

The Kola-Nut Ceremony: From Colonial Transgression to Postcolonial Resilience in Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004).

Souleymane TUO
Université Peleforo GON COULIBALY, Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire)
Email: soultuo@yahoo.fr

Abstract

This paper purports to investigate Igbos' response to changes brought about Christianity in the protocolary ceremony that consecrates the presentation, blessing and sharing of the kola nut in social meetings. Laboring on the cola acuminata communion consists in laying the finger on the bearing of this tropical seed on the socio-cultural unity of communities of the oriental part of Nigeria. But during colonial experience, even in post-independence era, church has attempted to interweave elements of liturgical practices and relics of the nut's protocol, through the process of hybridity, with the view to both subverting and swamping the Igbo cultural identity. Hopefully, in a postcolonial élan, the kola nut ritual has survived Western diktat. What is more, Eastern Nigerians have rejected, in a nationalist posture, the dictated hybridized codes and have remained true to their national image.

Key-words: *kola nut, communion, church, Igbo, hybridity, nationalism.*

Résumé

Cet article se propose d'examiner la réaction des Igbo face aux changements perpétrés par le christianisme dans la cérémonie protocolaire qui consacre la présentation, bénédiction et partage de la noix de cola pendant les rencontres communautaires dans les rassemblements à caractère social. Epiloguer sur la communion du cola acuminata consiste à mettre l'accent sur son rôle axial dans l'unité socioculturelle des communautés de la partie orientale du Nigéria. Cependant, pendant la colonisation, et même après les indépendances, l'église a essayé d'imbriquer des éléments de pratiques liturgiques et les reliques du protocole de la noix, à travers le processus de l'hybridité, à l'effet de pervertir et, de ce fait, de présider aux destinées de l'identité culturelle Igbo. Mais heureusement, dans un élan postcolonial, le rituel de la noix de cola a survécu aux diktats occidentaux. Mieux, la communauté de l'est nigérian a rejeté, dans une posture nationaliste, les codes hybrides imposés à elle et est résolument restée fidèle à son identité nationale.

Mots-clés: *noix de cola, communion, église, hybridité, Igbo, nationalisme.*

INTRODUCTION

The kola nut is more than just a tropical seed that is grown in Central and Western regions of Africa, especially Nigeria. Though it is highly present among the Yorubas (West) and the Hausas (of the North), the nut seems to have been conferred with a more cultural significance among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria. Leke Ogunfeyimi's article "Medical Plants and Natural Products Chemistry in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: The Metaphor of Kola" insists on the medicinal value of the nut. He contends that kola is not only used as stimulant but also as a panacea for whooping cough and asthma; and a stimulant that prevents tiredness and hunger. Other works attach commonly-held beliefs to the nut. In their article titled "Kola Nut: Kolanut as an Embodiment for Completeness of the Igbo Culture", Chinyere J. Anidobe and Uche Joy Uzoalor reveal the Igbo numerology whereby lobes on kola nuts reveal information about human conditions. Souleymane Tuo's paper "Rethinking Objects: the Numerical Significance of Kolanuts in Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2020)" is another rendition of the Igbo numerology centered on the nut. Contrary to Anidobe and Uzoalor's sociological work, Tuo rather proposes a theoretical reflection using thing theory. It makes a dichotomy between kola as an object (a simple fruit) and kola as a thing through the analysis of its lobes.

The present work grounded on Abani's *Graceland* is rooted in the Igbo cultural background in that it epitomizes the use of kola as a token of good will in hospitality. The article shows that for the reception of guests, Eastern Nigerian people have ritualized a strict protocol to kola nut known as the kola nut ceremony. It includes four canonical steps: presentation, blessing, breaking and distribution. Compared to the previous insights, this article is vested with a more political dimension.

The aim of this work is to emphasize the Igbo strife to emancipate their cultural ways from the Western appropriation. In this logic, more than a postcolonial instrument, hybridity becomes an articulation of colonial discourse in this study. It is a process by which the West both translates ex-colonized codes by weaving together liturgical rituals and relics of kola protocol in order to appropriate and debunk the essentialism of Igbo cultural image. In response to this hegemony, nationalism/nativism (an expression of postcolonial discourse) becomes a resilience strategy for Nigerians to both reject Eucharistic transubstantiation implicated in their local values and to try to safeguard the essentialism of their national code. To efficiently examine these points, we shall use postcolonial theory. It holds that one of the steps for ex-colonized people "in finding a voice and an identity" in the process of their cultural emancipation against the colonizer "is to reclaim their own past" (Barry, 2002, p. 193). To better analyze our topic, we will first explore the existence of kola nut ritual in precolonial Nigeria. Second, our work will consist in showing the West's attempt to transgress this ritual by swamping and controlling it. Third, the resilience of the kola nut protocol against Western influence will be another vista of research.

1. The Kola Nut Ceremony: A Precolonial Cultural Practice in Igboland

In the period predating the advent of colonization in Nigeria, Igbo people by far displayed a particular bond to their culture. Social events or customary practices were occasions for them to demonstrate strong attachment to ancestral ways and values. In welcoming guests and visitors, kola nuts were used in what is known as kola nut ceremony. Interesting enough in Igboland, there is an art to hospitality. The implementation of this ritual follows a set of rules, guidelines and procedures. The epigraph of Abani's *Graceland* exemplifies this protocol: "One

does not rush into the kola-nut ritual either. There is a strict protocol to hospitality” (Abani, 2004, p. 154). Hopefully, the novel identifies four steps to this ritual.

The first one is presentation. Like all the other ones, this inaugural phase takes place in the context of social events. When members of a neighboring clan are invited to a naming ceremony, a wedding or funerals, once they arrive at their hosts and settle down, some kola nuts are showed them as a sign of good will. Yet, not all members of the host community should proceed with the presentation. According to Abani’s *Graceland*, only “[t]he oldest man in the gathering must offer it to guests” (Abani, 2004, p. 155). After his symbolic presentation, it is placed in a wooden bowl and a child travels it around for the guest clan to actually see it in order of seniority.

The second step is inherent in the blessing of the nuts. After presentation, the nuts are now blessed. At this moment, the fruit becomes holy through prayers and sanctification. In fact, as the honored guests receive the nuts, the eldest one among them blesses the bowl containing them. This consists in pronouncing prayers on the nuts to ask for God’s help and divine protection for those who will chew the nut. During this step, the Igbo invoke “Obast [...] the central deity” (Abani, 2004, p. 291). The role of this god is to grant this edible thing a divine value that can help improve the existential condition of those who take part in this social event.

The breaking phase follows the blessing. Here, the elders of the community break the kola nuts at their apex and disclose the number of lobes of each seed. The epigraphs of novel bear out: “Will you break the King’s kola?” (Abani, 2004, p. 208). An elder is either in charge of breaking the seed or he can also entrust another clansman with this. The use of knives or fingers are welcomed for the breaking of the nuts.

The protocol is rounded off by the distribution phase. The novel observes: “Carved in the shape of an animal, the bowl has a center dip off peppered peanut butter, which the kola nut is dipped into before eating” (Abani, 2004, p. 183). This insight suggests that the host and guest clan members eat the kola nuts dipping them into alligator pepper right after its distribution. Yet, it takes place only when the person who has presented the seed in the early stage eats it first. Then, all people from both visiting and guest communities receive some lobes or complete nuts for them to chew.

We have shown that in the period antedating the coming of the white man in Africa, Africans used to live in accordance to their ancestral ways. Yet, as soon as many parts of the continent acquaint with the foreign religion, things irremediably fall apart. The West tries to transgress the kola nut ceremony by imposing its cultural codes on it.

2. ‘Things Fall Apart’: The Colonial Transgression of the Kola-Nut Ceremony

The coming of the Western colonizer in Nigeria rhymes with the transgression of some seminal cultural realities of Igboland. When white missionaries set foot in Eastern Nigeria, they tried to produce another version of the kola nut tradition by transgressing it. The epigraph of Chris Abani’s *Graceland* outstandingly emphasizes the defilement of the kola nut rite by the destabilizing actions of Christianity. Of the four stages of the protocol, the kola-nut blessing is the one which is subverted by Western religion. To the writer, the influence of the Church over this Igbo cultural value takes root in its openness: “For the Igbo, tradition is fluid, growing. [...] changing with every occurrence” (Abani, 2044, p. 291). The novel apprises of the Christianization of the kola-nut communion occurring through the process of hybridization. This alludes to the efforts of the clergy to translate the Igbo cultural legacy by weaving together elements of Christianity and the ways of the kola nut communion. This aims to debunk the

ritual's validity and genuineness. Here, Abani hints at two manifestations of hybridity in the process of colonial transgression of the Igbo kola nut ceremony.

On the one hand, the author argues that the process whereby a dominating culture merges with indigenous values is likened to mimicry. In *Graceland*, this concept alludes to a strategy for the West to simulate the protocolary habits of the kola nut ceremony into liturgical codes, especially those inherent in Eucharist. The following stance accurately epitomizes the third space: "[T]he kola ritual has changed. Christian prayers have been added, and Jesus has replaced Obast as the central deity" (Abani, 2004, p. 291). Through mimicry, Abani opines, Christianity subverts the authentic ways of performing the kola seed communion. And this simulacrum is carried out by melding some relics of the sacrament of the Last Supper to rules of the kola-nut blessing.

The aim of this transgression is to give way to a hybrid identity. This is neither predominantly Western nor exclusively Igbo. Abani establishes that owing to the permanent bond with the West, the kola nut rites have changed because they now go through mimicry: they are trapped in the complexities of Roman Catholic transubstantiation of indigenous Igbo codes. This posit is in keeping with Homi Bhabha's conception of "mimicry" as "sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other" (1994, p. 86). Western acts of mimicking African ways by replacing Obast, the Igbo guardian deity of social ceremonies, by the name of Jesus Christ is a true sign of a double articulation. It is a complex strategy for the Church to reform indigenous cultural values with the view of appropriating them.

Abani considers, by a causal effect, that the appropriation of local codes by the West readily issues in the Igbos' adoption of the intervening space: "[T]here seems to be some kind of transubstantiation involved in the kola-nut ceremony, similar to the communion wafer in the Catholic ritual of mass" (Abani, 2004, p. 17). The quote informs that the Church has produced a subversion of the ritual by mixing communion practices with it. And by dint of attending liturgical ceremonies that have integrated the kola nut, the Christianized Igbos have adopted this syncretic and hybridized paradigm. Also, this adoption is done in so a fetishist manner that the hyphenated cultural code becomes the only cultural reality the Nigerians remain attached to. Thus, far from being an expression of culture merger, mimicry alludes to the imitation of both foreign lifestyles and Western religious practices by the Igbo people. Lois Tyson confirms this. To her mind, mimicry "reflects both the desire of colonized individuals to be accepted by the colonizing culture and the shame experienced by colonized individuals concerning their own culture, which they were programmed to see as inferior" (Tyson, 2006, p. 421). In *Graceland*, imitation predicates Eastern Nigerians' desire not only to welcome the simulacra of kola nut rituals but also to identify with them. By consenting to call on Christ in kola-nut blessings in contempt of the normative ways, Igbos contribute to being humiliated about their century-long customary identity, which they regard as a lower cultural model.

As a consequence to this cultural servility, Abani suggests that the socio-cultural unity of the Igbo people is inclined to get debunked. Through this Westernized African code, the legendary cohesion of communities in Igboland readily become destabilized, unsettled. As a matter of fact, rather than up keeping ancestral traditions of concord and solidarity, the bond of Eastern Nigerians falls apart. The kola-nut ceremony as the backbone of their oneness now

breaks off through colonial subversion. Going from this observation, it becomes difficult for the Igbos to stick to their cultural background to the fullest. Instead of staying true to the contention that “[t]his protocol is followed strictly” (Abani, 2004, p. 196), they can now be liable to turn their backs on the original practice of the kola-nut ritual. As a consequence, they embrace the “double consciousness or double vision” (Tyson, 2006, p. 421): the dualistic meaning of culture or the church’s subverted rendition of the Igbo ceremonial event. Homi Bhabha reiterates the destabilizing power of colonial hybridity arguing that the “effect of mimicry” on the target culture “is profound and disturbing” (1994, p. 86). Both double consciousness or double vision and mimicry bring about an unsteady meaning of one’s identity, of one’s self Tyson and Bhabha seem to reveal.

On the other hand, Abani also suggests that the Church’s hybridization of the kola-nut ceremony is not healthy for the Igbos on the premise that it fosters cultural categorization. This is perceived in the third space’s ability to subvert and appropriate dominated cultures in a hegemonic articulation. This alludes for Christianity to make a rendition of the kola nut ritual by weaving together global and local cultural traits with the view to favoring foreign values over local ones. The epigraphs of Abani’s novel makes notice of this condition through this: “The Eucharistic qualities of the kola-nut ritual are clear” (Abani, 2004, p. 17). The third space which is framed here through the Eucharistic qualities of the kola-nut tradition is only a fakery, a false semblance of liminality. Truly speaking, this accommodated copy of the kola seed blessings in a Christian context does not aim at a mongrelized identity. Better, the meld of liturgical and Igbo cultural traits only seeks to make Christian values appropriate and swamp local Igbo identity.

In this hybrid identity, the cultural dominance of ecclesiastic model is so high that it may finally succeed in controlling and minimizing Igbo ways. Hence, hybridity turns partial to the dominating civilization. Also, it is thought to become akin to a dialectic holism in which Igbo values and elements of the Holy Sacrament do not come into being. Given that the hegemonic stand of liturgical culture is undoubtedly confirmed in the hyphenated culture, hybridity readily morphs into a quasi-monolithic entity in which Igbo cultural values are reduced to minimalism. Initially conceived of as a negotiated articulation of culture, the third space becomes a manifestation of colonial discourse, a dominating epistemology which takes the upper hand over indigenous Igbo codes. In this condition, hybridity is seen as a reality close to an outer appearance of third space in which there is no enunciation, but one in which the center gets the lion’s share of values compared to the periphery which loses ground.

In corroboration of such a biased representation of cultural hybridization, Marwan M. Kraïdy casts light on the negative effect of the liminal identity for post-colonial cultures. He lays down that “hybridity is hegemonically constructed in the interest of dominant sectors in society” (Kraïdy, 2002, p. 323). By using this insight as the baseline for our analysis, we can affirm that in *Graceland*, hybridity is hierarchically framed only in the advantage of the Church. This entails that the objective of the intertwined cultural code is far from being the production a simple coalescence of boundaries. It is also other than the expression of a universal civilization.

What need to be emphasized is that liminality aims for a form of cultural oppression geared against the Igbo cultural paradigms. It is as if in the hyphenated archetype, a raging conflict between center and periphery is at work. The aim of this hegemonic code is to have

command over the peripheral item. In corroboration of this view, Pnina Werbner considers: “Too much hybridity [...] leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and [cultural] oppression unresolved” (1997, p. 2). Thus, when Christians integrate kola nut in their social ceremonies their intent is initially to culturally exploit the kola seed ceremony at their own advantage. Their aim is also to palm off a cultural oppression on this West African ritual so as to make it shrink in size and value. In so doing, if the original way of performing the kola-nut ritual (omenala) might become dwindled, the Igbo people might therefore become uprooted. The reason is that the kola rituals are set to go through a hybridization process in which they are swamped by the hegemonic Eucharistic relics of the clergy.

From the aforesaid, Abani readily discloses the obscure side of mongrelized identities centered on the articulation of colonial epistemology. His stand is predicated upon the premise that the domination and shrink of Igbo cultural codes in the third space leads to the collapse of their socio-cultural unity. Worse, this action has a negative influence on the commonality of the Igbo community members. Thus, Eastern Nigerians would be reduced to welcome guests with an atrophied kola seed ceremony; which is stripped of most of its essential features. They could for instance take to a collective kola nut eating which has lost some essential steps because of the intrusion of clerical norms within it. Therefore, rather keeping an essential blessing of kola-nut, Nigerians could be inclined to add consecrated bread and wine as they now perform prayers on the seeds. During wedding ceremonies and local naming ceremonies, the Igbos might round off the kola-nut rite with Christian ways of the Holy Communion. This new fulfillment of this tradition confirms the hegemonic construction of hybridity in which Eucharistic standards radically takes precedence over the traditional distinctive style of this Igbo ceremony. Eastern Nigerian communities could also be inclined to use Western distilled alcoholic drink instead of kola-nut ceremony to show their feeling of kindness towards their guests and visitors. In Igboland today, instead of offering kola nuts to visitors, people seem to be liable to providing them with wine, an imitation of the Eucharist. Likewise, social ceremonies among the Igbo feature less and less kola seeds and more and more soft drinks and aperitifs. The rationale of this is that too much hybridity leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and cultural oppression unresolved.

Given that their culture is dominated by values of the new faith, the Igbos consequently adopt more emphasized Westernized ways as they proceed with the kola nut rites. Even youngsters who used to play a significant role in the whole procedure of the kola rite seem to have turned their backs. These ones who used observe the ritual in reverence for seniority now seem to demand more and more biscuits, according to themselves, to make up for the bitter taste of kolas. This explains that the fact that some people could also take a liking to offering huge quantities of candies in social events. By the same token, they might reduce the number of plateful of kola nuts that used to be shared out to the guests. No need to say that prayers and blessings which used to be performed in order to summon the manes of the forefathers at the onset the kola ritual seem to be shortened. At times it is rounded off and with the Ave Maria. Now, when a public reunion is being thrown among the Igbo, Jesus Christ’s name could be mentioned more often than that of their ancestral deity Obast. This uneasy situation might occur because hybridity is hegemonically constructed in the interest of the dominating culture of the West (2002, p. 323), to paraphrase Kraidy.

Now that the Igbos are dismayed and totally at a loss, the Nigerian novelist contends that they could readily become severed from their cultural background. If the kola nut ritual, one of the backbones of their identity, is mutilated, the cultural soul of their community might therefore feel to be quasi nonexistent. Thus, Eastern Nigerian local cultural values are likely to be driven into a continual agony which holds that they become caught in the yoke of Western oppressive hegemony (1970, p. 4) according to Frantz Fanon. In *Graceland*, it is noteworthy that when Western and Christian standards are regarded as the center of all interests and attentions and become the norm par excellence in the third space, the Igbo age-old ancestral practices become silenced. It becomes completely muzzled. In this condition, there is not enough room left to voice out their cultural expression to the fullest. What they need to do is to use dominating Westernized codes for their cultural identification. As a sequel to this, the socio-cultural unity that used to prevail between the Igbo communities become jeopardized. But, since they do not want to lose their traditional legacy, they will do their utmost to safeguard the cultural vestiges of the kola-nut blessing through a radical opposition to Western hybridity.

3. 'Writing Back to the Center': The Postcolonial Resilience of the Kola-Nut Rite

In *Graceland*, Chris Abani is of the opinion that the Igbos are a culturally strong people owing to their attachment to their ancestral values, to the eating of kola-nut in commonality. In spite of external pressures from the West and its politics of hybridity, which aims to inundate the kola-nut ceremony, the practice has strongly stood upright. Abani is of the opinion that in the face of foreign cultural pressures, postcolonial Igbo people have remained true to the customary value inherited from their forefathers. For the Nigerian author, the success of such a resistance is predicated upon two strategies. On the one hand, he lays down that throughout centuries and ages, the Igbos have kept the basic essence of the offering of kola in commonness. It means that as time goes on, the practice has survived internal pollution or significant retrenchment. Such an essentialism typifies what Igboland terms 'omenala': "There is only one path: omenala" (Abani, 2004, p. 291). It literally implies "the way we have always done it" (Abani, 2004, p. 223). As it stands out, omenala is the process by which the Igboland both maintains and safeguards the original way of performing the kola seed communion and keeps it free from any cultural impurity. In spite of the West's attempt to subvert the ritual with Eucharistic transubstantiations, omenala has permitted the Igbo to keep the way they have always done the tropical seed's communal presentation and sharing. In a word, their attachment to the original way of performing this event has largely contributed to their cultural resistance.

Moreover, Abani likens omenala (kola nut tradition) to a postcolonial tool. The Nigerian author contends that through its contribution to the maintaining of the kola nut's essentialism, the action of omenala is ascribed to an anti-imperial mission, that of rejecting all Western interferences that used to alter the integrity of the ritual. For a fact, the refusal of Eastern Nigerian people to submit to the hegemonic influence of the British's religion in the cola acuminata rites is on a par with the decolonizing project of postcolonial theorists. The following insight apprises of such a coincidence: "It seems that Postcolonial theory [...] emerged from the colonized people's frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and their fears, hopes and dreams about their future and their own identities" (Mahanta and Maut, 2014, p. 285). To affirm that Eastern Nigerians, take an aversion to the West's attempt to insert a Eucharistic dimension in the kola nut ceremony is not enough

to hint at their frustration. The church's maneuvers to corrupt the ceremony with the view to controlling it issues in a serious cultural clash that has frequently opposed the colonizer to the ex-colonized in Igboland.

Furthermore, Abani suggests that with a strong will not to close their eyes to this cultural dictatorship imposed by the church, the ex-colonized rise up in protest and reject in block the hybrid kola nut ritual laid down forcefully on them. What is more, they also take a dislike to the other cultural paradigms Christianity palms them off with. By taking this firm stand, it is at this moment that the Igbos' postcolonial fight comes into being. And as this rebuttal to the transformative agenda of the British power is set into motion, the West African people makes a stand against "the empiricism that is the Western way, where life is supposed to be a system of codes" (Abani, 2004, p. 291). They reject the West's inclination to codify their cultural value following the contention that "[t]he Igbo are not reducible to a system of codes" (Abani, 2004, p. 291). In return, their decolonizing struggle, which is mounted in the shape of radical resistance, leaves no room for the least Western value to settle. Left at this point, the most wanted thing that the Igbos wish for and take a shine to is the return to their sources. Taking heed of the aforesaid, one can doubtlessly posit that Igbo people therefore become nostalgic for roots of a bygone era by "rejecting the Western imperium" (1992, p. 152) according to Anthony Appiah.

In *Graceland*, Abani lays down that East Nigerians' rejection of the Western imperium is predicated upon their reconciliation with omenala, the original way their forefathers have always performed the kola-nut protocol. Also noted is their effort to make Christian cultural codes take a back seat to the Igbo customary practices. That is the reason why they strive for the disappearance of Eucharistic manifestations their rituals are imbued with. This nostalgia for roots of a bygone past is manifest in the Igbos' refusal of the West's construct of the ritual which aims to replace the ornate bowl shaped (in which the tropical seed is put before its presentation) by the communion wafer in the Catholic ritual of mass. Moreover, the novelist predicates that the postcolonial resilience of the kola seed is perceived in the Igbos' rejection of the use of Jesus Christ's name as the central deity. The latter is supposed to receive the blessings and prayers in public gatherings, in replacement of Obast, the tutelary god of ceremonies.

In Abani's outlook of anti-imperial resistance, a fight for cultural recovery should result in victory. This observation entails that the attempts of the ex-colonized to make a stand against the assaults of the foreign dominating culture ends up in the effacement of colonial oppression. In *Graceland*, Eastern Nigerians' cultural emancipation from the cultural dictatorship of Western religion is ascribed to the efforts they have deployed to keep and maintain the essentialism of the kola nut protocol. They resiliently succeeded in remaining strong after being 'contaminated' by Christian and Western norms throughout ages. As such, it is noteworthy that in an Africa which is prone to interferences from upsetting foreign civilizations, Igboland has determinedly stayed true to their ancestral values. Interesting enough, these ones have bravely succeeded in righting the wrongs they endured. The upkeep of such kola-nut ritual has also maintained the Igbos rid of external invasion. Duru illustratively ponders: "The societal changes brought about by the advent and spread of Christianity in Igboland in the 19th and 20th centuries have had very little effect on the custom and rites attached to the kola nut in Igboland" (2005,

p. 205). If Igboland has gone through social upheavals during the colonial experience, the maintaining of the kola-nut protocol has made headway. It has helped them reconstruct purity after having been stained by foreign codes. This is what Duru seems to drive at through her insight. In a similar vein, her posit hints at the resilience of the kola rites through the years of British colonial domination.

On the other hand, Abani predicates the resilience of the kola seed protocol against Western imperium upon acts of remembrance that take place as this event takes place. The author gives credence to his posit suggesting that during public gatherings where the tropical seed is presented and shared, hosts and guests recall the history of their clans through blessings that are uttered. Interestingly, through these mental processes of recalling and remembering, the safekeeping of the Igbo traditional values is established. This reality holds true for the epigraph of *Graceland* which reads: “Every time the ritual takes place, the history of all the clans present, and their connections, is enacted. This helps remembering” (Abani, 2004, p. 240). Basic to this insight is the mnemonic function of the kola ritual. It means that during a social ceremony in Igboland, as the hosts and the guests bless the seed in turn, all the panels of the history of their clans are accurately recalled in detail. This also includes the times of glory, the moments of despair or great prowess achieved by ancestral chiefs since time immemorial. Emphasis is also laid on cultural performances.

As it comes out, the way orality helps remembering the same way remembrance of old souvenirs inherent in the history of Igbo society aids in safeguarding the intrinsic nature of the kola nut rites. Under this formulation, Abani contends that when the memory of the clan is honored through the kola-nut ceremony, this event becomes vital in the eyes of Igboland people. And there is no reason this ritual may become abandoned and extinct. On the contrary, given the great significance of kola-nut protocol for memory, Igbo communities highly esteem it. Their consideration for this protocolary performance of rituals is brought to such a climax point that it finally runs parallel to an immortal or perpetual cultural happening that the Igbo communities should get attached to it.

Heedful of this, Abani opines that Eastern Nigerians readily safeguard the kola ritual because it is the epitome of their cultural identity. On account of its occurrence in all public gatherings, the blessing of the tropical seed becomes ingrained in the collective consciousness of the Igbo people. At this stage, eradicating it from their minds becomes no-easy venture. Even the hegemonic influence of the West does not succeed in taking down the significance of the kola nut ritual among the Igbos. No foreign culture, be it of a higher pedigree, cannot do communities in localities of Igboland out of this cultural reality forever. Even Christianity fails to make Eastern Nigerians turn their backs on the kola-nut protocol. The following insight by F.Chidozie Ogbalu comes through as a corroborative stance of the labored point. It runs: “Kola nut is one of the fruits which cannot be removed by the people not even by the Whiteman from Igboland” (Ogbalu, 1974, p. 51). No one can succeed for long in separating the Igbos from the established tradition of the proper kola-nut blessing. Even the Igbos themselves cannot pretend to such a venture. Ogbalu seems to elicit that the same holds for the logocentric and hierarchical civilization of the West.

Given the Igbos’ rejection of Eucharistic interferences involved in the kola-nut ceremony coupled with their burning desire to return to their roots, Chris Abani contends that

this postcolonial action is on a par with nationalism. No one can raise doubt about their enthusiastic interest in nationalist desire when they wholeheartedly voice out this emblematic declaration of cultural pride: “But there are things that cannot be contained, even in ritual” (Abani, 2004, p. 299). In actual fact, through their creedal formal statement that the kola nut ritual in Igboland should not be controlled and appropriated by the West, Eastern Nigerians are in keeping with the postcolonial nationalist movement which “is founded upon a collective consciousness from shared loyalty to a culture” (Yazdiha, 2010, p. 35). By asserting their faithfulness to their precolonial past and cultural practices that go along with it, the Igbo communities collectively give voice to their adoption of the nationalist project of the anti-imperial agenda. Abani suggests that communities from Eastern Nigeria are right to take such a strong line. Through their nationalist posture, they can be reconciled to their legendary socio-cultural ritual (kola seed ceremony) and maintain both the societal and customary unity. These ones once bounded them up together and made them act as a united people in precolonial times. Going from this standpoint, the author of *Graceland* takes upon himself to posit that nationalism is one of the best options for ex-colonized people to safeguard their cultural genuineness. It is by taking an aversion to anti-imperial compromising alternatives¹ that the postcolonial fight of the Igbo against the cultural hybridization nurtured by the West can bear fruit. In a similar vein, Abani optimistically points out that the perennial safeguard of the kola nut protocol among Nigerians of Igboland is only predicated upon their nationalist or nativist attitude.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, dealing with the kola nut ritual has successively consisted in laying the finger on the existence of the four steps of the kola nut ceremony among Igbo people in precolonial Nigeria in a first instance. In a second phase, our task has been to cast light on the Church’s attempts to interweave elements of liturgical practices and relics of *cola acuminata* protocol, through the process of hybridity, with the view to both subverting and swamping the Igbo cultural identity. In a last instance, we elaborated on the postcolonial resistance of the kola nut ceremony. It entails that Igboland did not yield in the face of Western cultural oppressions. The West African community has bravely withstood Christian transubstantiations involved in their social and cultural practices by rejecting these dictated foreign hybrid codes and by staying true to their national image.

Moreover, this article raises the question of the relevance of cultural dialogism in Africa and ex-colonized countries. It seems that with the end of colonization, a new form of imperium is being plotted through liminality. The cultural intertwining nurtured by the West is nothing more than the confirmation of their hegemonic inclinations in the Third World. By the means of the third space, they still intend to give Africa the mortal blow after having subjected the continent economically and politically. But hopefully, the Igbo people have discovered the fakery of the West’s undertakings. They have become aware that the dialogue of cultures is neither a sincere nor neutral project. Instead of being an enunciation, African people have understood that hybridism is rather an epistemology that works for the derision and effacement of their values through the dissimulated binarisms it is rife with.

¹ This is the position of postcolonial thinkers called ‘dwellers of the middle road’ who take a firm stand for hybridity as the only real anti-imperial tool for the emancipation of colonized and ex-colonized people. The likes of Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri or Leopold Sédar-Senghor militate for cultural syncretism in their writings.

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