

## SYMBOLISM OF KOLA NUT AND PALM WINE AMONG THE IGBO OF SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: PAST AND PRESENT

**Kanayo Nwadiolor, Ph.D & Kingsley Ekele Eze**

Department of Religion and Human Relations,

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

[kl.nwadiolor@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:kl.nwadiolor@unizik.edu.ng)

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### **Abstract**

*In every human culture there is always a mark of identity which defines the people's origin and existence. Kola nut and palm wine are two significant socio-cultural symbols of identification among the Igbo which defines their origin, festivity, hospitality, homogeneity, unity and integration. Scholars of different hues have written extensively on kola nut as it is generally significant in Nigeria's heterogeneous setting. In Yoruba it is grown and harvested in commercial quantity, in Hausa it is consumed almost as food, and it is mythically celebrated, adored, cherished and ritualized by the Igbo of south east Nigeria. This study, therefore, aimed at a historical and phenomenological investigation into the meaning and symbolism of kola nut, particularly Oji Igbo (cola acuminata), and to see why it is more valued than the other species of kola nut in Igbo tradition. The study also looked into the symbolism of palm wine among the Igbo. The study adopted the primary and secondary methods of the qualitative approach for data collection. Data collected were analyzed using the phenomenological approach. It was discovered that sacredness of kola nut is attached to the foundation of Igbo origin, Nto Ala Igbo, and the symbolism of palm wine is understood as a seal of covenant between the ancestors and the living. However, it is regrettably observed that these cherished symbolisms of kola nut and palm wine are almost at the verge of extinction owing to Igbo encounter with Christianity and its accompanying western culture and civilization. The paper, therefore, calls for a socio-cultural and religious revival of the symbolism of Igbo kola nut and palm wine as a way of maintaining pristine Igbo cultural heritage and identity.*

**Keywords: Symbolism, Kola Nut, Palm wine, Igbo, Past, Present**

### **Introduction**

Kola nut and palm wine are two Igbo ritual symbols that are very important and essential in almost all gatherings cum ceremonies. They play important roles at births, marriages, title takings, socials gatherings, courtesy visits and burials. They symbolize peace, respect, hospitality, goodwill, acceptance, settlement of quarrels and so on. Kola nut fosters unity among those who partake of its

blessing, breaking and eating. To Osuji (2013a) that is why kola nuts are used for every occasion in Igbo culture and it is one of the surviving cultural practices of the Igbo man. Achebe (2012) adds that “the kola nut is a sacred fruit in Igbo life and culture and therefore has distinct and distinguished roles to play” (p. 10). For Umeogu (2019), “The kola nut is the heartbeat of Igbo culture and tradition. To be sure it is the microcosm of macrocosmic world; the kola nut is almost everything for the Igbo people” (p. 29). That is why Nzekwu (cited by Umeogu, 2019) maintains that among the Igbo kola nut is a highly valued and indispensable product and commands our respect in a way no other product has done. Thus, the Igbo see kola nut and palm wine as primordial gifts from God; gifts which they equate with life, hence the recurring maxim that he who brings kola brings life. Though petite in size and nature, kola nut is very indispensable in Igbo life. Federal Ministry of Information (1979) talks of kola nut as very significant in Nigeria culture, not only known for its origin to American and European soft drinks and its use by labourers to diminish hunger and fatigue, but more for its sacred significance among the three major regions of Nigeria.

The symbolism of palm wine can also not be over emphasized. It is necessary to point out here that it is believed to have more significance and perfection than any of the local or foreign wine species. This point is accentuated by the fact that the Igbo can hardly hold any ceremony unless palm wine is available. This fact is also corroborated by the inevitable use of palm wine in pouring libation. Its use is anchored on the belief that palm wine has essential potency, a kind of force that makes it acceptable to Igbo ancestors and forebears. Apparently, the force inherent in palm-wine is not visible, yet, such invisible nature reinforces the belief in its power of spiritual transcendentalism and cultural communion. Intelligibility of palm wine capacitates it as possessing immense significance in Igbo ritual ceremonies. A celebrant may have provided a trailer load of assorted drinks, people may have drunk themselves to dreg, but a mere absence of palm wine automatically rapes the sanctimonious element of the occasion. To hold any ceremony without palm wine is like burying a person outside *Necropolis*. Every cemetery is believed to have a preternatural receptacle that facilitates the deceased passage into the underworld. In the same vein, any Igbo person who does libation without palm wine, the belief is that such exercise ends in futility. Libation with sacred palm wine, must not fail to aim at a designated target. So palm wine is a *condition sine-qua-non* for conjuration, divination, enchantment, magic, sorcery, witchcraft and wizardry exercises because it is believed to have come from ‘up’ somewhere, and not beneath the ground. Detailed studies on

either of the symbolism and significance of palm wine and kola nut are lacking. Only brief mention is made of palm wine and its uses by Basden, (1966) and Uchendu (1965), Mbalisi and Eneremmadu (2019). It is, therefore, the urgent need for the documentation of the symbolism and significance of these two Igbo ritual elements that informed this study.

### **Kola nut in Igbo land**

Kola nut is one of the most common African, and especially Nigerian, widely accepted and recognized cultural symbols. It is the fruit of the kola tree, a genus (cola) of trees that are native to the tropical rainforests of Africa. It is considered among some Nigerian ethnic groups to be the first tree on earth (Your Health Remedy, 2018). In many expressions, Igbo people say, “*Oji bu eze*” kola nut is the king in the plant kingdom and therefore the first before the rest in Igbo culture.

“Kola nut is a very important aspect of the tradition in Nigeria, which holds great social significance for many ethnic groups” (Mayaki, 2011:55). “It is neither the biggest nor the sweetest fruit in Igbo land but the nuts have tremendous cultural significance” (Chidume, Osioma and Echem, 2015:4). The traditional kola nut is regarded as a sacred nut, which is used to communicate with the deities being that it was chosen by the elders as the head or king of all seeds. Nnenna (2013) expresses the heart of Africans when he states that he who brings kola brings life. Kola nut symbolizes solemnity, reverence, communion, hospitality and tradition. “Kola nut must be blessed, broken and eaten before any discussion or activity in Igboland can commence” (Ubesie, 1975:14). For Umeogu (2003) there is no function or ceremony performed in any part of the Igbo land that presentation of kola nuts does not take precedence. Kola nut is to Igbo people what the prayer book stands for in the Christian world. Kola nut is often served with sauce (prepared mainly with pepper, groundnut, and palm oil) and alligator pepper; presented with kola nut disk “*okwa oji*” among the elders with white chalk ‘*nzu*’ accompanying it. With the ‘*nzu*’, they make marks on the floor and rub it on their big toes, and sometimes around their eyes. Kola nut is a culture of communion between the supernatural and natural world, between the divinities and man. The Igbo African people use kola nut to curry compliance of listening ear of the divinities whenever kola nut is raised up in prayer. To support this Umeogu (2003) adds that “the founding fathers chose *Oji* as the king of all the fruits and because it came from the divinities, it is used in communicating with divinities ... it is used showing goodwill to visitors and for entering into bonds” (p. 1). To buttress this fact, Obiajulu (2013:3) states that “*Oji*

*Igbo, Cola acuminata* is quite distinct from others in that it is used traditionally for rituals, for marriage ceremonies, title taking, offering of prayers at traditional ceremonies, to welcome visitors and introduce very important discussion and requests". The Igbo African respect for kola nut is predicated on the understanding of its value and inherent sacredness and sanctity. The simplicity of its appearance metaphysically connotes sublimity with which the Igbo regard its typologies. In the words of Okonkwo (1974:133) "*Mgbe obuna mmadu choro inye nna ya, ma o bu nna nna ha nwuru anwu ihe, o buputa okpesi ha goo oji were mpekere oji togbochaa n 'elu ha kelee ha*" (Any time a person considers it expedient to offer some sacrifices to his departed parents, he will first of all bring out a sacred object called *Okpesi* on which he will make epiclesis with pieces of kola while raising up his eyes in thanksgiving to his parents). Okonkwo went further to say a *choo irio ndi nwuru anwu aririo, o bu oji ka eji rio ha n'okpesi ha* (Whenever he wants to offer prayer of request to his departed ancestors kola is always an indispensable ingredient for use in his sacred place of worship). The above vernacular expression of Okonkwo presents clearly the functional symbol of kola nut as a ritual object in Igbo life and worship. No ceremonies are started without the breaking of kola (*Iwa Oji*) which all present are expected to partake. Kola nut is a sacred communion for Igbo Africans. It is used in the celebration of common wealth. Aspects of communalism are celebrated with kola nut which is both a spiritual and physical symbol of unity. Obiajulu (2003) accentuates a strong fact which is very significant for this paper. He attests that:

The 'ofeke', the stigmatized and excommunicated, does not partake of the communion of kola... until 'Igba Oriko' - a banquet of togetherness, a celebration indicating that the ostracized or the rejected... Person is now free to relate with his brethren and enjoy the common wealth in sharing love and responsibility. (p. 17).

It is worthy of note that kola nut typically grows in trees of different heights and sizes depending on the soil and climatic conditions. It begins its products with flowers in either white or yellowish colors. Its fruits are in pods, each of which is clustered about a dozen (less or more) roundish and oval shaped seeds of nuts. The nuts may be of different colors: red, pink, or white when opened from the pod whose arrangement look similar in their natural configuration (Nkemakolam, 2002). As special as it is it cannot be planted by women. To this Osuji (2009:43) strongly argues that:

A kola nut plant cannot be planted by a woman and as it grows, it is watched, preserved and nurtured by a family head, to mark its sacredness, if a woman tries to nurture it; it dies instantly as it grows, and it is

barricaded with fence in order to ward off any intruder particularly female. At maturity while producing nuts in its pods, if a woman leans on it, it will shed all the nuts. Before its nuts are ready to be plucked, if an unclean person, criminal, murderer, ostracized, touches it, it will shed all its nuts as well, and if a woman climbs the tree it sees to produces until propitiations are made. Hence, the owner watches and preserves it more carefully and continuously than any other local trees. (p. 43).

Umeogu (2019) adds that “because the kola nut tree and its kola nuts are sacred, women are prohibited from harvesting it, and in some places they are even prevented from picking up the fallen kola nut fruits from the ground” (p. 27).

### **Origin of Kola Nut**

The origin of kola nut is shrouded in mystery as the origin of Igbo itself. This is because while the western world looks at its origin from the agricultural and physical point of view, the Igbo has a mythological claim of the origin of kola nut in Igbo historiography. For Umeogu (2019), “the origin of kola nut in Igboland is shrouded in mystery, twilight and mythology. Here again the Igbo as they representatively make explicit in their culture what they implicitly found out in kola nut odyssey” (p. 24).

For the Igbo Onyioha (cited in Onwu-Otuyelu, 2009) links the root of kola nut to the relationship between humans and the spirit beings, leading to the human’s migrating over to the spirit world in an ocean floor at a price and a directive. This legend is generally accepted among the traditional Igbo people. It holds that in the beginning of time, the natural world was related to the spirit world, that men and spirits were interacting to the level of exchanging ceremonies and festivities like sports and competitions. In one of these competitions (wrestling), one spirit being called *Aji Ike Ugburuoba* stood so unconquerable by any human wrestler. Sports heroes would easily attract the love and affection of the opposite sex, thus women within the living beings began to fall in jealous love with this hero spirit, *Aji Ike*. Prominent among these women was *Ugo Onobo* who was so obsessed and madly in love that she eloped with *Aji Ike Ugburuoba* to his spirit abode located at the depth of the Cross River at Okwuruike. This sudden disappearance of *Ugo Onobo* posed a nightmare not only to her two elder brothers, *Agala* and *Ogbu Onobo*, but to the entire community who did not give up in search for her. To the two brothers, the search became more imperative when they were openly ridiculed in the village square for being weaklings because of their inability to locate their one and only missing sister, *Ugo*. This

challenge became so unbearable that Ogbu Onobo and his brother Agala vowed to stop at nothing till they had found their only sister. The search led them to a diviner “*dibia*” to inquire of her whereabouts. Their hope was elated when the diviner told them that by the time chicks start returning to their roost and the sun is gradually sinking close to setting (About 4pm), go to the brink of the Cross River at Okwuruike during ebb- tide there, stand and call loudly out the name of your sister, Ugo Onobo, seven times and she will answer. Then follow the echo of her voice; it will lead you to the bottom of the Cross-River. There you will find her living with Ajike Ugburuoba, the Great Spirit wrestler (Onwu-Otuyelu, 2009).

The two brothers complied strictly with the directives of the diviner and behold they found their sister with Ajike Ugburuoba. On entering the house, they found their sister pregnant. In excitement, for the visit of his brothers-in-law, Ajike went into his room and came out with the native chalk (Nzu), coconut, water as drink and kola nut. The chalk, he gave them to smear on their left wrist as a welcome gesture; the coconut with its water, he gave them as drink and food, and the kola nut; he gave them as dowry for their sister, Ugo. In anger, the two brothers rejected these offer but demanded to take their sister home even with the pregnancy. The helpless Ajike consented to their request but pleaded with them to accept his gesture of hospitality. He told them to go home with their sister, though pregnant, but along with the presentations. When you get home, he said, ‘use the chalk to welcome your guests as I did to you, to tell them how glad I was when you visited me; plant the coconut and when it grows and bears, take one, break it into four parts and leave it broken on the road. By this act, you have given me my own share of it and then you can eat the rest of it and subsequent merry with your families and guests. He instructed them to plant the kola nut also, but when it bears fruit and it is harvested, they should break the pod, pick one of its seeds with four divisions signifying the cotyledons (lobes or eyes), these they shall hold in their left hand, cast with a statement of thanks and in so doing, Ajike said, you have given me my share. Then break and share the rest with your guests. He continued to say that as he has presented them with the kola nut as dowry on the head of their sister, Ugo, so must they present kola nut with regard to every marriage in every human home as the celebration between the world of the living and that of the spirits. Although Ajike took back the baby from Ugo through a miscarriage on the Ndele Bridge, the two brothers performed the rituals as Ajike directed. As for the red colour of kola nut, the legend attributed that to Agala Onobo’s blood that stained red some of the seeds

in the process of breaking the first product of kola nut in the land of the living. While some of the white colour seeds are called *Oji Ugo* as a reference to Ugo Onobo who was the first woman ever to have kola nut as her bride price (Onwu-Otuyelu, 2009).

Kola nut is not only known for its origin in many American and European soft drinks and its chewing by laborers to diminish hunger and fatigue, but more for its sacred significance in Igboland. There is a popular acronym in the etymology of kola nut among the Igbo regarding its origin in Igboland. Such etymological acronym is *oji*, the three Igbo letter name for kola nut:

O - means *omenala* (customs)

J - means *jikotara* (that unites)

I - means *Igbo*

Hence, *oji* means “Omenala jikotara Igbo’ – custom that unites the Igbo.

Umeogu (2019) seems to suggest that “it is Chukwu who planted the kola nut tree as the first tree on Igboland whose fruit is to serve as food for the gods and men, as well as the gate way of communion between spirits and men” (p. 24). However, the gods’ origin of kola nut has it that Igbo gods lived on kola nut and sacrifices. Through sacrifices, men called out the gods to appear in Igbo land to solve one problem or the other. On one occasion the gods appeared in Igboland and forgot the kola nut they brought to eat their sacrifices with, for they normally eat the sacrifices offered to them by men with the kola nut. The kola nut sprouted and became a remarkable tree in Igboland. So it makes sense to agree with Umeogu (2019) that kola nut did not originate from Igboland. It was rather adopted by the Igbo as a sacred phenomenon of Igbo culture and tradition. And because it took years of migration, counter migration and passage for kola nut to reach Igboland, the origin of kola nut in Igboland as Igbo kola nut is shrouded in mystery. Kola nut came from the tropical and subtropical rainforests of Africa and other continents, but migrated through myth, commerce and culture into Igbo world. So the Igbo people took the kola nut from the forest and brought it to Igbo ritual home. The Igbo separated the kola nut from the profane use and dedicated it to sacred use. This is the reason why the kola nut is holy in Igboland. So, the essential nature of kola nut in Igboland is that it is holy and its super nature is that it is a symbol of sacred communion.

### **The Preeminence of Igbo Kola nut**

*Oji Igbo*, *Cola acuminata*, or otherwise called *Cola atrophora* as different from *Kola Alba* or *kola nitida*, *Oji Awusa* (Hausa) or *Gworo*, is used qualifiedly for

rituals, for marriage ceremonies, to welcome visitors and to introduce very important discussion and requests. *Oji Igbo* is the first thing served any welcomed visitor in an Igbo home. *Oji* is served before an important function begins, be it marriage, settlement of family disputes or entering into any type of agreement, (Obiajulu, 2003). Kola Nitida has no much significance or impact in Igbo traditional culture. It is called *Oji Hausa* because it is the common type of kola hawked and consumed more by the Hausa in particular and every other Nigerian in general without any mystical or cultural meaning attached to it. Although it can be presented in social gatherings and activities in Igboland along with garden eggs, bitter kola and alligator pepper, as a welcome gesture and entertainment, as the case maybe, but no other special cultural myth or symbol is attached to it than the usual Igbo hospitality and socialization. It is however believed that spirits or deities, to whom prayers are directed, do not accept them unless they are made through a connecting medium of Igbo kola. In agreement Osuji (2009) succinctly states that “it will produce only two lobes. It can never produce three slices; in some rare cases it may not produce two slices in which case it is said to be blind kola nut” (p. 41). In Igbo culture this may not be eaten at all and unless a kola has more than two (2) cotyledons like *Oji Igbo*, it cannot be used for rituals; hence, Igbo kola nut fulfils double functions, spiritual and entertaining functions.

*Oji Igbo* itself has two colours- white and red. The white is called *Oji Ugo*. *Ugo* means eagle in Igbo language, but this does not mean the eagle kola. Rather, *Ugo* here represents the legendary *Ugo Onobo*, the first human wife of the spirit wrestler, *Ajike* for whom kola nut was presented to the living brothers by the spirit husband. The red colour kola nut is attributed to the legendary *Agala Onobo's* blood that stained some kola nut seeds in the process of breaking the very first product of kola nut harvest in the land of humans.

So “*Oji Igbo*” (*acuminata*) is the type the Igbo attach much importance because it contains varying cotyledons and each cotyledon has a mystic meaning that is culturally attached to it. This shows that *Oji Igbo* is held in high esteem among the Igbo for reasons of traditional importance, which contributes to the attachment of meanings to its varying cotyledons ranging from one to seven or even more.

### **Kola nut Typologies, Slices and Interpretations**



It is not by chance that some Kola nuts, *cola acuminata*, *Oji Igbo*, appear to be monocotyledonous, dicotyledonous, triplecotyledonous, quatricotyledonous and so on and so forth. It is also a design of nature that certain kola nuts are five carpelled; some six carpelled and others are multicarpelled. The number of lobes each has determines its significance. The first among these typologies is *Oji Ugo* otherwise called Champion Kola. This is offered to dignitaries. It is symbolic of royalty and purity. It is regarded as the most noble of *Oji Igbo* and this is why it is named after the bird, Eagle which is known for flying so high. *Oji Ugo* is presented to the people with track record of achievements. So it is regarded as the achievers' kola. This justifies Igbo saying *Oji Ugo a na echerenwa Eze* - the princely kola which is offered to a prince. The number of cotyledons possessed by a Kola nut determines its relevance. The name given to the Kola nut is founded on the cotyledons inherent in it which eventually suggests its functional and ceremonial suitability. *Oji Igbo* must have more than two cotyledons to be relevant and useful in any social, religious or spiritual function. In its interpretation and meaning, a kola nut with single cotyledon is rare in "oji Igbo" because it is not only abnormal, but it signifies a taboo or abomination and has no good use in Igboland. Hence, it is called "oji Ogbi" - dumb kolanut, oji Agbara or Oji Mmuo (kolanut of the spirit) and as a result, it is not eaten by anybody but rather thrown away probably to the spirits. In the same vein, kola nut with two cotyledons is also seen as "Oji agbara" and while it is thrown to the deities in some parts of Igboland, number two in Igbo culture stands for something bad and it could be inferred from the pre-colonial era when twins were born and thrown into the "ajo ofia" (evil forest). In some parts it is eaten by the oldest man who will invariably perform some sacrifice before eating it. This is the main reason why the Igbo do not accept the use of "gworu" for rituals or any serious traditional celebrations or prayers.

When a cotyledon is three, it signifies good omen and also tripot "*akwu kwa ito, ite esiri*". However, the positive myths begin with three cotyledons. The kola nut with three cotyledons is associated with a strong mystic symbol as "Oji Ikenga" - kola of the valiant/the brave. It is only the warriors or the titled men- Nze na Ozo that are permitted to eat this type of kola nut in Igboland. But in Obowu, Imo state, as observed by Agha (2010) such kola nut with three lobes are regarded as defiled kola nut and is never eaten, it symbolizes bad omen. The Igbo proverb has it that "oji gbara ato ji ubochi ugwo" (it is a debtor to the four market days) hence some titled men will not eat it.

Four cotyledonous kola nut is an indicative of acceptance by the divinities in Igboland. Kola nut with four cotyledons is called *Oji Udo na Ngozi* which means “kola of peace/harmony and blessing”. The number four is a very scared number in Igbo culture as it symbolizes the four traditional market days eke, orie, afor, and nkwo, showing equality and social justice. These are said to have been named after the four Angels of God in charge of the four corners of heaven and earth

Kola nut with five cotyledons is called *Oji Omumu*, meaning kola of increase in procreation, prosperity, protection and good luck. It also symbolizes abundant harvest, which the Igbo interpret as wealth, increase and multiplication of children. Expectant parents and the newly married especially men, will always crave to partake of this kola. It is also referred to as “*oji Ikenga*”,

One with six cotyledons is often rare, but when it occurs it is a symbol of covenant or communion between the divinities and man. It is called “*Oji Ogbugbandu*”, bond with the ancestors. It should be noted that the smallest cotyledon of this kola nut is thrown to the ancestors to show the direct link between the living and the dead in Igbo cosmology. It is also a sign of prosperity which means that prosperity of the man that prayed and broke the kola nut is guaranteed.

Seven cotyledons denote good omen and prosperity while eight cotyledons signify joy and happiness and a symbol of royalty. It is said that this specie spores the titled men to exhibit their wealth and power as each contests to buy it for his family for the fortune that the kola nut is purported to have in stock. Eight lobes are highly valuable but rarely found, they are signs of good omen, if such are seen or broken it will be tithed with a rope and the presenter will perform some ceremony to celebrate it. The man will bring a cock, four tubers of yam, two gallons of palm wine (Thomas, Philip, Clifford and Kenneth, 2017/). To buttress this fact Agha (2010) says that if the person who broke the kola nut has no fowl at the time, he will have to preserve the kola nut by tying the lobes of the kola nut together until he is able to afford a fowl. The kola nut has to be eaten together with fowl.

### **Kola nut as Food and Flavouring**

Kola nut has nutritional values both to the Igbo and the non-Igbo who use them. In Igbo land, it is common to see manual labourers and farm workers chewing

kola nut as they go about their daily labour, as source of strength after or in-between meals. Sometimes, it is chewed to diffuse tension just as what the modern chewing of gum represents. Moreover, kola nut is often used as a type of appetizer to enhance the taste of the food to follow, as its astringency cleanses the palate and stimulates saliva production.

Kola nut is also taken as a source of some B vitamins, as well as protein, starch and sugar. In Africa, Muslims often substitute kola nut for alcohol since their religion forbids them to drink or use alcohol or addictives. This may be the reason why in Nigeria, while kola nut is produced more in the west, celebrated in the east among the Igbo, it is highly consumed in the North by the Hausa, hence the kola nitida is generally known in Nigeria as *gworu* (*Oji Hausa- the Hausa kolanut*).

Since John Styth Pemberton in his discovery in May 1886 created the first coca-cola recipe, kola nut has remained the distinctive source of flavor for colas, and certain brands of soft drinks and tonics around the world. Today, for instance, coca-cola company is one of the richest companies around the world and a household name in drinks and tonic entertainment around the world. Even today, when it is purportedly claimed that coca-cola no longer use kola nut for their drinks, but other alternatives like synthetic derivatives for its flavors, kola nut remained their historic beginning. Irrespective of the obvious negative effects on body chemistry, which can lead to such problems like insomnia, high blood pressure, increased heartbeat among others, kola nut has remained a cherished commodity that attracts huge economic prospects globally. “Kola nut trade is a profitable commodity that has made name in the international trade for the production of drinks and pharmaceutical products” (Uchendu, 2004: 28).

### **Palm Wine in Igbo land**

The term palm wine refers to both types of wine tapped from the oil palm and raffia palm trees respectively. According to Mbalisi and Vincent-Anene (2019), “palm wine is a white alcoholic drink beverage from palm tree” (p. 112). There are four different types of Nigerian palm-wine. There is the normal up-wine tapped from the male inflorescence of “life” oil palm tree. This is also known as *emu* and *nkwuenu* amongst the Yoruba and Igbo respectively. There is also the “down-wine” tapped from felled oil-palm tree and is destructive of the crop. The quantity of palm wine produced from a tree depends majorly on the number of male tappers available for tapping and the time or period of the year. During

the March/April and October/November seasons, large quantity of wine is produced. High yield of palm wine in October-November corresponds to the period of production of high number of male inflorescence while high yield in March-April corresponds to the period of increase in the rate of development of organs of the palm-tree being beginning of raining season. Stem tapping of standing oil-palm tree also gives very high yield during the March – April season. The stem tapping by inexperienced tapper may lead to damaging of soft tissues around the growing point and may kill the palm tree or provide entry for infectious insects and bacteria. Such a thing hardly happens with experienced tappers. The palm fronds are cut off leaving only a few around the growing tip. The side to be tapped is cleaned and smoothened. The tapping starts from the end closer to the apex and a very thin slice removed each day of the tapping as the tapping proceeds downwards. This gives higher yield of sap per day and may be tapped for several weeks until it stops producing. The same palm tree may be tapped again after one or two years. The palm wine produced in this case contains less sugar than the inflorescence palm wine. It is therefore not very sweet (when fresh) and the stale palm wine is not as strong or alcoholic as that tapped from the male inflorescence.

The peculiarity and the growth of palm tree in one place and the rarity of the same in other area is, to an extent, the preoccupation and concern in this paper. This situation has actually agitated the researchers to seek for the reasons behind such occurrence and the import of it as it concerns exclusively the local palm wine irrespective of its diverse nature and forms. The essential significance of palm wine cannot be over emphasized. It is necessary to point out here that there are more palm trees in Igboland than many other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This point is buttressed by the fact that the Igbo can hardly hold any ceremony unless palm wine is available. This fact is also corroborated by the inevitable use of palm wine in pouring libation and prayers. Its use is anchored on the belief that palm wine has more potency, a kind of force, which makes it acceptable to Igbo ancestors and sprits. Apparently, the force inherent in palm wine is not visible, yet is the source of communion with Igbo ancestors.

In Igboland, and in any gathering, it is the youngest male or man that serves the palm wine. Palm wine is usually drunk traditionally in either elephant tusks or cow horns for titled men. When palm wine is served there are certain rules that must be obeyed There are two major procedures in breaking kola nut, namely seniority and service (Thomas, Philip, Clifford and Kenneth 2017). Enyioha, observes that the young man serving will hold the wine container (calabash or

gallon) on his left lap and supports it with his left hand, while he holds the tusk or horn- *mpi*, *iko*, or *okuku*- (calabash cup) in his right hand. The first one he serves is handed to the host to drink, the second goes to him, while the third goes to the eldest man in the gathering. After all the formalities, the rest of the men are served except for titled men who are served first before the others. But if the young man is to serve the palm wine standing, he holds the base of the container with his right hand and the neck with his left hand, while the public holds out their cups for him to pour out the wine. All these formalities have reservation for woman. If she is to be served the wine, the young man pours it himself and hands the cup of wine to her, who in turn receives it with both hands as mark of respect and honor. She must not drink it while standing in the gathering; she squats down or sits somewhere before drinking it. If at any point the young man decides to shake the container on the ground before he continues serving, the first person to tap him will receive a cup of palm-wine; the last cup of palm-wine, which contains the dregs (*ugwu mmanya* or *uge nkwu*), is usually given as a mark of honor to the eldest or the host or in

### **Kola and Palm Wine in Contemporary Igbo Society**

The coming of Christianity and its accompanying western influence in Igboland has grossly affected the symbolism and spiritual significance of kola nut and palm wine as highly esteemed Igbo ritual elements. For instance, today in so many occasions in Igboland, including traditional marriages, palm wine which is the hallmark of reception is being replaced by mineral and malt drinks. People do that on the argument that Christians are admonished to refrain from taking alcoholic drinks. Some even assume that palm wine and kola nut are surviving elements of “paganism” that must be extinguished from the new face of Igbo Christian communities. Kola nut is in so many places replaced with biscuits and other eatable items. Kola nut is understood by the Igbo as a medium of communication between man and the divinities and not a mere snack that can be substituted with biscuits and the likes. A communicative object or instrument empowers man to establish a hitherto impossible relation with the divinities. Kola nut as a vehicle of communication objectifies the mind of the presenter and horizontally and vertically makes the relation of unequal status between man and the divinities.

Originally, the Igbo believe that *Oji Igbo* does not understand any other language other than the Igbo language. These days in some parts of Igboland, the ritual of the breaking of kola nut is said in English maybe to carry foreigners along. It is

pertinent to note that since kola nut is deeply rooted in Igbo culture, and since language is an inseparable aspect of culture, blessing of kola nut among the Igbo should be done exclusively in Igbo language no matter how official the gathering is.

### **Conclusion**

In traditional Igbo society, kola nut is highly held. It is used in virtually all the activities of the Igbo man. Palm wine has a strong socio-cultural and economic potentials that are beneficial to many rural African communities. Its importance cannot be overemphasized. It has come to be a universal cultural element that enriches the rural social living of people in many societies. The conviviality and social relaxation it offers to a communal living aside, *Nkwu Enu*, as a special type of Igbo palm wine, has the potential to contribute to industrial production of local drugs and alcohol brewing. As has been shown, this kind of palm wine is not only common to rural African societies but cuts across many continental regions with different nomenclature and usages. Understandably, in as much as palm wine ought to come and be consumed in its original and undiluted form, there is always the danger of adulteration and concoction. The economic fortune that go with it for the 'tappers' in their local business of it notwithstanding, the material prospect from it is on the wane. However, this its economic downward trend can be corrected to match its level of cultural good if the inherent but unsung potentials associated to it can be fully tapped.

External influence has adversely affected the symbolism of kola nut in Igboland that one may be tempted to assume that the future of kola nut is bleak. But that is not to be. According to Ogbalu, "kola nut is one of the fruits which cannot be removed by the people not even by the Whiteman from Igboland" (p. 51). Since, kola nut serves as a precursor at receptions, important meetings, customary ceremonies in Igboland, some people believe in "*onye melu ihe nna ya melu, melu nma*" (he who repeats his father's deeds, has done well). The rules of kola nut communion are fairly established in Igbo communities. The details and the dialects may differ, but the rules are the same.

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