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## Gender, Symbols and Traditional Peacebuilding Among The Nanka-Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria

Chinyere Ukpokolo

As the ephemeral fly caught in amber and the lace-like leaf printed in stone are able to retain their fragile shapes for countless centuries, so an idea or an emotion sealed within a symbol may keep intact, for uncalendared ages, the shape of a man's thought (Donnelly, 1950: vii).

### Abstract

Women's class condition in modern Igboland (southeastern Nigeria) in particular and African society generally, which is characterized by her peripheralization in the scheme of state building and knowledge production, has led to the need for the re-examination of her cultural representation in specific cultural contexts in Africa prior to the major historical events (partition and colonization) in the continent, which led to pragmatic shift in local paradigms not just culturally, but also in the significance placed on the agencies of cultural transmission. This exercise has become imperative in order to make, if possible, an accurate (or near accurate?) representation of women in specific cultural situations. This article re-examines the perception that women have nothing to do with two key peace symbols - '*oji*' (kolanut) and '*ofe*' (staff of authority and justice) - in Igbo culture as has been presented in the literature on Igbo culturé. Using a case study typology, the study uses Nanka in Anambra State, south-eastern Nigeria as the study area. It identifies the place of the Earth goddess in '*oji* and

'*ofa*' ritual performances and concludes that gender is mainstreamed in the usages of '*oji*' and '*ofa*'.

### Introduction

The general perception, both in the literature and among the Nanka people, is that women have nothing to do with '*oji*' (kolanut) and '*ofa*' (staff of authority and justice), key peace symbols in Igbo culture (see Meek 1937, Green 1947, Uchendu 1965, Nwala 1985 and Oparaugo 2004, for instance). Women are, therefore, assumed to lack active participation in the use that is made of these peace objects. A closer look, however, shows the contrary, as is evident in the presentation and discussion in this paper. The paper submits that in the use that is made of these peace symbols, men and women's positions and roles are integrated in ritual performances. Again, the elder, another key symbol in these rituals, ceases to represent any sex group. Rather, 'he' emerges as the voice of the family or community, as the case may be. 'He' embodies the historical consciousness of the people. The elder, thus, emerges as the fusion of the temporal and the spiritual. In this collectivized elder, the Igbo woman is incorporated, just as the man, in a tempo-spiritual essence.

### The Nanka People: Some Background Information

Nanka is located in Orumba North Local government Area of Anambra state, Nigeria (see Fig. 1 for map of Igbo culture area, indicating Nanka). It is made up of seven villages. These, in order of seniority, are: Agbiligba, Enugwu-Nanka, Ifite, Amako, Umudala, Ubaha, and Eti villages (see Fig. 2 for map of Nanka and the seven villages). Nanka falls in the heart of old Awka province and her neighbouring towns are Ekwulobia, Isuofia, and Umuona in the northern part, while some part of Agulu-Uzoigbo is in the north-eastern part of Nanka. The remaining part of Agulu-Uzoigbo and Agulu town are in the eastern part. Awgbu is in the southern part while Amaokpala and Oko are in the western part. The town, Nanka, has a population of 33,756 people following the 1991 census. Nanka operates a patrilineal descent system and residence is patrilocal. The people also practice exogamous marriage system. Although a woman marries outside her patrilineage, she still plays a vital role in her natal home through her involvement in the '*umuada*' (patrilineage daughters) Institution. These social networking create interconnectivity that enhances bonds of unity among the people. There are about 70 '*umunna*' (patrilineages) in Nanka (Table 1), cutting across the seven villages of the town. Nanka traditional society, like other Igbo societies, operates a dual sex socio-political system in which each sex group is represented in the socio-political structure. The modus operandi of this system has been extensively documented in works like Okonjo (1974, 1975, and 1976); Van Allen (1976) and Amadiume (1987), among others.

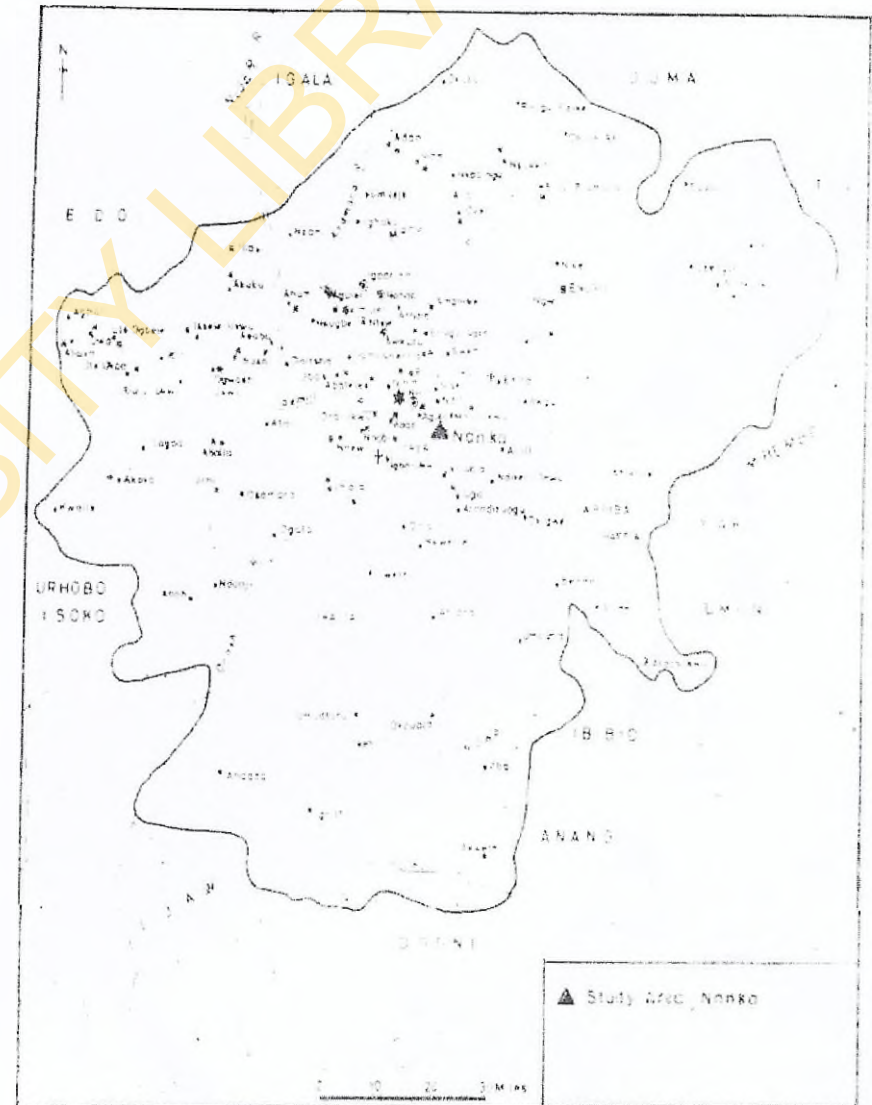
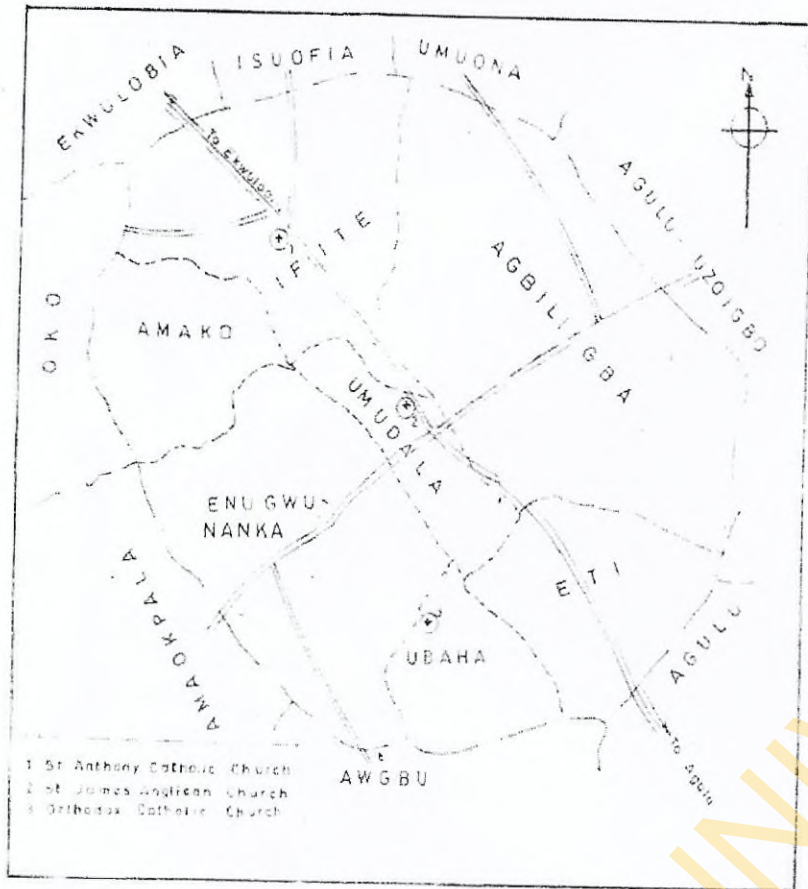


Fig 1: Map of Igbo Culture Area Showing the Study Area, Nanka.  
Adapted from Onwuejgwu (1981)



**Fig 2: A Sketch Guide of Nanka showing the Seven Villages and the Locations of the Three Major Church Denominations. Source: Fieldwork 2000.**

To the Nanka people, the community comprises of human beings, ancestors, local deities and spirits, and the Earth goddess. Like other African societies, the duality of human existence is also inherent in Nanka worldview. Writing on this tendency in Igbo culture, Madu submits:

The traditional Ibo is convinced of the existence of two distinct but similar world - the physical world and the spiritual world... whatever exists in the physical world as its counterpart, equally real in the invisible, spiritual world (Madu, 1996: 146 - 147).

**Table 1. Seven villages of Nanka indicating the number of 'umunna' (patrilineages)**

Villages in orders of seniority	Number of patrilineages (umunna)
Agbiligba	17
Enugwu-Nanka	23
Ifite	14
Amako	6
Umudala	12
Ubaha	8
Etti	10

Nanka, presently, has 20 primary schools, and 12 secondary schools offering Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). There are three major church denominations in Nanka, namely: Catholic Church, Anglican Church and Orthodox Catholic Church. Gully erosion is the major problem in Nanka. The erosion menace has brought the town into the attention of the global community, as it is one of the worst in sub-Saharan Africa. The gully erosion in Nanka has its severest impact in five of the seven villages of the town: These are Enugwu-Nanka, Amako, Etti, Ubaha and some parts of Ifite villages. The gullies could be as deep as 60 feet and very extensive, reaching neighbouring towns like Agulu, Amokpala and Oko. Occasionally, large expanse of farmlands and crops, houses, household animals and property are swept down these gullies and buried completely beneath the earth surface. At times, the erosion could cut off a section of the town from the rest. Nanka people engage in economic activities such as trading, farming, handcraft (like basket-making), palm wine tapping and public transportation. Farming is, however, at a subsistence level as a result of soil leaching due to erosion menace leading to soil infertility and low productivity. Although Nanka has produced a high percentage of people with Western education it has traders and business men and women who have traveled far and wide both nationally and internationally, the people, like in most Igbo societies, still have strong believe in the traditional practices as embedded in the 'omenana' (the unwritten constitution that guides Igbo ways of life, at times regarded as the injunctions of the Earth goddess).

### Gender and Peace Symbol: A Cultural Construction of Meanings

Geertz, in one of his definitions of symbol, affirms that symbol is used for any object, event, quality, or relation, which serves as a vehicle for a conception. The conception is the symbol's 'meaning'. It is in this sense that the number 6 (six) is a symbol just as the cross, whether talked about, visualized, or fondly fingered (Geertz 1973). All these, according to the author, are symbols or at least symbolic elements, because they are "tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs" (Geertz, 1973: 91). Symbols in any culture, according to Ladrerie (1977) as cited in Madu (1996):

Form part of representation through which the different groups which constitutes the collectivity try to interpret themselves and also interpret the world in which they are immersed and also the methods and means by which the collectivity in question strives to acquire knowledge (Madu, 1996: 104).

Thus, symbols assume a social function that unites language and social facts (Ortigue (1962) as cited in Madu 1996:113). Among the Nanka people, peace is encapsulated in certain objects, which we here regard as peace symbols. These cultural symbols form part of the people's "objective manifestation of thought" (Madu 1996: 107). Cultural symbols, as it were, help to form and synthesize social traditions, which are appreciated and recognized among the culturally distinct users. This social reference of symbol gives it power to affect human behaviour and, thus, constitutes the paradigm of judging one's action within the social milieu. Peace symbols in Nanka are gendered and, thus, create social boundaries and, at the same time, break barriers in male-female relations. This is because, as Bynum notes,

There is no such thing as a religious symbol that is merely a sign of or statement about social structure. However religious symbols 'mean', they never simply prescribe or transcribe social status. Rather they transmute it, even while referring to it. Religious symbols are ... polysemic, they have the quality of possessing manifold meanings (Bynum, 1986: 2).

She further submits: "All symbols arise out of the experience of 'gendered' users (1986: 2). Of course, symbol, as aspect of culture, constitutes the lens through which individuals writing the cultural environment perceive themselves and the world around them: their position in the society and the significance of their sex identity on their life chances. This is because as Bynum again notes:

What people understand themselves to be qua male and female is learned and shaped within culture, and religious symbols are one of the ways in which such meanings are taught and appropriated (Bynum, 1986: 7).

Here, the author points out the place of symbols in people's worldview. Geertz puts it more succinctly:

Sacred symbols function to synthesize a people's ethos - the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood - and their world view - the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order (Geertz, 1973: 89).

To Geertz, symbols provide 'model of' and 'model for'. He opines that cultural patterns have intrinsic dual aspects. In the first place, they give meaning, that is objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and secondly, by shaping it to themselves (Geertz, 1973: 93). In other words, Geertz, is of the view that cultural symbols give meaning to existence by providing a model of the world as it is and a model for the world as it ought to be. However, that symbols are gendered does not in any way mean that a symbol always entails the exclusion of a particular sex group. For, as Bynum (1986) notes symbol is 'polysemic', that is, it possesses multiplicity of meanings.

What constitute symbolic objects, are obtained in the culture of those who possess the symbolic objects as the history of symbolism shows anything can assume symbolic significance (Jaffe, 1964). Such objects that can assume symbolic significance, according to Jaffe, include natural objects (like stones, plants, animals, men, mountains and valleys, sun and moon, wind, water, and fire) or man-made things (like houses, boats, or cars), or even abstract forms (like numbers or triangle, square, and the circle) (1964: 257). Man, in his symbol-making propensity, constantly transforms objects into symbols, thereby endowing them with great cultural significance, particularly in religion and visual art (Jaffe, 1964: 257). In other words, when we use symbols (either verbal or non-verbal) to distinguish one class of things or actions from another we tend to create artificial boundaries in a field, which is naturally continuous (Leach, 1976: 331). The symbolic object endures for generations. It is transmitted to generation yet unborn.

Because symbols are observable in different areas of human existence, both verbal and non-verbal, they affect Man's attempt at mastering his environment and sustaining group and inter-group cohesion. Consequently, for the survival of the group, symbols in forms of objects are constituted to perform the role of affecting

and transforming people's behaviour, particularly to conform to societal expectations. Such objects are set apart from others, creating social discontinuity, as they perform culturally recognized roles. As Leach rightly pointed out, "meaning depends on contrast" (Leach 1976: 33). This is exemplified in the use of peace symbols among Nanka people of Anambra State, south-eastern Nigeria.

Peace symbols, among Nanka people, according to Pa Okeke Obuoha, a seventy-five year old man of Nanka, include '*oji*' (kolanut) and '*ofo*' (staff of authority and justice). These objects constitute parts of the instruments and mechanisms of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the culture. They are employed in ritual performances that guaranteed peace in the traditional society. In the rituals using '*oji*' and '*ofo*', the Earth goddess is incorporated. For the traditional Nanka people, the Earth on which they live and get food to sustain lives, and herbs for treatment of ailments, is sacred. She symbolizes fertility. She is therefore a woman. It is to the earth that Man must return after death. The earth sustains life, the earth consumes life. She symbolizes completeness. She is held in awe. To the people, the earth is a living and active participant in their daily lives; hence, her veneration. In traditional society, without the invocation of the earth goddess in ritual performances, there is a tempo-spiritual crisis, which will necessitate a ritual cleansing. As a female, the Earth goddess represents the female voice in rituals through the invocations that accompany such ritual performances. Her participation is the participation of the women just as the inclusion of the ancestors creates space for the male voice. The significant place these symbols occupy in the consciousness and socio-political life of the people, and the gendered implications of the rituals associated with them can give an in-road into understanding men and women possession of power and authority within the culture, and the participation of women in peace-building in the traditional Nanka society.

#### Symbols of Peace as Instruments and Mechanisms of Traditional Peacebuilding

'*Oji*' (Kolanut) '*Oji*' (Plate 5.1) is a highly priced symbol among the Nanka people. It is a symbol of love and hospitality. According to an informant, Pa Mathias Okeke, a seventy-one year old man, "kolanut is the basic thing in welcoming a visitor. If you do everything for a visitor without kolanut, he will deny that you did something" (Personal communication, March 2004). He further observed that it is the host that offers kolanut to the guest in Nanka. On the significance of the kolanut in Nanka culture the traditional leader of the town, Igwe G.N. Ofomata affirms that "*Ndi b'anyi si okwa ejide oji adoo ana aka na nti*", meaning "it is when one has the kolanut in the hand that one can 'pull' the ears of the Earth goddess", that is, approach the Earth goddess with confidence and assurance that one's request will

be granted. To the people, '*oji Igbo* (*cola acuminata*) '*Oji Igbo*', also known as '*oji ugo*', is the preferred specie for social and ritual purposes. '*Ugo*' actually means the eagle bird. To the Igbo, the eagle bird symbolizes beauty, fortune and outstanding. This specie of kolanut connotes fortune, prosperity and good omen. According to the chief ritualist of Nanka, Ezenwafor Ezekafor, the number of lobes in a kolanut is significant. Thus, '*oji aka ano*' (kolanut with four lobes) is most sought after for religious and ritual purposes. The number four represents the four market days and four-calendar week of the Igbo that is '*Eke*', '*Oye*', '*Afor*', and '*Nkwo*'. This makes a four-lobed kolanut significant as a means of exchange, a symbol of interconnectedness that also guarantees the solidarity of the community. '*Oji aka ise*' (a five cotyledon kolanut), a rare specie, is assumed to be very special and, when broken by a young man, it is believed that such an individual will do great things in the future. A male elder performs the kolanut rituals among the Nanka people. Such an elder is a symbol in itself and represents the voice of the community.

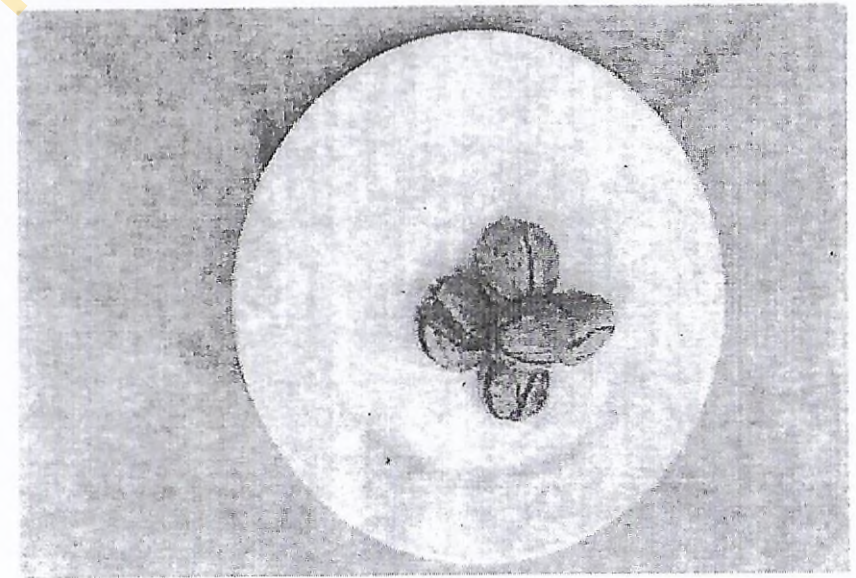


Plate 1: *Oji Igbo* (*cola acuminata*) Symbol of love and hospitality.  
Source: Fieldwork 2003.

Among the Nanka people, in any social gathering where the kolanut is presented, there are three stages of rites that follow before it is eaten. These are '*igosi oji*' (the



presentation of the kolanut), '*iwa oji*' (the breaking of the kolanut), and '*ita oji*' (the sharing and eating of the kolanut). The first stage is the '*igosi oji*' (presentation of kolanut). In a family gathering, it is the duty of the head of the family to present the kolanut. In presenting the kolanut to the visitors, the host could say '*Ndi b'anyi oji abia nu o o o*', meaning "our people, kolanut has come o o o": a statement, which implies that the symbol of solidarity is ushered in, all restiveness should stop, all attention should be focused on the symbol. The kolanut is, then, handed over to the eldest person in the gathering, in whose hands lie the power to communicate with the cosmic forces the people's need for peace, progress and development. The elder, thus, has the power to determine peace and progress. The eldest person approximates the ancestors, the continuity and essence of the community. Just like the entry of the kolanut, the handling of the kolanut by the eldest, represents a passage of authority to the one who embraces the collective identity and integrity.

However, if the gathering is a large one comprising various patrilineages or communities, the oldest man in the hosting patrilineage or community is the one that presents the kolanut to the oldest man in the gathering, who may also be in a leadership position. The kolanut then passes on to the various kindred represented after which it goes back to the man that started the presentation. If there are '*ozo*' titled men in the gathering, the kolanut is presented to the oldest '*ozo*' titled man from where it passes on to others to see. The essence of this stage of kolanut presentation is for everybody present to see the kolanut, have a sense of personal recognition, have a sense of collective identity and become integrated into the meeting. The shift from the eldest to the youngest, from the titled to the non-titled, is a movement towards the integrative, which recognizes the individuality and the collectivity of the person. The intricate web so constructed represents a bond, a contract, which ensures that obligations are properly carried out, and that the possibility of dissent is minimized. Hence, as the people say, '*Agwo ofu onye furu na aho eke*' meaning: 'The snake that only one person saw turns out to be a python'.

There are certain taboos associated with the kolanut in Nanka. The first one is that the kolanut is not presented to women in any gathering at this stage, except that when it is shown round women use the opportunity to see it. Also, a woman does not climb the kolanut tree. According to Pa Mathias Okeke, "a woman has nothing to do with kolanut". In fact, it is culturally unacceptable for a woman to pray with the kolanut in her hand in the ritualistic way a man does. According to Emmanuel Agbanari, an indigene of Nanka born in 1953, "If a visitor comes into a polygamous home and the head of the household is not around, the women must look for any male, no matter how young to present the kolanut" (Personal communication, March, 2006). This seems to paint an image of women subordination. Oparaugo, however, affirms that:

This does not in any sense mean that women have no value in Igbo culture. The reason is based on the fact that ...Igbo kolanut is accompanied with the symbolic act of communicating with the spirits of the ancestors. In the Igbo culture this cultural and religious office belongs only to the male sect (Oparaugo, 2004: 11).

Pa Mathias Okeke supports this submission when he affirms that: "The reason is that kolanut is used to communicate with the deities and shrines, and the woman does not feed the deities" (Personal communication, July, 2004). Their submissions, however, fail to recognize the deconstruction and the subordination of the self to the collectivity in this ritual performance. These submissions can, therefore, be nothing but political statements aimed at denying the woman her rightful place in this cultural construction of meanings. In any case, the seemingly male presence in the kolanut rituals represents the voice of one who has de-emphasized the self for the collective identity. It is the voice of the elder, a symbol in itself, and a form where sex identity is suppressed or unavailable. Hence, the elder, here, is male-female embodied. Other taboos associated with the kolanut in Nanka are that a visitor does not take kolanut to his host's house and an '*osu*' (a social outcast) does not perform the kolanut rituals in the mist of the freeborn.

The second stage in the presentation of kola nut is the '*igo oji*' (praying with the kolanut). At this stage, the oldest man in the hosting family performs the kolanut rituals. Traditionally, the content of Igbo kolanut rituals include (a) showing the kolanut to the people (if it is meant for a group of people); (b) lifting up the kolanut to the Almighty God, the God that lives in Heaven or in the sky, (c) calling on the ancestors to come and partake in the sharing, (d) informing the Earth goddess of the community that the kolanut has been presented (e) stating the purpose of the (gathering if it is known), and (f) asking for the general needs of the people. Thus, the prayer presents to God, the ancestors and the Earth goddess, the people's desire for peace, good health, long life, gift of children and prosperity. The prayer takes care of varied interests, of men and women, boys and girls, kith and kin, in-laws and '*umudiana*' (the cult of the patrilineage daughters' children). Pa Mathias Okeke puts it this way:

The kolanut is raised up and Obasi di n'elu, Chukwu, (God in Heaven, Supreme Being) is called upon. If it is in front of a deity, he (the person leading the prayer) begins to tell the deity why he came. If it is in '*umunna*', after raising it to God, he calls the ancestors and the Earth goddess to come and eat kolanut. He begins to bless the people around: 'They will eat the kolanut in peace and have long life and progress' (Personal communication, August, 2003).

The acknowledgement of the Earth goddess in this ritual reflects the presence of the female voice in kolanut ritual and thus female presence. An example of such prayer in a marriage ceremony is this;

<i>Chukwu okike, okike kele uwa</i>	God the Creator, the Creator who created the world.
<i>Ndi nna nna anyi ha,</i>	Our ancestors,
<i>Ana Nanka,</i>	the land (Earth goddess) of Nanka
<i>oji oji n' ayo ndu nmadu nini no ebea.</i>	We use the kolanut to ask for life for the people here.
<i>Ma onye afuru anyi, ma onye afughi anyi</i>	Both the ones we see and the ones we do not see
<i>Ayi n' ayo ndu ya. Ka ha nwee ndu</i>	We are asking for life for them. Let them have life.
<i>Enwe ga esi ka ibe ya mara wee maa</i>	The monkey will jump from where his mates jumped.
<i>Nwanyi ka abira anuru.</i>	It is a woman that is getting married.
<i>O je amu ozuzu eke, muo ozuzu oye,</i>	She will bear children in 'eke' market day and 'oye' market day.
<i>muo ozuzu afor, muo ozuzu nkwo.</i>	deliver on 'afor' market day and 'nkwo' market day.
<i>O je amuta nwoke.</i>	She will bear males.
<i>O je amuta nwanyi.</i>	She will bear females.
<i>Oo na ala unele ka abira marwara</i>	It is from the mother plantain that this one has been gotten.
<i>Nneye mutara, ya na onweya je amuta.</i>	The mother bore children, she too will bear.
<i>Nneye aghohu nna ya ahia.</i>	The mother was not a loss to the father.
<i>Yana onwe ya ejeghi agho di ya ahia</i>	She will not be a loss to the husband.
<i>O je abara ya uru</i>	She will be profitable to him
<i>O je enye ayi ife akuaku ife enwe enwe</i>	She will bring us wealth and prosperity.
<i>Fa ejeghi amuta nwa enwe nne,</i>	They will not bear fatherless or
<i>nwa enwe nna.</i>	motherless.

<i>Ife ndi a ka anyi n' ayo</i>	We ask all these, with hope they will be
<i>nwee nchekwube n' oje adi otua</i>	so.
<i>Iseeeee</i>	So be it.

(Pa Mathias Okeke; an informant, August, 2004).

The kolanut ritual, as the one above, also incorporates the people's philosophy of life; concerning the position of the woman and the societal expectation of her. A woman is expected to bear children and without this she is a 'loss' to the husband. Thus, motherhood enhances the position of the woman in the culture. It is an institution that has no male equivalent in the culture. Again, collectivity, completeness and continuity are also emphasized in the fact that the bride will bear children in all the four market days of the people. Her coming into the new family will not bring about discontinuity in the family unit or patrilineage. Marriage, just like the kolanut, here initiates a bond of unity between the groups involved. More importantly, the invocation of the Earth goddess in the ritual creates space for women participation and involvement. Her position, role and the fact that she must, of necessity, be included, ensure a voice for the Igbo woman in peacebuilding. The ancestors, of course, represent voice for the men. This cultural construction of gender and meanings where the woman has a space has always been silenced in interpretation of kolanut symbol and rituals in Igbo culture and by extension in knowledge production, privileging men's position.

The kolanut aims at perpetuating peace, love and unity. Consequently, the people often say, '*Onye wetara oji wetara ndu*', that is 'He that brought the kolanut brought life'. Here, again, the kolanut takes a symbolic status: It signifies life to the individual and the community. Life, to Nanka people, signifies a concrete experience and not some kind of abstraction. It is the sense of belonging, communion, sharing, hospitality and celebration. Life means wellbeing, which includes material, spiritual, psychological and social wellbeing. To the Igbo people in general, life, according to Nwala (1985), means '*ndu*', derived from the root word '*di*' that is 'being'. He further submits that '*ndu*' means existence, that is 'the vital force of being or existence' (Nwala 1985). Because of the mystery surrounding '*ndu*', the people say '*Ndubuisi*', meaning, 'life is supreme', '*Chinwendu*', 'life belongs to God', '*Ndukaku*', 'life is greater than wealth'. These are personal names that re-echo Igbo view of life and help to perpetuate this perception. Hence, the shedding of innocent blood is a sacrilege. It is frowned upon. For this reason, Nwala (1985) affirms, the people practice '*igba ndu*', an oath of fidelity whose aim is to ensure the preservation of life of those who are involved. Speaking further on the attitude of the Igbo to '*ndu*', Nwala concludes:

To them [the Igbo] life is a never-ending process and its perpetuation is the goal of all activity and aspirations. 'Ndu', in conception is the dynamic quality of material and human existence. Ndu is also existence itself and existence could take various forms either material/spiritual or pure spirit (Nwala, 1985:144).

The kolanut, as a symbol of life and peace, is a revitalizing agent, using the agency of public meeting to reinvigorate interest in, and concern for, social order. For the order to prevail, roles are properly distributed, and performances are well monitored. It is equally important that collective goals are kept in focus, both for the purpose of ensuring that divided loyalty does not arise, and a meaningful, directional development is pursued. In this wise, kolanut plays a prominent role in the settlement of disputes and other socio-political conflicts. According to an informant, Emmanuel Agbanari (b. 1953), in settling a marital dispute, with kolanut in the hand of the eldest member of the husband's family, a prayer like this can be said:

<i>Chukwu okike, okike kele uwa,</i>	God the Creator, the Creator of the world,
<i>Ndi nna nna anyi ha,</i>	Our ancestors,
<i>Ana Nanka,</i>	The land (Earth goddess) of Nanka,
<i>Oji abia nu ooo.</i>	The kolanut has come o o o o o.
<i>Ndu nmadu nini no ebea,</i>	We use the kolanut to ask for life for the people here,
<i>Anyi biara maku udo,</i>	We have come for peace.
<i>Onye biara okwu, bia alayi</i>	He that comes for settlement and decides to create division
<i>Alayi esohu ya, okwu esoro ye naba.</i>	If division does not follow him, dispute will follow him.
<i>Ibe anyi kwanu ya e'e e e</i>	My people is that not so oooo?
<i>Okwu anyi jiri bia bu okwu udo</i>	What we have come for is peace
<i>Oburu na onye f'ionye ife na nku</i>	If anybody ties something else in the bunch of firewood,
<i>Ya niba ya.</i>	Let him bear the weight.
<i>Onye efionyeghi ihe na nku,</i>	He that does not tie something
<i>Oj'ebu nku ya wee naa.</i>	else in the bunch of firewood will go

*lseeeeeeee.*

with his/her bunch of firewood.  
So be it.

(Emmanuel Agbanari; an informant, July, 2004).

The proverb employed admonishes all to be sincere in the settlement of the dispute or else bear the consequence. The consequence may be the punishment, which the Earth goddess may inflict on the defaulter.

In a situation where the purpose of the visit is not known, such statements as '*O biara be onye abigbune ya, O naba nkpuke apukwana ya*', meaning, 'may the visitor not bring death or misfortune upon the host so that when he/she [the visitor] is going, he/she will not develop hunchback', is included in the kolanut rituals. While prayers are said for the reign of peace, curses are also placed on anybody standing against the progress of others or on those who wish others evil. The prayer will end with 'Chukwu', or Chineke but if it is a Christian gathering, it ends with Jesus Christ, omitting the Earth goddess. An example of a prayer that ends with Chukwu is written below:

<i>Chineke kere enigwe na ani,</i>	God, the Creator of Heaven and earth.
<i>Chukwu okike, anyi ekene gi.</i>	God the Creator, we greet you.
<i>Ndi nna nna anyi ha, anyi ekene nu ooo.</i>	Our ancestors, we greet you.
<i>Ana Nanka, anyi ekene gi.</i>	The land of Nanka (Earth goddess), we greet you.
<i>Ndi furu anyi ma na anyi afughi hu.</i>	Those that see us but we do not see them,
<i>Bia nu, na oji abina oo.</i>	Come, the kolanut has come oooo.
<i>Onye wetara oji wetara ndu.</i>	He that brings kolanut brings life.
<i>Ndi h'anyi si O biara h' onye abigbuneya</i>	Our people say, may he who comes visiting not bring death and misfortune upon the host
<i>O naba nkpuke apunaya.</i>	so that when he will go he will not develop hunchback.
<i>Udo na ifunanya ka anyi n' ucho.</i>	Peace and love is what we want.
<i>Ogonogo ndu n' aru isi ike.</i>	Long life and good health.
<i>Onye biri, ibeya biri.</i>	Let he that lives allow others to live.
<i>Eghe here ugo here.</i>	Let the eagle petch and the kite petch.

<i>Nke siri ibeye ebena, nku kwaa ya.</i>	The one that says the other should not <i>petch, let his wings break.</i>
<i>Nye anyi ndu, nye anyi omumu.</i>	Give us life, give us children, give us
<i>nye anyi oganiru.</i>	Progress.
<i>Ka Chukwu mezie okwu nkaa.</i>	May God complete these words so that it
<i>Ka O diri anyi nma.</i>	will be well with us.
<i>Ndi be anyi, anyi ga adi oooo.</i>	Our people, we shall live ooooo
(The people will say:)	
'Iseeeee'	'So be it'.

(Okeke Obuoha, an informant in Nanka: August, 2003).

The third stage in the kolanut rite is the '*iwa oji*' and '*ita oji*' (the breaking of the kolanut and the eating of the kolanut). At this stage, the kolanut is broken and shared as the plate containing the kolanut passes from one person to the other. In Nanka, it is traditionally expected that the person who breaks the kolanut takes it first before passing it to others. The reason is that one is not expected to offer to others what he or she cannot eat. It should be noted that a piece of kolanut is not handed to an individual. Rather, one takes it by oneself. One, then, chews it for a longer period than it normally should. The people have an adage, which says, '*Oji n' ano aka n' onu onye ma ata oji*', that is, 'the kolanut lasts longer in the mouth of the person that knows how to chew it'. On the sharing of the kolanut between the host and his visitor, Oparaugo observes that this ritual makes the visitor feel welcome and able to go further in explaining himself and the purpose of his visit (Oparaugo, 2004: 22). It, culturally, places on the host the responsibility of protecting his visitor. Oparaugo further submits that the sharing of the kolanut gives the visitor some sense of security and being in union and at peace, with his host (Oparaugo, 2004: 22-23).

To the Nanka people, the kolanut is the greatest symbol of hospitality. It is presented to visitors as a sign of love and goodwill. It is treated with much reverence and piety almost afforded the deities. In peace processes, it is a sign that honesty is expected from everyone. This, in turn, gives way for easy reconciliation, harmony and love. When kolanut is presented, prayer for peace, love and unity follows it. As a symbol, friendship and hospitality are extended, through the kolanut, to whomever

it is presented to, be it the ancestors, the Earth goddess, the gods or human beings. In sacrifice, the kolanut introduces the ritual activities.

Early European visitors to Igboland were enthralled by the position of kolanut in Igbo culture that Basden, for instance, calls the kolanut "a strange passport, an immunity from attack" (Basden 1966: 162). He, in fact, gave a first hand experience of kolanut ritual and sharing in Igboland:

Having explained the reason for our visit and allayed any suspicion he (the host) may have entertained, we were able to converse on easy terms. Whatever be the case and the purpose of the visit, the Igbo man receives all by sharing kolanut (Basden, 1966: 43).

The influence of colonial contact and Christian religion has not, in anyway, affected the honour and respect accorded the kolanut. The only modification is that rather than praying to the ancestors, the Christians pray to the Almighty God and end with Jesus Christ, while omitting the Earth goddess. This is a result of culture contact and social change. The omission of the Earth goddess, which is the female voice and space in the new proceeding, signifies the denial of women position and voice, which the Western civilization embodies.

Traditionally, the consumption of the kolanut becomes a binding force between an individual or group with the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the Earth goddess. As a peace symbol used for the purpose of reconciliation, not just between Man and his fellow Man, but, also, between Man and the cosmic forces, the kolanut is presented prior to the discussion of the causes of a dispute or conflict. It is, principally, a mediating symbol using the channel of the 'elder'. The mediator uses proverbs to buttress the points raised in discussions.

'*Ofo*' (Plate 2), an instrument of traditional peacebuilding among the Nanka Igbo, is made of a stick or pieces of sticks of '*Detarium senegalense*' tree tied together. According to a respondent, Nze Samuel Chukwuewghi, a fifty-three year old titled man: "Our people believe that God talks to us through some media. '*Ofo*' is seen as one of such media and it is a symbol of authority" (Personal communication, August, 2004). The head of every household, usually the father or the '*okpala*' (if the father is deceased), the priests, and the '*okpala*' of sub-family unit and the patrilineage, all had the '*ofo*' in their possession during the pre-colonial time. To prepare an '*ofo*', certain rituals must be performed, which transforms the object into a peace symbol embodying the spirit of the ancestors of the possessor. According to Nze Samuel Chukwuewghi, the informant, the head of the '*umunna*' (*okpala*) is the one that performs this ritual. To do this, he will kill a cock, a goat or cow and the blood of the animal is smeared on the '*ofo*' stick. The feathers or hair of the animal is stuck to the wood. The spirit of the ancestors is invoked to come and

reside in the wood and empower the possessor. In this covenant ritual, all the male adults of the patrilineage must be present. At the gathering, they will agree that this 'ofo' will be a source of unity for the people. After the rituals, the stick becomes consecrated, and thus, it is imbued with the spirit of the ancestors of the possessor.

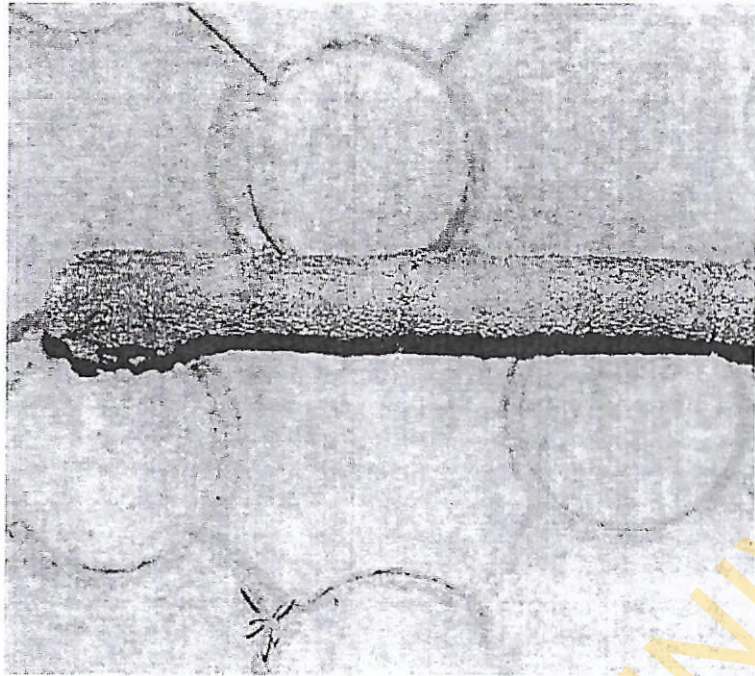


Plate 2: 'Ofo' stick (*Detarium senegalense* stick). Symbol of authority and justice. Source: Fieldwork 2003.

In addition to being a staff of authority, it is an emblem of the link between the Great Creator and Man, the dead and the living, the living and the unborn. 'Ofo' symbolizes justice, righteousness and peace. For this reason, it plays important role in the social, political, and religious life of the people. In pre-colonial Nanka, no serious ritual could be performed without the 'ofo'. For example, 'ofo' was used to confer titles and to establish new customary practices and traditions. Laws were rectified and canonized using the 'ofo'. In the light of this, Nwala concludes:

The cult is, indeed, the key, which the ancestors give to their holders for binding and loosening their members as the case may be. Whatever the holder of 'ofo' binds or condemns or approves is that which the gods and ancestors disapprove or approve (Nwala, 1986: 65)

The possessor is expected to live a life of integrity and responsibility. Taboos associated with the 'ofo' in Nanka, according to Nze Chukwueweghi, include (1) 'ofo' cannot be possessed by a woman or bought with money. (2) A stranger cannot handle the 'ofo' of a family (3) A bastard cannot handle an 'ofo' and, (4) 'Ofo' must be carried with two hands no matter how small the object is (Personal communication, August, 2004).

The 'ofo' stick or staff is employed in serious discussions and in taking serious family or community decisions that are especially intended to be binding on every member of the family or community. Thus, it becomes a seal to an agreement when it is used to invoke the spirit of the ancestors and the Earth goddess. This is called 'isu 'ofo' mechanism. The diviner, priest or family head performs this symbolic ritual depending on the place such ritual is needed. At the end of the invocation, the people would respond: 'Ofo' o o o o o. It is believed that spiritual forces go after whosoever went against the resolution reached using 'ofo' in the proceeding. This is because curses are uttered on anyone who went contrary to such decisions. Therefore, to swear with the 'ofo' stick raised or placed on the ground is to call the sky, the earth and the cosmic forces to witness to the veracity of the oath.

'Ofo' is, also, a judicial instrument that requires everybody to be honest whenever it is presented in any judicial proceeding. Nwala draws similar conclusion when he affirms that:

'Ofo', as a legal instrument for validating decisions of the family lineage, village or clan, helps to ensure political stability by its role as a means of sanction, settling disputes and ensuring peace (Nwala, 1985: 65)

The belief in the continued presence of the ancestors implies that they are capable of punishing whoever does things contrary to the 'omenana' (customs and traditions) of the people. The presentation of the 'ofo' is a symbolic representation of the ancestors and the Earth goddess in the assembly. In a family meeting, the family head presents the 'ofo' calling on the ancestors and the Earth goddess to join in the proceeding. If the purpose of the gathering is to reconcile husband and wife, the head of the family having presented the 'ofo' reminds all that reconciliation is the focus of the gathering.

In a communal or intergroup gathering, the individual occupying a leadership position, like the leader of *'nze na ozo'* or chief priest of the community, after presenting the 'ofo' reaffirms the resolutions of the people. In each instance, he struck the 'ofo' on the ground. Such an agreement is usually guided by the 'omenana' of the people, that is, the customs and traditions of the people, an unwritten constitution on how the people should organize and live their lives. It is an abomination to go against anything that has been sealed with an 'ofo'. Here, lies the significance of 'ofo' in peacebuilding. The fear of the negative consequences that might befall anyone who goes against anything sealed with the 'ofo' ensures that resolutions remained intact. For instance, in the resolution of a particular conflict, 'ofo' could be used to seal the agreement reached. The elder, acting as chief mediator, presents the 'ofo' in the midst of all who are already seated. Prior to the presentation of the grievances of the individuals or parties, the mediator affirms the presence of the ancestors in the session. He states that anyone who does not want peace to reign be held by the 'ofo'. Any agreement that will cause the people to dwell in peace may the 'ofo' affirm.

'Ofo' is often invoked with its twin sister 'ogu'. The two often go together. The 'ofo' is assumed to be more powerful than the 'ogu' probably because much preparations and rituals are associated with acquiring it (Uwalaka 1996). Also, while anything could be used as 'ogu', 'ofo' has a particular tree from where it is gotten, as indicated above. However, in the preparation and usages of 'ofo' in rituals, the Earth goddess, the female representation, must of necessity be invoked, her space ensured without which there is a tempo-spiritual crisis. In this interconnectedness, man and woman engage in mutual participation in peacebuilding processes. Often people say *'Eji m' ofo na ugu'*. This means 'I hold 'ofo' and 'ogu', to show that one is innocent of an accusation leveled against him or her. Their association is to reinforce a point. So, if, according to Uwalaka, "'ofo' is associated with maleness while 'ogu' is associated with femaleness" (1996: 5), then the complementarity of the two as a social force in peacebuilding is affirmed. It is the social force that binds the community. More importantly, and this is of major concern to us in this paper, even without the invocation of 'ogu' (which is often the case) there is still female presence and voice in 'ofo' rituals through the participation of the Earth goddess.

The people distinguish between *'igo ofo'* and *'isu ofo'*. *'Igo ofo'* means to pray with the 'ofo', mostly to bless; though in the process, curses may be rendered against whoever wishes one evil. *'Isu ofo'*, on the other hand, is entirely meant to curse, usually, the evildoer or the person that goes against the resolution of the people. *'Igo ofo'* ('ofo' prayer) is an invocation to the gods, the goddess 'Ala' (Earth goddess), to come to bear witness, to bless, or to punish as the case may be. An 'ofo' prayer

is, here, assumed to authenticate the good-will wishes extended to whomever it is used to pray for. In such prayers, the ancestors, the 'Umudiana' (the cult of the children of patrilineage daughters), the Earth goddess and the deities are all invited to participate in the occasion and greetings are extended to them. An example of 'igo ofo' is presented below:

*Ndi nna anyi ha.*

*Anyi abia.*

*Nua nu mmanye.*

*Nduchie ba yi*

*Nara nu nmayi nuo.*

*Ana Nanka, nua nmanyi.*

*Ofo nuo nmayi, ugu nua nmanyi.*

*Ikwu n' ibe, ndi nbu na ndi abuo,*

*Nua nmanyi.*

*Umudiana, nua nmanyi.*

*Ifeoma, ifeoma, je eso Okeke nwa M*

*O je amu nwoke, Oje amu nwanyi.*

*Onye si na o jeghi eme.*

*ama be ya chikwee.*

*Ife onye kulu, ya ghoru.*

*Ochu okuko onweghi nwe adu.*

*Okuko O na achu nwe nwenwe oso.*

(Mazi Okafor; an informant, July, 2004).

'Isu ofo' with its mythical force, could be used for conditional curses against those who did what the land abhorred. The priest or an elder may do this by hitting

Our ancestors

We have come.

Drink wine.

Our ancestors

Take wine and drink.

The land (Earth goddess) of Nanka, take wine and drink.

'Ofo', drink wine, 'ogu' drink wine.

Kith and kin, the first and second generation.

Drink wine.

The cult of 'umudiana', take wine and drink.

Good things, good things, will follow my son, Okeke.

He will bear males, he will bear females.

He that says it will not be so, may the path to his homestead close.

Whatever one plants, let him reap.

He that is pursuing the fowl that is not his own, will continue to fall.

The fowl he is pursuing, trots along.

the 'ofo' on the ground ('*isu ofo*') and, in each case, releasing curses against the offender. Below is an example of '*isu ofo*':

<i>Onye si na udo ejeghi adi n' obodo</i>	He that says that there will not be peace in the land
<i>Yu enwekwene udo.</i>	May he or she not have peace.
<i>O nye si na ojeghi adiri M mma.</i>	He that says it will not be well with me.
<i>Ojeghi adikwa ra ya.</i>	May it not be well with him/her.
<i>O na eje eje, O na anana.</i>	When he/she is going, when he/she is returning.
<i>Ana b'anyi sobe ya.</i>	May our Land (Earth goddess) follow (that is, pass judgement upon) him/her.
<i>Ife onye kuru, ya ghoru</i>	Whatever anyone plants, may he harvest.
<i>Aka M di ocha.</i>	My hands are clean.
<i>Ofooooo.</i>	So be it...ooo....

(Okeke Obuoha, an informant, August, 2003).

When a new law is promulgated in the community using the '*ofo*', such law and, or, tradition becomes binding on every member of the community. Even with the influence of Christianity, Christian converts still make references to '*ofo*' and '*ogu*' when they want to assert their innocence in informal discussions. For instance, one may hear statements like "Aka M di ocha. E ji M ugu. Eji M ofo". This means, "My hands are clean (I'm innocent). I'm 'holding' '*ogu*'. I'm holding '*ofo*' ". Statements like these are made without physically holding the '*ofo*' stick. This shows the extent to which the concept of '*ofo*' has permeated the consciousness and social life of Nanka Igbo people. The influence, which it wielded and is still wielding, affects the people's lifestyle. With the tremendous command of the '*ofo*', peace is established.

In pre-colonial Nanka society, the recourse to the '*ofo*' supernatural mechanism was a means of resolving dispute or conflict when every other means of consultation had failed. In such situations, each of the parties in conflicts was called to state its side of the story. The mediator or mediators, usually elders, who were, in most cases titled men, ('*nze nu ozo*' titleholders) tried to ascertain the truth of the matter in dispute, and reach an amicable resolution. The aim was always societal re-

integration and harmony. As a legal instrument, '*ofo*' validate decisions of the family, village, clan or community. It helped to ensure political stability as a means of sanction, and by settling disputes and ensuring peace, harmony and conformity. '*Ofo*' expressed the will of the community, including that of the gods, the Earth goddess, the ancestors, the living, and the unborn.

As instrument of peacebuilding, '*ofo*' is an object of oath-taking (*inu iyi*) in peace processes. This is usually done to establish sincerity of action, respect for group agreement and resolution, and maintenance of social order. The use of '*ofo*', verbally, by male and female, is a sign of loyalty and a guarantee of veracity in what the individual is saying. It is an attestation that the individual has respect for the truth and is calling on the gods, the ancestors and the Earth goddess as witnesses. '*Inu iyi*' can, equally, be carried out to ascertain the ownership of a particular thing, for example, a piece of land. The contending parties (individuals or family representatives) are interrogated one after the other by the council of elders, that is, the '*nze na ozo*' titleholders. Their witnesses are also interrogated. Oath taking may be involved, as the last resort, if the issues cannot be resolved through dialogue.

It is important to differentiate between '*idu niyi*' and '*inu iyi*'. '*Inu iyi*' means swearing to an oath, which is done by the parties involved in the dispute or conflict. '*Idu niyi*', on the other hand, means being led to an oath, which is done by the mediator, which in this case may be the lineage head, the leader of the titled men at the village level or a priest of a local deity. In pre-colonial days, the '*ofo*' was given specific period, usually seven native week, that is 28 (twenty-eight) days, to kill the person or inflict illness, if found guilty. This punishment could also take the form of death to the individual's loved ones, especially his sons, preferably still, his first son. If at the expiration of the period the person survived, it meant he or she was the undisputed owner of the land, and most of the time he was expected to celebrate his survival in merry making known as "*inu alusi*", which literally means "overcoming or surviving the deity".

In pre-colonial days, and among those not yet affected by Christianity in the modern time, a suspect could be told to swear to an oath, '*inu iyi*', to prove his innocence. Depending on the gravity of the offence, the culprit might be presented to the oracles, shrines or deities. According to an informant, Pa Okeke Obuoha, a traditionalist by religion:

For confession to be made, a person has to go to 'Ana oji', [a deity in Ifite village] stand bare-footed and swear that he did not do a particular thing, and that if he did it, may our earth (Earth goddess) hold him (Pa Okeke Obuoha; Personal communication, August, 2003).

In a situation where the offender was unknown, 'nze na ozo' (titleholders) would gather at 'Ana oji' (this is located at Ezekwem, a deity in Ifite village) to render conditional curses: "He that did this thing (mention is made of the offence committed) let the land (Earth goddess) of Nanka hold him". The people would respond 'ofo oooo' meaning, 'so be it'. Each of the titled elders held 'ofo' stick and at a regular interval, it was struck on the ground as the people proclaim 'ofo oooo'. In land disputes, according to Madam Mgbokwu Enechi, an eighty-nine year old leader of Ada-Nanka Institution, seven men were needed to take an oath to determine the actual owner of the piece of land under contention. This was done at the location of the land. Each of the parties involved in the dispute produced seven persons who took the oath with him. An 'nze' man, that is an 'ozo' titleholder with facial tattoo or facial marks (scarification) stood for two people. So, if the claimant produced three men with 'ichi' (tribal facial marks), those three people represent six people. In other words, he only needed to get one more person to complete the seven. The number 'seven' here is significant. It stands for the seven villages of Nanka.

Having produced the seven people, the claimant would then walk around the piece of land under dispute holding 'ofo' stick while his opponent watched keenly. He was supposed to show disapproval if he felt the contestant was trespassing. If, actually, the land did not belong to him, he could fall instantly, as he walked around, or at a later time, he would die or start suffering from undiagnosable sickness, which would ultimately lead to his death. According to Madam Mgbokwu Enechi, a person who knew the truth about an issue, for instance, land matter, might be invited to bear witness. This, usually, is an elder who is believed to be an honest person. In pre-colonial days, before the witness testified, he would swear that as he stood on the land bare-footed, the gods, the ancestors, the Earth goddess, and the sky should bear witness that he was speaking the truth. Having said that, he would walk round the disputed land bare-footed holding the 'ofo' in his hand. At the end of this exercise, he would drop the 'ofo' for the other disputant to take his turn. Women are not involved in land matters in Nanka. As the people say: 'Nwanyi anaghi ekwu okwu ana', meaning, 'a woman does not speak on land matters'. This seeming exclusion may not be unconnected with patrilocal residence and exogamous marriage systems practiced in the culture. These social indices imply that because a woman marries outside her patrilineage, she may not have accurate information necessary for the settlement of land disputes as in her natal home; she has not always been there, and she came into her marital home through marriage. By the mechanisms of supernatural invocation, using 'ofo', disputes are settled between individuals, families, patrilineages, villages, and communities in pre-colonial days. In situations where an offender was not known, this supernatural method of adjudicating a case was also employed.

It is important to note that when an evil is done in the society, the Earth goddess holds the whole community culpable. This snowball effect of evil on all and sundry also helps to re-enforce the communal consciousness of the people. Hence, everybody is interested in the affairs and lifestyle of everybody. Appeal to supernatural methods in situations where the wrong doer is not known is a mechanism that serves as a firm deterrence against anyone who would do such a thing in the future. This is because the evildoer cannot hide.

Scholars of Igbo culture have always portrayed women as lacking involvement and participation in the use that is made of 'oji' and 'ofo' in the culture. This is because emphases have always been on whose possession the peace object is or who carries out the rituals. Even within these indices, these authors give premium to the men without an analysis of the dynamics that give rise to the seeming female exclusion. In any case, the performer of the ritual is a symbol, a form where sex identity is non-existent. The seeming exclusion of the woman at the secular level is, nevertheless, not unconnected with patrilineal descent system and patrilocal resident system practiced in the culture. Inevitably, it is in the usages and ritual performances of these symbolic objects that women participation and role is made manifest through the involvement of the Earth goddess. For this reason, we cannot but recognize that the dual nature of human existence and the cosmological worldview that inform Igbo cultural practices, especially, in the 'oji' and 'ofo' rituals, mean that women are not excluded in 'oji' and 'ofo' usages. Gender relations, with regard to power sharing between the sexes, in these peace symbolic objects have not in anyway undermined women position, participation and involvement in traditional peacebuilding, particularly from the viewpoints of these peace objects – 'oji' and 'ofo'.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have identified two key traditional peace symbols in Nanka culture. These are 'oji' (kolanut) and 'ofo' (staff of authority and justice). We have noted that these peace structures are not peculiar to Nanka people but are also used in other Igbo societies. Also, in 'oji' and 'ofo' rituals, there is a hierarchy of relationship. In the first place, God the Creator is supreme and, thus, placed in the first position. The ancestors and the Earth goddess follow respectively. The incorporation of the Earth goddess ensures man/woman recognition in the social process of continuity. Emerging from the analysis in this article is that the agent of peace, which the elder represents, both in the breaking of the kolanut, presented in a gathering, and in the possession and performance of 'ofo' rituals, is gender neutral. In the hierarchy of relationship, the elder stands as the link between the living and the ancestors, the Earth goddess, the temporal and the spiritual. He is not representing any particular sex group. Rather, he is the voice of the community; he represents the



historical consciousness of the people; he represents continuity. In this position, the fusion of the temporal and the spiritual is affirmed. The elder in this process emerges male/female embodied. Evident in this exposition is the fact that Nanka social thought is not always rooted in biology. "using the body as the bedrock of social order" as obtains in the West, as Oyewumi noted of the Oyo-Yoruba of western Nigeria (Oyewumi, 1997: xvii). The body as a sex identity is deconstructed in these symbols ('*oji*' and '*ofò*') and what is evident is beyond male/female dichotomy. Consequently, women participation, space, power and authority are adequately represented in these symbolic rituals, which are traditional structures of peacebuilding. For, as Bynum (1986), citing Paul Ricoeur, submits:

There is no such thing as a religious symbol that is merely a sign of or statement about social structure. However religious symbols 'mean', they never simply prescribe or transcribe social status. Rather they transmute it, even while referring to it. Religious symbols are, as Victor Turner puts it, "Polysemic", they have the quality of possessing manifold meanings (Bynum, 1986: 2).

It is within this multiplicity of meanings that women participation and involvement is ensured in peacebuilding among the Nanka people. In '*oji*' and '*ofò*' rituals, we are confronted with the reality that helps the traditional Nanka-Igbo society in coping with conflicts emanating from human interaction by the institutionalization of equality that guaranteed justice and peace through men and women participation and involvement in peacebuilding. It is, therefore, accurate to conclude, in the words of Giddens that:

Without ordered ritual and collective involvement, individuals are left without structured ways of coping with tensions and anxieties... Communal rites provide a focus of group solidarity at major transitions as well as allocating definite tasks for those involved ... Rites de passage place those concerned in touch with wider cosmic forces, relating individual life to more encompassing existential issues. Traditional ritual connected individual action to moral frameworks and to elemental questions about human existence. The loss of ritual [in Western-oriented modern peacebuilding system] is also the loss of such framework (Giddens, 1991: 204).

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