa Ibom* State namely; *Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam* and *Ukanafun* (Ineme and Udondata, 2014). The landscape is generally flat and low-lying with no point rising above 300ft and no part less than 100ft feet above sea level. It has a level landscape covered by relatively low vegetation and myriads of palms.

Production of *Ufofop* in Annang

There are two versions regarding the origin of the local dry gin in Annang. The first version claims that it is indigenous to Annang society. Ntia opined that people who fished in high waters and sailors needed beverage of that quality, and that fishermen and sailors knew alcohol as the main source of stimulant in the cold sea (Ntia, 2019). Therefore, it had been in use long before the coming of the Europeans into Annang. The origin of *Ufofop* is shrouded in myths and, therefore, no one is certain when and where it originated from. This suggests that the production and consumption of gin, (*Ufofop*) is as old as the Annang society itself. *Ufofop* is a product of palm oil tree or *raphia* palm tree. The *raphia* wine is tapped from these trees and, therefore, it is considered to be indigenous to the people. The production of traditional alcohol did not differ markedly from other groups in Southern Nigeria such as the Igbo, Urhobo, Itsekiri and so on, but there were peculiarities.

The production of *Ufofop* is complex and involved a number of processes. The first process began with the tapping of the *raphia* tree and bringing out the sap. Although the knowledge and skill in palm wine tapping and drinking could be found in other pre-colonial Nigerian

societies, the Annang palm wine has been considered to be one of the best in southern Nigeria. *Ufofop* production took a uniform procedure throughout Annang, but it was only a few men who engaged in it as a main occupation. This is because the climbing of the raffia trees using bamboo ladder was a complicated and risky venture (Umo, 2019). The bamboo ladder was tied against the raffia tree that was ripe for tapping. The tapper climbed to the top of the *raphia* tree where he cut off the trunk just before the point of emergence of new branches. Two times a day for a week, the tapper heated up a tank with fire to draw up the liquid from the *raphia* tree. When the wine began to flow, he levelled the top of the trunk and makes a niche on the edge into which the mouth of a clay pot was inserted to collect the wine. The tapper visited the *raphia* tree thrice a day. In the morning he collected the liquid in a gourd, early in the afternoon he levelled the drink and carried out maintenance and at dusk he collected the liquid in the gourd again. Palm wine required no processing after it was tapped. However, the palm wine must be drunk within a day or two of its tapping Ukan, 2019). Fresh *raphia* palm wine has been analysed by Dominic Akpan to contain sugars (8. 40g/100ml), protein (0.37g/100ml), titrable organic acids (0. 28g/100ml) and (0.79) (Akpan, 2009). (Osagie, 2005), has stated that:

> Palm wine is a pleasant and intoxicating drink had great socio-economic importance, apart from it being used to entertain guests, it was an important items required for social ceremonies like marriages, festivals and burials as well as ancestral worships. As people were always engaged in one form of ceremony or the other, patronage brought a lot of financial benefits to the palm wine tappers.

Etim traced the origin of *Ufofop* in Annang to the two communities of Akani-Obio and Uruan and linked it far back as the pre-slave trade era (Antia , 2005). He also noted that the local dry gin was consumed in gatherings, especially in the parlours of the village titled holders. The other version of the history of its origin, which appears less plausible has it that the knowledge of local distillation was brought by the early Europeans visitors. Although this Euro-centric view denies African ingenuity and inventiveness in indigenous technology, Archibong is of the opinion that the white men's role in the local dry gin business centred on the introduction of new tools and equipment used in the distillation (Archibong, 2019). He added that copper rods were brought by the early Portuguese to replace the bamboo, while the kerosene tins replaced clay pots and bottles that were used as storage facilities. Despite these, the local dry gin was, and still the product of indigenous people.

Indigenous Distillation of *Ufofop* (Local Dry Gin)

Palm wine that has not been drunk after two days are left to ferment and distilled later. During fermentation, the alcohol concentration within the palm wine increases while the sugar content decreases (Ndon, 2003). The fermented palm wine is moved into an empty clay pot to be distilled. It is then heated from a fire source, which normally used firewood.

The heating wine passed through two stages. The first stage required much heat to enable the fermented palm wine to reach a boiling point. The boiling point at that level may reach 100^{o}C or more. The content inside the clay pot tend to be foamy and the palm wine now begins to rise. The heating may last between 30 minutes and one hour depending on the quantity. However, during the heating process, the distiller would now watch the fire and the distillation bottle. The reason for watching the fire and the bottle is to listen, in case there is an unusual noise from the pipe. The unusual noise, if any, is an indication of either over heating or the palm wine did not undergo the required days for fermentation. Thus, the collected beverage would be dark in could or and mixed with water. Should the content continue to be heated, the dry gin or beverage would be of low quality and unfit for human consumption (Akpan, 2019).

To correct the problem of overheating, a fresh palm fruits were pounded and the clay pot while on fire was opened neatly. The pounded fresh palm was thus inserted to end the production of poor quality drink Udoma, 2019). The determination of the quality of beverage collected depends on the quantity of fermented palm wine being put to use. Before the advent of Europeans, the local dry gin was stored in gourds or calabashes for local consumption and sale in the market. Europeans later brought different kind of drinks in bottles and ceramic jars. Hence, bottles and jars brought by the Europeans replaced gourds in the storage of surplus dry gin for local consumption and for export.

Distribution and Consumption of *Ufofop*

The distribution pattern of alcohol could be divided into two broad categories: non-commercial and commercial distribution. The former involved the family and individuals that produced and consumed a significant percentage of *ufofop* and offered some to entertain relations, neighbors and even to visitors. This pattern of distribution, usually, does not involve selling of the product.

The commercial pattern of distribution involved small or large scale producers and retailers, of indigenous gin. Producers of alcohol could sell to consumers on a daily, weekly or forth night basis. Consumers and customers in some cases booked for the supply of alcohol in large quantities for special functions and celebrations such as weddings, festivities and other social functions (Dumbili, 2013) . At this level of distribution, the manufacturers and the sellers participated in the distribution chain. Large scale production and distribution involved a more elaborate and sophisticated network. At this level, the producers distributed their alcohol to more distant locations and larger cities, selling directly to specific sites and retailers for resale. Some of these larger scale operations sold their alcohol to an agent who then resold it in other locations. The use of agents and several retailers appeared to have increased the speed of distribution, and thus, reduced some of the risks associated with alcohol manufacture, sale, consumption and spoilage for a large scale producer. In this network, consumers and manufacturers are well known to one

another and would have traded with one another repeatedly (Williason and Roger Blench, 2013.

Traditional alcohol recipes and manufacturing methods were prized family assets. Local alcohol producers were respected for their skills and the quality of their product and it was unlikely they would knowingly do anything to destroy their reputation. Large scale distribution, however, reached beyond the social network and the safeguards inherent in it. Selling to distant locations, as well as the involvement of middlemen (wholesalers) increased the risk of diluting, adulterating, and contaminating traditional gin. These larger distribution networks could be influenced more by profit and were not constrained by close relationships to customers. Alcohol distributed by agents was sometimes of lower quality, made from poorer quality products, possibly adulterated with industrial alcohol. Sometimes agents mixed alcohols from different producers. Similarly, many local people preferred the local gin because they did not trust the purity of some imported brands (Udoma, 2019).

Benefits of *Ufofop* Production

The benefits of traditional gin production included social utility, local jobs, income for women, and raw materials for livestock production. The Annang people cherished traditional gin for its quality, flavor, safety and as a part of their cultural heritage. The social benefits included family communion when shared at home, as well as religious, festive and celebratory usage. Personal health benefits included relieving fatigue, keeping warm, aiding digestion, enhancing food, and—when mixed with herbs—treating and/or preventing illnesses (Ukpong, 2018).

Furthermore, *Ufofop* is a delight and satisfies local values and tastes in local annual celebrations and rites of passage. In addition, it provided income for families. Gin making was home-based and the work hours are flexible, allowing women to continue to attend to child rearing and housekeeping while contributing to the family income.

The people believed that locally-made alcohol was of good quality, satisfied local tastes, and was safe compared to alcohol coming from outside the local area, including commercial brands of alcohol. Traditional alcohol was also seen by the people to have several benefits.

Ufofop served as a local drink for socio-cultural occasions such as marriages, naming ceremonies and libation during family meetings. For marriage, the local gin sometimes formed a part of bride price or a requirement for settling marriage arrangement. Pouring libation was a common practice in the pre-colonial period. It was one of the ways the Annang people called on their gods and ancestors to partake in the activity. Local alcohol was usually used for treatment of many aliments as the barks and roots of various trees and herbs were mixed with alcohol and used for treatment and cure of many diseases,

including malaria, body pains and stomach disorder (Udo, 2018). Roots and barks also improved the colour and flavour of the alcoholic drink. This practice has endured up to the present time.

Furthermore, Local gin was used for ritual and religious purposes, including the invocation of spirit entities. Local gin was a conventional requirement in the consultation of the elderly people and settlement of disputes (Usoro, 2018).

The demand for the local dry gin at the time was high. Markets were found among the local consumers such as the fishermen and the sailors; it was also found among purely sedentary people who used it as stimulants in their homes and at functions. According to Etim, the local gin had penetrated the European markets and competed favourably with those produced in Europe (Etim, 2018). Etim also opined that at a time some of the Europeans preferred our local gin to the one produced in their shores. The Portuguese and the Spanish were our main markets. As we shall see, with the entrenchment of colonialism and with the exchange relations in place the local gin penetrated the international market in a manner that made the British colonial masters ban the distillation and marketing of the local gin in 1934 by an Act.

Colonial Rule and Decline in *Ufofop* Production

During the colonial period, the once bourgeoning local gin industry declined. It was eclipsed by a number of developments, the most decisive being the outright ban of its production by the colonial authorities and the introduction of foreign brands. The colonial authorities ostensibly imputed health and safety concerns into a regulatory policy that outlawed *ufofop.* Consequently, it became an offence punishable by law in the Eastern province to produce or consume the brand. The 1934 Act made it an offence to distil and market the products in Nigeria. The terms "illicit" was attached to our product by the colonial masters. They argued that the gin was unfit for human consumption. It was so called illicit to undermine its sale in the international market, as the prices of British gin were dwindling at the time. (Annual Report, 1934)

It was also termed illicit to deprive people of their employment so as to create class of jobless people for European menial jobs. The acceptability of the local dry gin like other products in international market is based on the fact that Annang society had a role to play in international trade long before the colonial rule. The banning of the sale local dry gin to Europe was a destabilizing force to Annang economic growth and development. Elaborating further, (Nwankwo ,1998) aptly contends in this way:

> The direct control of the African economy and political administration enabled the colonialist to ensure that African colonies or states did not take to manufacturing. It helped to restrict African and their technology to the confine or role

of producing only primary goods or agricultural raw materials needed by the industries in Europe.

Invariably, this regulation was enforced in Annang where the *ufofop* industry flourished hitherto. For instant Ikot Ekpene Native Council made the following rules:

1. The falling of oil palms for the purpose of obtaining palm wine is prohibited
2. No oil bearing palm tree shall be felled for any purpose whatever or tapped for palm wine without the consent of the Native Council within the area of whose jurisdiction it grows
3. Any breach of the above rules shall be punishable; for the first offenders, a fine not exceeding five pounds, for the second offenders a fine not exceeding five pounds and or imprisonment with hard labor for a period not exceeding six months, for any subsequent offenders a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds and or imprisonment with hard labor for a period not exceeding twelve months (NAE, 1912).

As a results of this rules numbers of persons as shown in the table below were punished for going against the rule in Ikot Ekpene District in 1913

Table 1: Names and Villages of persons Punished under The Falling of Oil Palms Trees Rules in Ikot Ekpene Native Court

S/N	NAMES	Town
1	Udo Akpan Ibanga	Adiasim
2	Akpan Ajaja Umoessien	Ikot Efia
3	Udo Essien Akpan	Ibiakpan Ikot Itina
4	Umo Eden Akwa	Ebong Odok
5	Akpan Enyonowong Ibok	Ikot Ndiya
6	Akpan Ekpo Udo	Atam Ikot Etu Uden

Source: NAE, "Ikot Ekpene District Palm Trees Rule for the Falling of Palm Trees", CALPROF 14/4/842

The intention of the colonial government in banning the falling of oil palm trees for palm wine tapping and by extension *ufofop* production remains controversial. Economic motives seemed paramount, despite the stated health concerns. The British realizing that the production process involved the felling of palm trees or drilling into the sap of a live one, felt that it will hamper palm oil production. Palm produce was the highest revenue earner in Ikot Ekpene and Abak Divisions during the colonial period, accounting for 10, 000 tons of palm oil and 14, 7000 tons of palm kernels in 1931 (Annual Report, 1936) and14,000 tons of pam oil and 17,000 tons of palm kernels in 1932 (Annaul Report, 1936) for instance. It was also a prized commodity in the bourgeoning soap, cosmetic and lubricant industry in

Europe. The ban, therefore, was not only a means of saving the trees for palm oil and palm kernel production; it ensured that more men, abandoning the palm wine and local gin production, took to plantation agriculture. The refinement of palm wine into local gin and the purpose is served in the local economy were of little moment to the British authorities. This implies that the economic calculations of the colonial authorities were tailored towards British interest. Consequently, *ufofop* production became a clandestine business, characterized by trepidation and fear of arrest and prosecution.

There was now a greater availability, even in the rural areas, of a wide range of alcoholic drinks, beers, wines and spirits. Also, fewer hands became available for *Ufofop* production as a number of young people left the rural areas, where traditional alcohol was made for urban centers, where opportunities to work in non-agricultural jobs had increased, to earn salaries and expand their purchasing power. Associated with this was the perception that the use of imported and branded products carries a particular message of status and modernity, a belief that was more common among young people.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to draw attention to how the Europeans perceived African civilization. From the study, it is clear, that African development was undermined by the European colonization of the 19th and 20th centuries. Focussing on the Annang local economy, and using the production of *ufofop* as a case study, it shows the application and the vicissitudes of indigenous technology. Traditional alcohol production in Annangland is an age long practice. Indigenous alcohol played a significant role in the local society as considerable economic and social benefit derived from it. It was not injurious to the peoples` health as there were no reported instances of alcohol poisoning. The advent of Europeans and the increased importation of foreign brands largely competed with the traditional alcohol and tended to displace it as urbanized youth turned to branded products, including beer; reducing traditional alcohol making and consumption to the affair of older people in rural areas. The process for making traditional distilled spirit alcohol (*ufofop*) followed a long-standing tradition, which withstood attempts in the Twentieth Century by outside cultures to undermine it. The distilled alcohol was made to meet the tastes of the local people, depended on locally available ingredients. Although changes over time have occurred in the type of container (plastic substituted for pottery, metal pipe substituted for bamboo) they hardly affected the recipe or procedure.

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