



An Anthropological Perspective to *Igo Oji* (kola nut invocation) among the Igbo People of Nigeria

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Abstract. One of the outstanding features that mark Igbo culture is the kola nut. In the traditional mould, the kola nut goes through a noticeable ritual termed *igo oji* or the kola nut invocation before it is eaten. Research have been carried out by Igbo scholars on the kola nut custom, especially in relation to its use and typology, but inadequate attention has been paid to the invocation. Hinged on the standard form of the kola nut invocation process, the present study therefore examines the invocation process with a view to delineating the nature of the invocation, the structure of the invocation and the manner of language used in the invocation in contemporary times. Twelve male adults were interviewed for this study. The choice of only males is based on the fact that in patriarchal Igbo society, kola nut is actually the business of men and so men are the custodians and repositories of knowledge about the kola nut. The researcher equally observed the custom of *igo oji* in three different occasions. Information gathered from the interviewees and the observations made, formed the data for this study. Analysis of data shows that, in general, the process of *igo oji* is no longer strictly adhered to due to reasons of changes in religious inclination and orientation among the Igbo. Christian religion which most Igbo embraced is the major reason behind the shift in the traditional procedure for kola nut invocation. The three-pronged structure of the invocation is no longer followed, and the language of invocation has fallen from the poetic to the prosaic, with all the adverse implications to Igbo language. It is recommended that, to avoid conflict and disputations, Christians should restrict themselves to *ekpere oji* (prayers over kola nut) while traditionalists should continue with *igo oji* (kola nut invocation)

Keywords: Kolanut, *Oji* Igbo, Culture, Religion, Lobes

1. Introduction

Cultures all over the world are known for one or several symbols or another that makes them unique in a positive way. One of the major elements of the Yoruba culture is the talking drum called *dundun/gangan*, the *aso oke* hat known as *fila*, the *gele* 'headtie' worn by women and *agbada* 'traditional cloth' worn by men. In the area of food, the Yoruba *amala* and *ewedu* stand out among others. A major element of Hausa culture is the *kulikuli*, a fried snack made from peanuts and spices, *tuwo*, a thick pudding made from maize, guinea corn or millet, *kosai*, food made from beans and fried in palm oil and *koko* porridge made from millet or maize; others are *hula* or *bama cap*, a head gear, and the *babaringa*, which is like the Yoruba *agbada* worn by men. The Tiv are mainly denoted by their black and white fabric and hat known as *A'nger*. The Edo/Bini are prominent for their black soup known as *omoebe*. The Efik/Ibibio are known for their traditional vegetable soups known as *afang*, *atama*, *Edikang ikong*, and some others. Among the Igbo, the salient aspects of the culture are seen in both fashion and cuisine. While their men are denoted for their traditional cloth and red cap, *isiagu* and *okpu mmee*, the women are known by their special head gear and double wrapper tied around the waist, *ichafu* and *ukwu akwa*. In terms of cuisine, Igbo is generally known for such soups as *ofe nsala* (white soup), *ofe onugbu* (bitter leaf soup), among others. However, one of the symbols that is used to delineate Igbo culture is the food or seed known as *oji* 'kola nut'. Although, it is mainly eaten as snack by the Hausa, it is used for so many social and ritual purposes among the Igbo.

Some of the uses of the kola nut among the Igbo include, receiving guests, morning invocation to gods and ancestors, prayers during traditional marriage rites and traditional festivals, making covenants or agreements between people or communities, pouring

libations and sacrifices in shrines, and virtually every function among the Igbo. One of the common maxims that underline the importance of the kola nut among the Igbo is *onye wetara oji wetara ndu* ‘He who brings kola nut brings life’, which is commonly said during festive occasions, thus equating kola nut with life. In the perspective of the Igbo, the kola nut is not just a seed or food to be eaten casually or arbitrarily, but a seed that symbolizes life and therefore eaten after observing certain rituals or prayers. It is very hard to see an Igbo buy a kola nut and start eating it as snack. It can be rightly adduced that, any kola nut eaten by an Igbo may have passed through certain rituals of prayers or invocation. Due to the fact that it is not seen as snack, it could be broken into smithereens to reach as many people as possible in a gathering, hence the saying *oji ezughi, mbo aka o jere ebee?* ‘If the kola nut is not sufficient, where did the finger nail go?’ It is for this extrinsic reason that the Igbo see the kola nut as a spiritual food, that they note that: *oji bu nri mmadu na mmuo* ‘kola nut is food for humans and spirits’, meaning that it is only kola nut that is shared by both human beings and spirits. Although chickens, goats and other animals are offered to gods, the kola nut stands out; while the kola nut can be offered alone, no animal can be offered alone without the kola nut. Even during animal offerings, the kola nut takes precedence.

An essential feature of the kola nut custom among the Igbo is the invocation that attends it referred to as *igo oji*. In traditional Igbo society, before eating the kola nut, an elder will offer it to the gods and ancestors; such offering is couched in prayers to the Supreme Being, *Chukwu*, the land, *ala*, and the ancestors, *ndiichie*. The invocation is actually the process of summoning the spirits to participate in the kola nut event. This invocation is an art in itself masterfully crafted and delivered by elders and orators in figurative locution laden with proverbs, idioms, innuendoes and other metaphorical expressions. Notably, the invocation is not evinced in simple prose, for two reasons. First, for whatever reason that necessitated the use of the kola nut, it is a gathering of adult males, who culturally use higher language. Secondly, and more importantly, given the trajectory of the offering, the invocator is not only addressing humans but spirits who are usually approached with deeper forms of the language. It should be emphasised that it is not every adult Igbo that has the skill to offer kola nut; the skill is actually transmitted from generation to generation, as children learn from their fathers or other elders in the community, until, over time, they achieve sufficient mastery of the art. Incidentally, in contemporary time, the traditional way of offering kola nut is no longer the same, just like every other aspect of the Igbo culture affected by

modernization. Although the kola nut culture among the Igbo has defied modernization, same cannot be said of the way and process of its offering in the present time.

Based on the construct above, the present study focuses on the kola nut custom among the Igbo, by examining if invocations are still made during the kola nut event, the present structure of the kola nut invocation (to be interchangeably used with the blessing of kola nut), and the manner of language used during the invocation. Beyond addressing these issues, this study is poised to ascertain the reason(s) behind the departure from the traditional way of breaking kola nuts and its effects on the Igbo language and culture. For an easier understanding of this study, a look shall be taken at the origin of the kola nut, what kola nut means to the Igbo, as well as works done on the subject.

2. Etymology of kola nut among the Igbo

There exist several myths surrounding the origin of Igbo kola nuts (to be used interchangeably with *Oji* hereafter) and its adoption as a sacred fruit among other fruits in Igboland. Ogbalu (1981) traces the origin of *Oji* to an old man’s visit to the Supreme Being, *Chukwu*. *Chukwu* asked the old man to enter his big house where he, *Chukwu*, keeps varieties of fruits and select the one he, the old man, likes. The man chose *Oji* and went home with it. The man planted the *Oji* according to *Chukwu*’s instruction; when the *Oji* tree grew, he held it sacred because it came from *Chukwu*. Ogbalu (2019) shares same view, but added that “... when *Oji* tree started yielding fruits, our forefathers started using the seed to welcome their guests as *Chukwu* had used it in welcoming them (p.38).

The above myth has a link with divinity. The Igbo forebears copied what *Chukwu* did with *Oji*, that is, offering it to a guest, and handed same down to their children, hence, the Igbo use of *Oji* to commune with divinity and welcome guests. Other myths have it that *Chukwu*, himself, planted *Oji* as the first tree in Igbo land, so that its fruits serve as fruits for both gods and men. On the other hand, a myth has it that gods lived on kola nut trees (see Kanu, 2020). The sum of it is that the Igbo have a strong belief that *Oji* is connected with divinity, hence, their celebrating it before breaking and eating it. It is equally for the same reason that they have some taboos that surround the sacred nut. For instance, women do not climb kola nut tree not to think of plucking it; women do not bless it in the presence of a man or use its dried sticks as firewood. Furthermore, it is a taboo among the Igbo for someone

to steal kola nut. Kola nut must also be blessed and broken before it is eaten. During the breaking of kola nuts, silence is maintained. The silence is not just in honour of the kola and divinity that will be communicated with through the kola; it helps the audience to pay rapt attention to the prayers so that they know when to play their part by answering *isee*, which serves as a seal to the prayers.

In support, the work of Obineche (2017) based on the history of kola nut as a significant socio-cultural symbol of identification of Igbo origin of hospitality, unity and integration reveals that *Oji Igbo* is valued in Igbo tradition and its sacredness is attached to the foundation of Igbo origin. Similarly, the work of Nwadiakor and Eze (2021) on historical and phenomenological inquiry into the meaning and symbolism of Igbo kola nut and palm wine reveal that the sacredness of kola nut can be traced to Igbo origin; however, external factors have adversely affected the symbolism of kola nut among the Igbo.

2.1 The Igbo and kola nut

Kolanut can simply be defined as the seed kernel of a large African tree grown commercially around the world, particularly in Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Brazil and other parts (Obineche, 2017). Kola nuts are of different sizes, and colours, and they perform sundry functions for different ethnic groups. Anidobe and Uzoakor (2010, p. 1) note that “In Nigeria, up to twenty species of kola are recognised.” Even though there are different species of kolanuts, every ethnic group has its own level of attachment to it. Uchem (2001, p. 60) avers that there is a popular national adage developed around kolanuts thus: “The Yorubas grow the kolanut, the Hausas eat it, but the Igbo celebrate it.” This is to say that kolanuts mean different things to different people. It also affirms the importance the Igbo attach to it.

The Igbo uphold kolanut as a sacred nut. They have their own specie of kolanut, called *Oji Igbo* that is *colacuminata*. It is this particular specie of kolanut that they celebrate and use for all their occasions. On Igbo kola nut, Ezeifeke and Chinyeaka (2019) submit that:

It is a nut imbued with both physical and supernatural powers, and performative utterances during the breaking ritual are believed to possess the potency of spiritual preservation (p. 130).

The Igbo actually have a strong belief that kola nut is not an ordinary nut, hence, the reason behind their ritualising it. The Igbo do not just get kola nut and eat it, they rather perform both linguistic and paralinguistic actions before eating it. This is to say

that the breaking of kola nut has its own procedure which is considered very important. Kola-nut is, to say the least, the closest companion to the traditional Igboman (Nnabuihe, 2018). Continuing, Nnabuihe (2018) explains that the traditional Igboman’s relationship with *Oji* starts from the womb and continues till his death; this, he said, is because “There is hardly anything a traditional Igboman would do all through his life that kolanut would not be presented (p.152). The presentation of kola nuts in every occasion shows indeed how important the nut is to the Igbo. Ogbalu (1979, p. 55) affirms the dual function of *Oji* when he states that: “*oji na-egosị obioma mmadu nwere n’ebe ibe ya no, ma o bu n’ebe chi ya no*”. ‘Kolanut shows a good heart one has towards his fellow man or towards his *Chi*’. This is to say that the Igbo offer kola nuts both to their *Chi* and to their fellows. Nzeakor (2002) shares the same view with Ogbalu, but adds that:

O bu ezie na oji di nta ma o na-arụ ọrụ di ukwu n’ala anyi, na-egosị obi oma mmadu nwere n’ebe mmadu ibe ya no, n’ebe ihe kere mmadu no na n’ebe ndi ichie na ndi nwuru anwu kwesiri icheta echeta no... ebe oji di, nsopuru, ugwu na obi ocha di ya. (p.3).

‘It is true that kola nut is small but it does a great job in our land, shows good heart a person has towards his fellow man, and the creator and on the ancestors and the dead who are worth remembering... where there is kola nut, honour, prestige and clean heart is there’.

The above excerpt amplifies the importance of kola nut. The Igboman relates with his fellowmen, creator, and ancestors through kola nut, hence the honour and prestige accorded it. The Igbo relates with his fellowman by offering him kola nut to welcome him; his creator by praying to him with kola nut; his ancestors and the dead worth remembering by inviting them in the blessing of kola nut and giving them their own portions when the breaking is done. It is based on the above relationships that the Igbo assert that *aka ruru aru adighi emetu oji* ‘a soiled hand does not touch kola nuts’ (see Ubesie,1979). The Igboman’s attachment to *Oji* is further justified by his belief that “Spirits or gods, to whom prayers are directed do not accept them unless they are made through a connecting medium of Igbo kola” (Obiajulu & Nnajofofor, 2017, p. 87). The Igbo are very religious group of people and they will do everything possible to make sure that their prayers are heard.

The name given to the kolanut is founded on the cotyledons inherent in it which eventually suggests its functional and ceremonial suitability (Nwadiakor & Eze, 2021). The above explanation brings to the fore, another important point on the use of the sacred nut. The lobes determine its name, significance, purpose

and appropriateness. This is to say that the lobes in a kola nut determine the name given to it. It is also the number of lobes in *Oji* that settles if it will be used for a particular occasion or not, and if it is suitable for consumption or not.

The Igbo consider one-lobed kolanut as *Oji ogbi, Agbara/Mmuo*. The first name *Oji ogbi*, (dumb kola nut) suggests that the kola nut did not say a thing, therefore it belongs to the gods, or seen as an evil omen and thrown away (Ezeifeka and Chinyeaka, 2019), or belongs to *Chukwu* (Kanu, 2022). The strangeness of the one-lobed kola nut explains the reason it is not used for rituals among the Igbo. A two-lobed kola nut is also perceived as the one-lobed kola nut. According to scholars, (Nwadike in Uzọalo, 2017; Obiajulu & Nnajiifo, 2018) the spirits do not accept such kola nuts and they are not used for rituals.

Three-lobed kola nut called *Oji Ikenga /Dike* is exclusively meant for men who are great achievers. It is very symbolic among the Igbo and symbolizes three male children (Nnabuihe, 2008) or the tripartite aspects of man in Igbo psychology namely; *Arụ* 'Body'; *mkpuruobi/uche* 'soul/mind' and *mmuo* 'spirit' (Obiajulu & Nnajiifo (2017). This is to say that everything that makes a human being is fully represented in the three lobed kola. However, Ezeifeka & Chinyeaka (2019, p. 129) argue that "three is a significant number in Igbo but not a lucky number". In support, Nwadior & Eze (2021, p. 82) citing Agha (2010), note that "...kolanut with three lobes [sic] are regarded as defiled kolanut and is never eaten, as it symbolised bad omen. The Igbo proverb has it that "oji gbara ato ji ubochi ugwo" (a three-lobed kola nut is a debtor to the four market days) hence some titled man [sic] will not eat it. All these points to the fact that even though kola nuts are accepted among the Igbo, the significance of the lobes is subject to various interpretations.

A four-lobed kola nut is celebrated virtually among every area in Igboland. While some call this kola, *Oji afia naano ubosi ano* (four markets four days' kola). Others call it *Oji udo na ngozi* (kola of peace and blessing). The number four is very symbolic among the Igbo. Apart from the fact that it marks four market days which Igbo count for a week, it stands for completeness. On four-lobed kola, Obiajulu and Nnajiifo (2017) argue that:

Both the male and female face each other, not in a confrontational manner, not in a remonstrative posture, but in a manner that smacks of coming together of negative and positive polar conditions for the purpose of producing a new being creative light

and power of life, the light of a father and the power of a mother... (p.89).

Nnabuihe (2018) supports the above claim when he notes that the four-lobed kolanut predicate two males and two females' children. Among the Igbo, a family with such combination of children is said to be complete. Five-lobed kolanuts and more are very acceptable to the Igbo. They signify great things and good things to come. On the issue of sex in such lobes, Nnabuihe (2018, p. 162) gives an elaborate explanation when he notes that:

Apart from the three-lobe kola *Ikenga*, that contains all males, kolanut hardly contains more than two male lobes irrespective of the number of lobes in it. This explains why the Igbo uphold polygamy but do not tolerate polyandry. Being a people who long to have many children through the institution of marriage, the Igbo permit a man to marry more wives... This is to create the opportunity for all women to get married...

The long explanation justifies polygamy among the Igbo. The fewer number of male lobes to female lobes is further justified by the Igbo saying that *nwoke di uko* (man is scarce). The Igbo see polygamy as a way of ensuring that their young ladies are customarily married, thereby discouraging harlotry and single motherhood.

Discussions so far are pertinent; for they arm the person that will bless and break the kola nut with enough knowledge on what to do and what to refrain from. Although the presentation, blessing and breaking of kola nut may differ slightly in different Igbo culture areas, there are still some key things that remain the same for all Igbo. The environment goes a long way in determining who presents the kola nut. If it were to be at home, a man's wife or son brings the kola nut to him to present to visitors. If it were a gathering, the host will present the kola to the oldest man based on the Igbo belief that an old man is closer to the ancestors. The Igbo believes that *Okenye kwachaa akpiri, ndi mmuo egewe nti* 'when an old man clears his throat, the ancestors pay attention'. Duru (2016, p. 66) attests that:

Prior to the blessing of kolanut, one significant thing that must be observed is that it moves from hand to hand. First, the elders of the land owners ... are shown the kola and from there it goes round to other relevant persons, as the tradition provides. After the movement of the kolanut, it is returned to the title holder before blessing.

The movement of kola nut from hand to hand is a form of headcount among the Igbo. In some places, the movement is done according to kin relationship. Once

the kola gets to a person, he touches it to show his consent. The kola nut is returned to the oldest man or the title holder for blessing and breaking. The blessing of kola nut has its own procedure. It is not just the kind of general prayer done in contemporary time. Uchendu (1965) aptly notes that:

A typical prayer calls on the creator, the ancestors, and all friendly spirits to “eat” kolanut. It demands good health, wealth to nourish it, progress for all, and peace to the village. It calls on the wicked and the sorcerers to meet their disastrous end (p. 74).

The excerpt defends the reason behind the raising of the kola nut when blessing it. The first to be acknowledged is the creator, hence, the raising of the kola to honour him. The invitation to the kola moves in hierarchies, from the creator to the divinities such as *ala*, the earth goddess, the ancestors, then, friendly spirits. It is believed that it is only when these spirit beings are present that one can make his demand. A look at the demands equally shows a good sequence - good health, wealth, progress and peace. It is only the healthy that will enjoy his wealth and make good progress. Peace is equally important for without it, a man’s joy will not be complete. The interest of all is also part of the petition. The prayer did not forget the wicked spirits. If these spirits are not addressed, life will remain difficult for the people. Nwala (2010, p.211) specifically notes that in the kola nut invocation, visitors are wished safe journey home even as the host and his family remains in peace. When the prayer is going on, those in the environment play their part by echoing ‘*isee*’. This response shows their consent to the prayers. It also acts as a seal to the prayers. Ezeifeke and Chinyeaka’s (2019) aver that the breaking of kola nut is a strong speech event. The reference to *igo oji* as a ‘strong speech event’ implies that, given the setting, the nature and manner of language used is not ordinary. The language is usually poetic so as to align with the participants, particularly the deities. Kanu (2022, p.44) shares the above idea when he states that: “During prayers, *Chukwu* is invoked with incantations garnished with proverbs and prayers...” the is to say that the act of blessing kola nut requires a good speaker who understands appropriate use of proverbs.

It is after the *igo oji* that the kola nut is broken. Basden (1921, p. 226) describes an easier way to break the nut when he notes that nut can be “held bottom and upwards and the thumb nails pressed firmly into the natural lines of division”. It is worth noting that kola nuts are broken long according to their natural lines. This pattern of breaking it is very symbolic as it stands for long life. It also gives a clearer insight into the Igbo aphorism that *onye wetara oji wetara ndu* “S/he who

brings kola nut brings life. The Igbo make every effort to see that everyone partakes of the kola nut, no matter how large they are in number. It is based on this that the Igbo say: *a na-asị na oji ezughị, mboaka o jere ebee?* ‘How can you say that the kola nut is not sufficient, where did the finger nails go?’” The saying is to further establish the need for all to partake in the blessed kola nut which signifies life, even if it means using the finger nails to break it into smaller pieces.

Igo oji is one of the cultures the Igbo still hold very dearly. Ogbalu (1979, p.54) insists that “*Oji bu otu n’ime omenala Igbo nke ndi ocha na-enweghi ike ichu n’ala Igbo*” (kolanut is one of the traditions which the Europeans could not destroy in Igboland). This assertion is still very strong for despite contact with other ethnicities and their religions, the Igbo still maintain the culture of *igo oji*.

Discussions so far point to the significance of kola nut among the Igbo. A look shall now be taken at some other research works done on Igbo kola nut.

3. Literature

Earlier works done on Igbo kola nuts concentrated on what kola nut is to the Igbo, its significant, taboos, advantages and disadvantages (see Ogbalu, 1979;81, Osuagwu 1979, Ekwealor, 1998, and Nzeako, 2002, Ubesie, 1979). However, there exist some more recent works on Igbo kola nut.

The work of Obineche (2017) is a reminiscent of the history of kola nut as a significant socio-cultural symbol of identification of the Igbo origin of hospitality unity and integration. His finding shows that *Oji Igbo* is more valued in Igbo tradition where its sacredness is attached to the foundation of Igbo origin.

Ezeifeke and Chinyeaka’s (2019) study is on speech act analysis of the utterances that precede the breaking of kola nut in selected cultural events. Their findings reveal that different speech situations have different participants who enact different acts. The acts have effects on both man and supernatural beings who are part of the events. Their conclusion has it that kola nut is a strong speech event which connects the living and the dead in Igbo culture. They maintain that civilisation and Christianity cannot destroy the kola nut ritual among the Igbo.

Kanu’s (2022) research has to do with Igbo kola nut and *Igwebuiké* philosophy. His result shows that kola nut expresses *Igwebuiké* philosophy which is the operative condition of the Igbo worldview. The work of Nwadiakor and Eze (2021) is on historical and phenomenological inquiry into the meaning and

symbolism of Igbo kola nut and palm wine. Their findings reveal that the sacredness of kola nut can be traced to Igbo origin; however, external factors have adversely affected the symbolism of kola nut among the Igbo.

The present research is different from the earlier ones based on the fact that it takes a look at kola nut through ethnolinguistic perspective with a view to finding out if invocations are still made during the kola nut event, the present structure of the kola nut invocation, the manner of language used during the invocation, the reason(s) behind the departure from the traditional way of breaking kola nuts and its effects on the Igbo language and culture.

4. Research Methodology

The researcher gathered data for this study through a mixed method. Materials from the library and internet that have to do with kola nuts were gathered/downloaded and read. The researcher, who is an Igbo, relied also on her intuitive knowledge of Igbo language and culture. With the assistance of three male and three female research assistants, the researcher was able to get recordings of blessing and breaking of kola nuts in different marriage functions in Alor, Idemmili South, Anambra State. The researcher, who has watched time and again, with keen interest, the traditional blessing and breaking of kola nuts from some senior colleagues, Professors Nnabuihe and Okoro, at the University of Lagos, recorded the procedure and equally met them for an interview session on Igbo kola nut. Out of about nine recordings on blessing and breaking of kola nut, only three were selected based on the fact that the recorded voices were clearer. The three also covered the Christian and traditional blessing of the sacred nut. The blessing and breaking of kola nut which were done in Igbo were translated into English language and this formed the data for this study.

4.2 Data Presentation

Here, data gathered for this study are carefully presented. Data I is the first recording of *igo oji* in a marriage ceremony. Following each Igbo rendition is an English translation. The Igbo sentences are numbered to aid the analysis of the data.

Data I

Ndị Ogo anyị, ekelee mụ ụnụ ooo! 1
(Our in-laws, I greet you ooo!)
Geenụ ntị ofuma 2
(Listen attentively)
Eji m oji n'aka n'afa 3
(I am holding the kola nut on behalf of ...)

Wee na-asị na mmemme taa na aka Chineke dī ya ...
4
(I am saying that the hand of God is in today's celebration...)
O wee mee anyị, anyị na-awa oji a 5
(And he made us, and we are breaking this kolanut)
M wee na-asị Ada anyị na ogo anyị nwoke 6
(And I am saying to our daughter and our in-law)
Chineke ya-enye ụnụ udo na ifunanya ... 7
(God will give you peace and love...)
Anyị na-asị na ụnụ ya-amuta nwoke mta nwaanyi ee 8
(We are saying that you will give birth to male and female, yes?)
Ụnụ mụlụ one ụnụ ya-azụ, ụnụ azụo ha nkeoma 9
(You will give birth to the number you can train, and you train them well)
Chineke ya-enye anyị ogonogo ndu 10
(God will give us long life)
A sị onye chuo, o rie ee 11
(It is said that whoever works, eats yes?)
Ụnụ na-eje obodo oyibo, ụnụ ana-anata 12
(As you travel outside the country, you will be coming back)
Anyị nọ n'ụnọ anọlụ na-ekpelụ ụnụ ekpele 13
(We at home will stay and be praying for you)
Ka Chineke gozie anyị nine bịara ebe a n'aha Jizọs Kraịst bụ onye nwe anyị 14
(Let God bless us all that came here in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord).
Response – Amen!

The speaker in the first line, greets the in-laws, which is in tandem with Igbo tradition. It is one of the ways of letting someone know that s/he is welcome. In the second line, the speaker commands his audience to listen attentively. Such command shows that he had something very important to say or tell them. In the third line, the speaker announced that he was holding the kola nut; this is a subtle reminder to the audience who were not paying attention (as suggested in the second line) to be mindful of his presence. Holding the kola nut is like holding a wand of authority to speak which implies that the audience must show respect for the kola nut and listen attentively. This authoritative symbol of the kola nut is synonymous with the 'Conch' in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. In the novel, the conch (a shell) became a symbol of order during meetings among the boys, in the island, meaning that one can only speak if he had the conch. In the data above, the speaker called for order by notifying the inattentive audience that he was holding the kola nut, meaning that having the kola nut conferred on him the right and authority to speak. The speaker proceeded to acknowledged the hand of God

in the celebration in line four. It is the help of God that kept them all, hence, their breaking the kola nut as he noted in line five. Line six is directed to the couple. The speaker's use of *Ada anyị* 'our daughter' in this line shows that he is from the bride's family. The seventh line is a prayer for peace and love between the couple. The prayer continues in line eight, and it is for procreation – male and female children. Line nine is an advice for the couple to give birth to the number of children they can afford to train very well. In line ten, the speaker prayed for everyone, asking for long life. He expressed his expectation in line eleven: it is only someone who has planted something that enjoys the harvest. Line twelve is also a prayer for the couple, that they will be travelling outside the country, where it is believed that there is greener pasture, but as they travel, they will not forget home. On the part of those at home, their work is to pray for them. In the last line, fourteen, the speaker prayed for God's blessings on all and the people responded by answering 'Amen' to the prayers.

Data 2

The following data is also a recording from a marriage ceremony. The kola nut is blessed thus:

(Akpomoku) Otuto dīlī Jeeso - (nzaghachi) Na ndū ebeebe, Amen 1

((Call) Glory be to Jesus - (Response) forever Amen)

Ọ ọ nwadīana m bụ ... bjalū kpọlū nwaanyị 2

(It is my sister's son that is ...that married a wife) Ekpele m na-ekpe bụ na ọ ga-adīlī fa mma 3

(My prayer is that it will be well with them) Fa ga-amūta nwoke mūta nwaanyị 4

(They will give birth to male and female) Mūọ one ha ga-azūnwu eeh 5

(Give birth to the number that they can take care of eeh)

Eee m ha zūchaa ūmūazi, ūmūazi azūbakwa ha 6

(Eeem, when they are done training the children, the children will take care of them)

Ije anyị bjara ebe a, ọọ ije mmīlī ... 7

(Our visit here, it is a way to the stream)

So, na ndī ọgọ ayī ọ ga-adīrī ayī na unū mma 8

(So, our in-laws, it will be well with you and with us) Nwadiana ga-abja bjakwute unū bjakwutekwooyī 9

(Grandchild will come, come to you and come to us.)

So, na agamnihu ka anyị na-ayo

10

(So, we plead for progress)

Na-ayo Chineke, O ya-anyechasī anyī ogonogo ndū na ahūisiike 11

(We pray to God, he will give us long life and good health.)

Anyī afūkwasīanū ūmūdiana a ga-amūtasīkwa 12

(We see the grandchildren that will be given birth to) ūmūdiana afūkwasīanū ndī nna ha ochie, īghōtago? Fūsja ūmūnne ha 13

(Grandchildren will see their maternal grandparents. You understand? See their kin.)

So na m onyenweanyī, oge adīhōzi ... Ka Chineke gozie ọjī a n'aha Jizos Kraist bụ onye nwe anyī.

14

(So that our lord, there is no time... Let God bless this kola in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Response – Amen!

In the above data, the speaker, in line one, started with praise to Jesus. This kind of praise is peculiar to the liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church. He introduced himself in line two by stating his relationship with the groom; he is a maternal uncle to the groom. In line three, he prayed that it will go well with the couple. The prayer continues in line four where he prayed for them to have children – male and female. He equally added in lines five and six that the couple should give birth to the number of children they can afford to train and when they are done training them, the children will in turn take care of their parents. Line seven describes the kind of journey the marriage is, which is likened to the path to a stream. Line eight is a prayer that all will go well with the in-laws, while line nine is for both families, that both families will be blessed with grandchildren. Progress is prayed for in line ten while long life with good health is the plea, so that they, the maternal family will see their grandchildren as line twelve shows. The prayer continued in line thirteen, which is that the grandchildren will see their maternal uncles and other kin. The speaker called on God, in line fourteen, acknowledged that time was not on their side, that is to say that he would have said/prayed for more things if they had the time. All the same, he requested that God should bless the kola nut in Jesus Christ's name. The people present responded by echoing 'Amen', which serves as a seal in Christian faith.

Data 3

The following data is abridged for lack of space. It is a recording of the blessing of kola nut in a meeting at the University of Lagos. The prayer is as follows:

(Akpòmoku) Chaa chaa chaa chaa nzukòòò -
(nzaghachi) Ugwu! 1.

(Call - Chaa chaa chaa chaameeting
Response - prestige!)

Ndị Mbaise ... Akala ... Alor ... lekwanụ oji ooo
2.

(People of Mbaise... Akala ... Alor ... see kola nut
ooo)

Oji a anyị ji n'aka gbara anọ, e kewaa ya, ibuọ ka ọ wụ
3.

(The kolanut we are holding has four lobes, when
divided, it is two)

Ihe ọ gbasa bụ nwoke na nwaanyị... 4
(It concerns male and female...)

Chukwu Okike abjama, anyị ekeneka gị ooo5

(*Chukwu Okike abjama* (God, the all-knowing
creator), we thank you very well ooo)

Chukwu Okike abjama, anyị ekenechaa gị ooo
mmamma n'ụbọchị taa 6

(*Chukwu Okike abjama*, we thank you very much
today)

... Ọfọ na ogu ka e ji agọ oji 7

(... we use *ọfọ* na *ogu* (symbols of justice and equity)
to bless kolanut)

Ihe anyị ji ebe a wụ nzu 8

(What we have here is *nzu* (kaolin))

Ụcha ụcha ka anyị dị wee bịa ooo 9

(We came clean ooo)

Anyị atụhọ ilulo tugide mmadụ ibe anyị.

10

(We did not think evil of our fellow man ...)

Isi kotere evu ka evu ya-agba ...

11

(the head that hooks the gadfly will be stung by the
gadfly)

Chukwu Okike abjama ... anyanwụ lekwa oji ooo

12

(*Chukwu Okike abjama ... anyanwụ* (sun) see kola nut
ooo)

Ala ... mmụọ jikọtara ala na àfọ, ihe a bụ oji ...

13

(Land ... the spirit that holds the land and *àfọ* (market
day) together, this is kola nut...)

Eke, anyị sị gị bịa were oji ...

14

(*Eke* (market day), we invite you to come and take kola
nut)

Ndị mmụommiri niile ... Nkwọ, anyị sị gị bịa were oji

15

(All the water spirits ... *Nkwọ* (market day), we invite
you to come and take kola nut)

... Eke, Afọ, Nkwọ... taa bụ Orié, zukọonụ n'Oríe

16

(... *Eke, Afọ, Nkwọ* ... today is *Oríe*, meet together on
Oríe)

Oríe bụ ikuku ... ikuku bụ Onyeozí ... 17

(*Oríe* is wind ... wind is a messenger)

Chukwu Okike Abjama ... sị Orié nyezuchaa ... ihe
mmamma ooo 18

(*Chukwu Okike Abjama* ... tell *Oríe* to give ...things
very well)

Ihe ọbụla bụ ihe ọjọ Orié regbuchaa ya ... 19

(Whatever thing that is bad, *Oríe* should burn it off
completely)

Mezichaara ... Hazichaara anyị ihe mmamma20

(keep very well ... arrange things for us very well)

Ezumezu alaIgbo niile ... ala Odua, ala Legọọsị ... bía
were oji 21

(The whole of Igboland... land of Odua, land of
Lagos, come and take kola nut)

... Ala Igbo ga-adịdo ruo oge ebighiebi 22

(... Igbo land will last for ever)

Ala Yoruba ga-adi, anyị ga na-emekọrịta ruo oge
ebighiebi 23

(The land of Yoruba will live; we will continue to
relate with them forever)

... ndi egede ... ndi nwe ala ... ndi ichie ala Igbo niile

... Yoruba niile ... anyị sị unu zukọọ bía were oji ...24

(... the old ... owners of the land ... the forebears of
the entire Igboland... entire Yoruba land ... we invite
you to meet and take kolanut)

... ugwu ka m ji wee kpọkuo unu 25

(... I called you in honour ...)

Ka ekpere anyị rezie n'Ọfọ ... Iseee 26

(Let our prayers be effective with *Ọfọ* ... Iseee)

The first line in this data calls the meeting to order in a traditional way. The second line invites the towns of the meeting members to the presentation of kola nut. In line three, the speaker acknowledged the number of lobes the kola nut has and stated its significance which extends to line four. In lines five and six, he gave honour to *Chukwu Okike Abjama* God, the all-knowing creator. Line seven states categorically what is needed in blessing kola nut among the Igbo - *Ọfọ* 'staff of authority' and *Ogu* 'the spike of justice'. He presented *nzu* (kaolin), which is symbolic of a clean heart. Lines eight and nine show the significance of kaolin, which is hearts. In line ten, the speaker continued to state their innocence, noting in line eleven that it is only trouble makers that are engulfed with trouble. In lines twelve to sixteen, the speaker called on *Chukwu* and his agents to behold the kola nut, he specifically mentioned the market day the day fell on which was *Oríe*. In lines seventeen to twenty, he stated the assignment of *Oríe* market day and prayed that it destroys every evil and brings everything good. In line twenty-one, the Igboland, Yorubaland and specifically, Lagos land where the blessing of the kola nut took place were all invited to eat kola nut. Lines twenty-two and twenty-three, are prayers for longevity of Igbo and Yoruba and good relationship

between the two ethnic groups. In lines twenty-four and twenty-five, the forebears of the land were invited in honour to meet together and eat kola nut. The last line, twenty-six, is the conclusion. The speaker prayed for the effectiveness of the prayers in line with *Ofo*, the traditional seal, and the people present answered *Isee* 'so be it' which signifies also, a seal of approval to the prayers.

5. Discussion

The discussion of findings will follow the trajectory of the research objectives, with respect to the inquiry on whether the practice of *igo oji* has survived, followed by the process or structure, and the manner of language used in the art. Underlying these two inquiries is the fact that the kola nut custom is one of the Igbo customs that have survived the intrusion of Christianity and Westernisation into Igbo culture. Although the tradition of using kola nut is still very much alive in Igbo functions, the data so far show that it hardly follows the traditional procedures and convention, in both the offering and invocation and in language use.

First, is the fact that the invocation is almost completely left out of the offering; it is just a mere prayer bereft of the invitation to the deities to partake in the eating of the kola nut. In data 1 and 11, prayers were said by the speakers to the Supreme Being for various reasons, particularly blessings to the living. However, the speakers did not invite the Supreme Being to partake in the eating of the kola nut, as was practiced in times of yore. It is only in data 111 that shows semblance of the ideal invocation where the deities stemming from *Chukwu okike Abiama* (Supreme Being) to *Ala*, (earth goddess) *ndiichie*, *ndiegede* (ancestors) and *Eke, Ori, Afo, Nkwo* (the four Igbo market days) were summoned. The difference is that, in data 1 and 11, the speakers merely asked God to bless the living in sundry ways, but in data 111, the speaker made an open invitation to the deities to come and partake in the kola nut event. It bears repeating that *igo oji* (kola nut invocation) is different from *ikpe ekpere* (prayers). Evidently, the difference can be clarified by the religious orientation of the speakers; while speakers in data 1 and 11 were orthodox Christians, the speaker in data 111 was an Igbo traditionalist. Apparently, Christians refrain from *igo oji* due to the implications of idolatry based on the understanding and belief that the ancestors have no relationship with the living, which is in contrast with the belief of the traditionalists that the ancestors are ever with us, although dead. On this vexed subject, interviewees from varied belief systems provided different accounts. While Igbo Christians admit the importance of the kola nut and the part it plays in Igbo

culture, they strongly disagree on the need to follow the traditional pattern as regards inviting the gods to eat the kola nut not to think of breaking it and giving the gods their share. On the contrary, the traditionalists argued strongly that since kola nut is a female nut, given to our forebears by *Chukwu Okike Abiama* it is necessary to offer it to the gods and also invite them to partake in the breaking and eating, hence *igo oji*. They contend that one must follow the right procedure for offering and breaking it. They argue strongly that instead of breaking the sacred nut in the Christian way, the Christians should forget about it and use other substitutes like garden eggs, biscuits and soft drinks to say their prayers. The traditionalists envisage also that if the Christian pattern of blessing and breaking of kola nut continues, Igbo youths and their successors will in no distant time forget the origin and values of kola nut in Igbo culture.

In terms of the traditional structure of *igo oji*, the data shows that, among the three data presented, the order is not strictly followed. Although there are variations in the organisation of the ideas or content in kola nut invocation, there are three basic components; first is the *mmacha okwu* (introductory phase) where the speaker uses his creativity and skill to deliver some relevant maxims and proverbs to clear the way for accessing the spirits. This phase is followed by the *mkpoku* (the invocation) where the speaker summons the deities to validate the event with their presence. The third phase is the prayers said by the speaker on behalf of the audience, which signals the end. Before the prayers, the speaker declares his innocence. This is referred to as *itu ogu* (declaration of innocence). Here, the speaker takes time to express his innocence and declares that any evil he thinks of another should befall him. He equally prays same for his enemies, that any evil they plan against him and his household should return to them. A critical look at the three data shows that none of them complied strictly with the standard structure. The speaker in data 1 used greetings to the audience as introductory remark, while the speaker in data 11 used a Catholic liturgical expression and an introduction of himself as introductory remark. The speaker in data 111 used a variant of a popular Igbo call-greeting form '*Igbo kwenu!*' used mainly during large gatherings as introductory remarks. It is pertinent to note that this particular Igbo call-greeting form is not used during *igo oji*; it is mainly used during speech events, where a speaker uses it to greet and also to arrest the attention of the audience. It needs be pointed out that, as important as greetings are in Igbo culture, there is no place for greeting of people or introduction of self during kola nut invocation. Usually, guests have already been received with greetings before the kola nut is presented; attention is now focused on the

summons to the gods and deities and the prayers for the gathered audience in the setting. Evidently, none of the speakers used *mmacha okwu* as introduction in the events. The non-use of *mmacha okwu* is a major limitation in the art of *igo oji* in the data.

The second phase of the kola nut invocation is *mkpoku*; it is only the speaker in data III that complied with this by summoning the deities to partake in the kola nut event as was fully explained in the first section of the discussion; the (non)compliance with this aspect of *igo oji* is implicated in the religious orientation of the facilitators or speakers. The third and last phase is the prayers said by the speaker on behalf of the audience; the data shows that all the speakers complied with this aspect of *igo oji*. In Data I and II, the speakers made prayers to the Christian God for love, peace, progress, grandchildren and good relationship with kin but they made no mention of evil men or enemies. The prayer did not strike a good balance as *itu ogu* was conspicuously missing. Although the Christian faith believes and preaches the forgiveness of one's enemies, they still pray against the stubborn ones. It is only when God deals with the stubborn enemies that the person enjoys good progress. It must be noted that in samples I and II, both speakers prayed for everyone. This is well understood because it is a large gathering and people will not be called one after another to ascertain their towns or ethnicity so that they be mentioned in prayers. The speaker in data III took time for *itu ogu*. In lines eight to ten, he declared their state of innocence while in line eleven, he prayed against their enemies. He proceeded to pray for all good things to come to people at the meeting by pleading that *Chukwu Okike Abjama* tells *Orie* to bring them. He pleaded also that *Orie* should burn off every evil. The prayer recognizes that evil needs to be dealt with so that people enjoy their lives. It must be noted, the mention of *Chukwu Okike Abjama* and *ala* among other gods in the prayer of the speaker in Data III. The Igbo hold the two gods in high esteem. Udechukwu (2017) notes that:

Male and female gods and goddesses, such as Chukwu and Ala, governed the lives of people. Chukwu was the masculine "Supreme Being" of all creation and actions, and "Ala" Feminine deities was the "great mother goddess". Chukwu and Ala seem to represent the father and mother of a human household (p. 88). It is based on this belief that anyone who blesses and breaks the kola in a traditional way recognises the two gods. He prayed for the entire Igboland and the land of sojourn – Yoruba, and Lagos specifically. The Igbo are known as *Oje Mba enwe iro* 'A traveller does not have enemy'. In his/her description of the Igbo, Aniga (2023, p. 154) notes that they "... are fearless. They do not fear to migrate". Based on the Igbo nature of

migration, they seek the peace of the owners of the land they sojourn to. This belief justifies the prayers for Yoruba land and specifically, Lagos. Data I and II ended the blessing of the kola nut in the same manner, which is in the name of Jesus Christ, but not so with Data III which ended by pleading the efficacy of the prayers through the Igbo staff of office, *Ofo. Ofo*, among the Igbo is very symbolic. It acts as a seal to prayers/agreement.

A very critical look at the prayers in Data I and II shows that they are laden with elements of Igbo culture and belief, such as praying for a couple to have both male and female children, to travel and return to their traditional home, good kin relationship and an attestation that marriage is a path that leads to the stream. All these fall in line with Igbo culture. The Igbo are happier when there is a balance in the sex of their children. A male child will give them direct grandchildren. A female child gives them grandchildren referred to as *nwadiani*. Each set of grandchildren has their relationships/duties towards their grandparents (see Oyeka, 2022). It is the prayer of many Igbo to travel out of their hometown, earn better than they would have earned at home, visit home often to show their evidence. Aniga (2023, p. 153) maintains that "the Igbo man travels around in order to become much richer and come back home as a better man for his people to respect and love". The love and respect come when those at home see the evidence their kin brought home which will be beneficial to them. The Igbo believe that *akụ ruo ulọ a mara onye kpataara ya* 'when wealth reaches the home, the person that made it will be known'. For the Igbo, *ndi nọ n'ulo nọoro ndi nọ n'ezị, ndi nọ n'ezị nọdurụ ndi nọ n'ulo* 'those at home are representing those outside and those outside do same for those at home'. This is the reason why those outside usually travel back with gifts for those at home for they know that they are there to represent them and as they travel back, those at home give them some fresh delicacies that they cannot get in foreign lands where they sojourn. For good kinship relationship as seen in the prayers, the Igbo believe that no matter how well you relate with others, when one is in a very difficult situation, it is his/her kin that will show up when friends have left. It is based on this belief that the Igbo say that *Ozu sibe isi, enyi ka nwanne alaa* 'When the corpse starts stinking, a friend that is closer than a brother leaves'. The explanations so far serve as confirmation that the prayers in Data I and II are in line with Igbo belief system. Even though certain Igbo cultural elements are present in the prayers for kola nut in Data I and II, it was also observed that the paralinguistic aspects of lifting the kolanut up to *Chukwu Okike Abjama*, lowering it a bit to show *ala* and other gods were missing too, likewise

the responses like *Isee! O di n'ofọ. Otu a ka o di* 'It is so'. Even though the second speaker had interjections of the English word 'so' during his prayers, the prayers were at least mainly done in Igbo language. The Igbo believe that *Oji adighi anu Oyibo* (kolanut does not understand English language). This assertion is based on the belief that kola nut event is a spiritual session that brings into communion the human, the deities, and the ancestors who had no knowledge of any other language aside Igbo; therefore, there is no place for any other language irrespective of its status.

The third aspect of the inquiry, based on the objective of the study is the language of *igo oji* among the Igbo. The three data presented indicates that the speakers used mainly simple prose in their presentations, rather than the poetic language that defined *igo oji* in the past. While praying, the speaker in data 1 used one solitary figurative expression *A si onye chuo, o rie ee* 'It is said that if one works, he also eats' which he used to stress the importance of one reaping the fruits of their labour. He used the aphorism to beseech God to bless the efforts of the couple. Similarly, while praying, the speaker in data 11 used one solitary maxim *Ije anyi biara ebe a, o o ije mmili* 'Our journey here, it is a journey to the stream', implying that marriage is a constant relationship and not an occasional one. Notably, the Igbo see marriage as a path to the stream, contrasted with the path to the jungle for firewood. In the traditional Igbo world, people go to the stream very early in the morning and late in the evening to fetch water based on the fact that they did not have big reservoirs for keeping water as people do today. Consequently, the path to the stream is always very busy, clean and clear as against the path to the bush that is always thorny (see Oyeka 2023). The speaker used this maxim to stress that the two families and communities brought together by marriage will always find reasons to relate in a mutual way. In no different manner, the speaker in data 111 used a solitary figurative expression *isi kotere evu ka evu ga-agba* (the head that hooks the gadfly will be stung by the gadfly) implying that any one that initiates trouble will be visited by trouble or consumed in their own troubles. This idiom is anchored on the Igbo belief that one reaps what he sows '*Mkpuru onye kuru ka o ga-aghoru*'. It is worth noting that such poetic expressions are the norm in traditional breaking of kola nuts.

Incidentally, the data shows that the three speakers did not use sufficient poetic expressions in their delivery. If the speakers in data 1 and 11 can be excused for their religious (Christian) background, the speaker in data 111 who is a traditionalist is inexcusable. There is little doubt that the language use in the art of *igo oji* has been watered down to mainly the prosaic; the treason

for this depletion of linguistic resource is traceable partly to modernity and partly to infrequency in the opportunities for *igo oji* as well as infrequency in the use of Igbo in interactions. A lot has been said about the negative impact of modernization on indigenous cultures around the world, including Igbo. Part of that is that whereas opportunities for presentation of kola nut still persist such as visitations and cultural events, the kola nut is no longer stored in homes as it were; in the traditional setting, women bought kola nuts and stored them at home in readiness for guests. They are wrapped in certain leaves that ensure their preservation. Immediately a guest arrives, the *dibiulo* 'head of the family' will confidently alert the wife to bring kola nut for the guest. It is hardly the case that kola nut was not in the house of an adult Igbo. In the present time, in the place of kola nut, many Igbo store and present fruits such as garden egg or bitter kola, while some present soft drinks or even alcoholic beverages which are preserved in refrigerators. Since these alternatives are not kola nut, they are not revered as kola nut and therefore not used as offerings to deities. Rather, mere prayers are said before they are eaten.

Added to this is the issue of insufficient use of Igbo during interaction, which over time has led to language attrition. Presently, Igbo conversations are replete with English-Igbo or Igbo-English code-switching or code-mixing, to the point that, sometimes, one wonders if the person is speaking English or Igbo. Language attrition implies the dropping of aspects of a language as a result of insufficient use of the indigenous language and the more frequent use of another language, in this case, English. One of the aspects of Igbo that has suffered attrition is figurative expressions, particularly proverbs. The fact about proverbs and other idiomatic constructs is that, constant usage keeps them alive in the memory of people while non-usage limits consciousness in them and makes them difficult to retrieve from memory. Nwagbo's (2016) research on orality in the contemporary period and settings revealed that children are no longer as exposed to proverbs as their parents when they (parents) were children, meaning that many adult Igbo are averse to using proverbs in their utterances, and leading to non-transmission of same to their offspring. The limited use of Igbo proverbs presents a problem to the vitality of Igbo. If, as Achebe (1958) asserted, that proverb is the oil with which Igbo eat words, the limited use of same implies that words are no longer as rich as they used to be, and in effect, conversations in Igbo are no longer as fluid and enjoyable as they used to be.

6. Way forward

In present day Igbo society, there are two opposing sides on the issue of kola nut invocation; the traditionalists and the Church. While the traditionalists insist on the old ways of *igo oji*, Christians prefer some modifications based on the issue of deities and ancestors which is not acceptable to them. However, a common ground shared by both parties is the importance of the kola nut, as a seed/food used for welcoming guests both in domestic settings and in gatherings, festivals and sundry occasions. In terms of the rigid positions of both parties, it is posited that, like every other aspect of life, culture is dynamic and always evolving. Many other aspects of Igbo culture have witnessed changes, and kola nut custom is not an exception. As an Igbo adage says, *uno anaghi ada ghara uko* 'A house does not fall down without the rafters', which coincides with Achebe's (1958) notion that the white man has put a knife in the thing that held us together, and we have fallen apart. As a way out, the primary concern of both traditionalists and the Church is the preservation of the kola nut culture more than the process and structure. Given the fact that a significant majority of Igbo are Christians, it is advisable to take that demography into consideration in weighing the options. Based on population, if the kola nut is left for only traditionalists, though this will be very hard to accept by Igbo community, in no distant time, the kola nut tradition will die a natural death. Okekeosisi (2020, p. 117) notes that "The modern church sees Oji as a necessary edible material which must be presented in any function organised by the church". If Christians place such value on kola nut, it will be almost impossible to ask them to look for a substitute for it. It is here argued that there are some traditional institutions that Christians uphold but renamed them in order to uphold the culture. For instance, one hears of *Igwe uka* 'Christian King', *Ozo uka* 'Christian ozo'. The attachment of *uka* to the traditional seat and title is to differentiate them from the traditional ones, it is to convince the initiates that the seat or title has no connection with heathenism. Such conviction has worked over the years resulting in Christians willingly accepting the *Ozo uka* title. Dragging Christians to bless and break kola nut in the traditional way or leave it out completely will not yield any fruit. It is suggested that Christians rename the kola nut tradition from *igo oji* 'kola nut invocation' to *ikpe ekpere oji/iwa oji uka* 'kolanut prayer/breaking of kola nut in a Christian way'. Such renaming will help each religious body to continue to use the sacred nut without much issues.

7. Conclusion

This study has tried to look at the tradition of *igo oji* among the Igbo, with respect to the past and the present state of affairs. The origin, types, significance, and procedure for *igo oji* were given a detailed attention. Data for the study confirms that most *igo oji* in contemporary times do not follow the traditional procedure. Data reveals that Christianity has adversely affected the traditional way of blessing kola nut. Although traditionalists insist on the usual invocation in the traditional way, Christians believe that their new found faith is against summoning the deities and ancestors to see the kola nut not to think of giving them their shares to eat. This study suggests modifying the name given to kola nut offering, first, for the purpose of making it acceptable to all religious orientations, and more importantly for the purpose of maintaining and perpetuating the rich cultural heritage. The researcher deemed it very necessary to document this study so as to help youths, especially those in diaspora, to understand the significance of kola nut to the Igbo.

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