



**We are all one**

**Kola, the nut which brings peace, joy and life in Nso' society, Cameroon**

**SVF-3903**

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UIT - The Arctic University of Norway

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## **Abstract**

Nso' is the biggest Kingdom of the Western Grassfields and an ethnic group in the northeast corner of Cameroon's North West region. The Nso' population comprises Christians, Muslims, and followers of *traditional* religious beliefs. Nso' is a kola producing region. This thesis is about the consequences of kola nut use in Nso'. It offers an analysis of the socio-cultural context where kola is used and its cultural significance. The sense of unity, togetherness, and belonging is one of the issues that is connected to the production and reproduction of the social world we are engaged in. Thus, this study on kola nut practices is all about how identities power and gender roles are constructed and re-constructed around the practice of gathering, distributing and chewing of kola nut. The use kola nut in various social situations contribute to the sense of construction and re-construction of Nso' identity and belonging.

I decided to follow many people to fully grasp element enabling me understand the meaning of kola nut use in a diverse society, wherein are found the literates, illiterates, traditionalists, farmers, traders, scholars, Christians, Muslims etc.

From what I saw during my fieldwork in all the settings where kola nuts were being shared in Nso', I discovered that kola nut practices are important in understanding successful integration of the Nso' people in the sense that whether they are literates, illiterates, traders, farmers, scholars, Traditionalists, Christians, Muslims; they all share and eat kola nut. It is about the construction and reconstruction of social identity despite the forces of modernisation and globalization.





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## **List of abbreviation**

Fig.: Figure.

VCS: Visual Cultural Studies



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# 1- Introduction

## 1.1- What inspired the research project?

*In the back of the truck, someone offered me a little purple piece of something. It was shaped like garlic but looked like a radish. He cut it in half and gave a bit to me, popped the rest in his mouth. I did the same. And oh my God! What a horrid taste. It was like a jolt of lightning, the essence of bitterness. My body shuddered head to toe. We were so crowded in the back of the truck that the man next to me felt the violence of my shuddering and, by the way he looked at me, he must have thought that I was having some kind of seizure. There was no place to spit out this thing I was eating and I had to keep it in my mouth until finally I chewed it up and swallowed it. I thought to myself: I've got to stop putting strange things in my mouth.*

*At least until I know what they are.*

*"What was that?" I asked.*

*"You don't know?" asked the astounded man who had given it to me. Perhaps he was astounded that I would eat something without knowing what it was. "It was kola nut. It gives you energy. It wakes you up."*

*"It certainly does," I said.*

The above quotation is an excerpt of the book, *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa*, written by Eddy L. Harris, in which he narrates his impressions when he ate kola nut for the first time travelling in a truck in Guinea. I was particularly interested in this story because his reaction was similar to mine when I also tried kola nut for the first time. I was very astonished about the kola nuts bitterness while the Nso' people were enjoying it.

Kola nut, the object of this thesis has grown as a topic as a result of a gradual process of questioning, reflexion and observation through time and space. I grew up in the northern part of Cameroon where kola nut is commonly used and sold everywhere in the market in special shelters, around the street corners in small tables, in bars, in bus stations, in railway stations.

Also I could vividly recall my childhood holidays in Nso' in my father's village (in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon) whereby I usually followed other village kids every morning to gather kola under the trees which grew near our house, intercropped and rotated with coffee and beans. During the fruits harvesting season, we enjoyed eating the white envelope (kola nut skin) for their succulent pulp. I saw how people in my village were addicted to eating kola nuts. Then I also decided to taste kola nut for the first time (I was still a kid). It was so horrid and bitter that I spat it out.

As I mentioned, I grew up in northern Cameroun where people eat a lot of kola nut. But what surprised me was that I had never seen a kola tree there. I began to ask myself this question: how is it that they are so fond of kola nuts which they do not produce? Kola nuts are distributed to people in almost every gathering such as naming and marriage ceremonies, brief in every social gathering in general and in Muslim gatherings in particular. So, I decided to find out what kola was and how it has become part of the northerners' life. After some few preliminary researches, I understood that it has to do with historic event.

I came across a documentary produced by CRTV-Adamaoua (Cameroon Radio Television for the Adamaoua region<sup>1</sup>) entitled *Histoires de kola* in 2004 whereby Aboubakar, the Imam of the Mosque of Mbideng in Ngaoundere<sup>2</sup> summarises what kola is and how it became a popular culture in the north when he says<sup>3</sup>:

*For us in the North, especially in the Adamoua kola is a symbol, a symbol of greatness, dignity and respect. And Islam is a religion of communion whereby every believer is assisted by all the believers as whole and tradition has it that you should attend to those assisting you by giving them something symbolic, which in our case is kola nut. This nut has as origin the Hausa<sup>4</sup> civilization. That is to say, it's a ... it's a phenomenon that arose with the Hausa civilization in Hausa country and as you know, Adamawa (especially) and Grand North (as whole) were Islamized by dignitaries who came from Nigeria. And for countries having the Arab civilization for example, dates are rather the items used on similar occasions. Thus, since at the level of the Arab civilization, date represents the above stated symbol ... here, it is represented by the cola.*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Adamaoua region is one of the three northern regions of Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> Ngaoundere is the capital of the Adamaoua region.

<sup>3</sup> These are his exact word: *Chez nous dans le Grand Nord et particulièrement dans l'Adamaoua le cola est un symbole, un symbole de grandeur, de dignité et de respect. Et la religion islamique est une religion de communion ou chaque fidele est assiste par l'ensemble des fideles et il est de tradition que quand on vous assiste que vous donniez quelque chose de symbolique a ceux qui vous assistent. Et chez nous donc c'est la cola. Cette cola a pour origine la civilisation Hausa. C'est-à-dire, c'est un...c'est une situation qui est née avec la civilisation Hausa dans les pays Hausa et vous savez que l'Adamaoua et le Grand Nord ont été islamises par les dignitaires venant du Nigeria. Dans des pays ou par exemple ou il y'a la civilisation arabe, c'est par exemple les dattes qu'ils donnent là-bas. Puisqu'au niveau de la civilisation arabe c'est la datte qui représente ce symbole et qui ici ...est aussi représenté par la cola.* I am the one who did the translation.

<sup>4</sup> The Hausa (one of the largest ethnic group in West Africa) are located in the Sahel regions of northern Nigeria and southeastern Niger with significant numbers also living in parts Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan and Ghana. They were famous traders who travelled from one country to another. In fact they were expert in what historians qualify as *long distance trade*. And one of the trading items was kola nut which they buy from African producing areas and sold in the consuming ones. They are often qualified in Africa as people who are fond of kola nut and who are able to give whatever they have for it.



After listening to the above statement, I realised that the understanding of the consumption of kola in the northern part of Cameroon was linked to the history of this region<sup>5</sup>.

## **1.2- The spread of Islam increased the demand for kola in Northern Cameroon**

Kola nut consumption in Northern Cameroon has to do both with the Hausa presence as kola consumers and merchants who traded kola nut among other items; and the establishment of Islam. In fact, Dan Fodio, a Fulani religious leader and teacher who lived in the Hausa city state of Gobir, initiated the jihad (Holy war)<sup>6</sup> in 1804 after he and his followers were expelled from the city. From exile he called for holy war against the leaders of Gobir and other Hausa city states. Gathering a large army of Fulani and Hausa supporters he conquered Gobir and eventually Sokoto, Kano, Katsina, and the other major city states. By 1815 when his armies ended their conquests, Uthman dan Fodio's religious empire, known as the Sokoto Caliphate<sup>7</sup>, included most of what is now northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon.

Ivor Wilks contends that arising out of Islamic reform movement which culminated in Sokoto jihad of 1804,

*as community were increasingly denied the resort to alcoholics stimulants, so the demand for kola arose' (In Bovil, 1964, 99). And Lovejoy also added that, The spread of Islam had a particular advantageous effect on the demand for kola. The nuts were only readily available stimulant which Islam did not condemn; thus as more people in the savannah region of West Africa became Muslim, the trade in kola increased (Lovejoy, 1973, 633-651).*

Thus, kola nut which is eaten a lot in Northern Cameroon was made popular through the settlement or the presence of some ethnic groups such as the Hausa and also through the Jihad movement. But, in this thesis, I am instead going to take you to Nso' my father's home

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<sup>5</sup> The reason why I am mentioning the consumption of kola in the north in general and in Adamaoua in particular is because the north is the main destination/market of kola nut produce in Nso' land (my area of study).

<sup>6</sup> Usman Dan Fodio started a movement to purify and cleanse the Islamic faith, which he believed had been debased and corrupted by its adherents in the Hausa States of what is now northern Nigeria.

<sup>7</sup> *The Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria was one of the largest empires in Africa during the 19th century. The empire developed as a result of the Fulani jihads (holy wars) which took place in the first decade of the 19th century across what is now Northern Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate was the center of politics and economics in the region until it fell to French and British colonial armies in the early 20th Century. The Sokoto Caliphate was founded in 1804 by Uthman Dan Fodio who became the first Sultan of Sokoto or in the terminology of the time, the first sarkin musulmi (commander of the faithful). Although dan Fodio refused to embrace the term Sultan, each of his successors called himself the Sultan of Sokoto.*

<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=gah/sultanate-sokoto-sokoto-caliphate>  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6110800.stm>

which is one of the kola nut producing areas in Cameroon and where Christians, Muslims and those involved in the *traditional* religious practices live side by side.

### **1.3- Brief presentation of kola nut**

Kola nuts are the seed pods of various evergreen trees that are native to Africa; *Sterculiaceae Cola vera* is the scientific name of the most common species. The Kola nut trees are common in western Africa, especially the nations of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and the Atlantic coast area of Central Africa (Trindall, 1997,1; Rister and al., 1998, 2). The kola tree has been naturalized to South America, Central America, the West Indies, Sri Lanka and Malaysia (Ibid.). There are many kola nut species, but kola *anomala* are the species found in Nso'. It is reddish in color and has many cotyledons.

Kola nut is consumed by breaking it open and into pieces, then chewing the kola nut pieces as one chews gum. Most people find the taste very bitter, especially at first. Sometimes a knife is needed to cut the nut into pieces.

The stimulating effect is similar to a strong cup of coffee. Kola nuts are important in many African societies, particularly in Western and Central Africa. Besides the fact that kola nuts contain caffeine and act as a stimulant and anti-depressant, they are also thought to reduce fatigue and hunger, aid digestion, and work as an aphrodisiac. Kola nuts are commonly seen in African markets in cities and villages. They are often sold by street vendors at bus and train stations. On a train or bus, a traveller with a kola nut will often offer a piece to the others nearby, whether he knows them or not. In some parts of Africa, kola nuts are gifts given to visitors entering a home, usually with some formal ceremony. Offering the kola nut is a gesture of friendship and hospitality. Thus, it forms an integrated part of the social life.

Western and Central Africa directly associate the kola nuts with the economy, religious practices, social relations, health and sexuality. Thus, the kola nut is ubiquitous in daily life; it is present in almost all events. No ceremony or celebration is indeed conceivable without the distribution of kola nuts to guests and preferably in large quantities. Ceremonies such as engagement, marriage, and birth, naming the new-born/baptism, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and visit to the elder (s), the funeral ceremonies imperatively involve the use of kola nuts. There is a general perception of kola nut as a symbol of hospitality, friendship, sharing, understanding, respect, solidarity and sociability. An African adage says that: *he,*

*who brings kola, brings life*. The kola nut is therefore a language and a symbolic means of communication.

The kola nut is a commodity and a source of substantial income for many households both in rural and urban areas. This nut has fed the famous trans-Saharan trade for several centuries. Referred thereto by Leo Africanus in the early sixteenth century, then in 1591 by Piaggafeta, it is still subject to heavy traffic between the forest region and the countries of Sudan and the Sahel (Labouret 1959, 41).

Coca-Cola which is consumed worldwide and which was made in 1886 by an Atlanta pharmacist contained, among other things, an extract of kola nuts<sup>8</sup>. Although substitutes are now used for the manufacture of Coke, its reputation is based initially on the taste and stimulating properties of kola nuts. Although Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola stopped using kola nut in the early twentieth century, Genesis Productions Incorporated in Paramus, New Jersey, continues to produce Cola syrup, using among other things, extracts from Cola nuts (Abaka, 2005, ix).

#### **1.4- Background information on fieldwork area (Location of the fieldwork)**

In this part, I would like to briefly present some background information on Cameroon in general and on Nso' in particular.

The Republic of Cameroon is a country in Central Africa. English and French are the official languages. The country is called *Africa in miniature* for its geological and cultural diversity.

Natural features include beaches, deserts, mountains, rainforests, and savannas. The surface area of Cameroon is about 475,442 sq. km with around 20,129,878 of population (July 2012 est.)<sup>9</sup> and an ethnic diversity, with more than 250 ethnicities.

Cameroon has a high level of religious freedom and diversity. The predominant faith is Christianity, practiced by about two-thirds of the population, while Islam is a significant minority faith, adhered to by about one-fifth. In addition, traditional faiths are practiced by many. Muslims are most concentrated in the north, while Christians are concentrated primarily in the southern and western regions, but practitioners of both faiths can be found

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cyberscriptus.org/cyber45/cocacola.html>. Site consulted on mars25th, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> (July 2012 est.). <http://www.indexmundi.com/cameroon/population.html>  
<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107382.html>

throughout the country<sup>10</sup>. Large cities have significant populations of both groups<sup>11</sup>. There is significant internal migration.

Cameroonians' world view is affected not only by their traditional religions, but also by the new religions that were brought with colonialism and the invaded Islamic holy warriors. Although Islam is concentrated in the northern part of the country, there are significant Muslim populations in the North West region (Nso' belongs to this region) and several large cities. In addition, several Christian missions operate in the north, especially among ethnic groups that successfully resisted conversion to Islam.

No matter the above mentioned differences, people live in peace. Cameroon is often referred to as an *island of peace and stability* (Mbuli, 2009). My assumption which I am developing in a later stage in this thesis is that the gathering, distribution and consumption of kola nut play a role in the praxis of social integration of a diverse people and in the process of togetherness.



1-Cameroon Map – West and Central Africa

[http://www.tractors.pk/cameroon\\_tractors\\_sale.html](http://www.tractors.pk/cameroon_tractors_sale.html)

### **1.4.1- The Reason why I decided to go to my homeland**

In the quest for more information on kola nut while in Northern Cameroon, I realised that, my father's village (Nso' land) was historically one of the most important kola producing areas. Though, in the North, I could see trucks from Nso' supplying kola nuts in many stores.

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<sup>10</sup> [July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report – Cameroon](#). State.gov (2011-4-8). Retrieved on 2011-11-12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In fact, I was very astonished when I came across the book of Jean-Pierre Warnier (1985, 106) where he mentioned that the Hausa merchants from northern Nigeria named Nso' region around 1860 as *Kurmin Gora* which can be translated as *kola forest* or *kola country* (Warnier Jean-Pierre, quoting Duffill, 1976, 15-16). E.M. Chilver (quoted by Kongnso Lafon, 1974, 50) commenting on kola trade before the 1920s said that: *Nso' appears to have been the largest producer originally marketing its kola through the intermediate market at Nkor and insisting on doma and salt in exchange*. The production and exchange of kola nuts was the most important source of income in Nso'. This was due to the good harvesting and to the favorable market prices that existed in the Northern regions of Nigeria and Cameroon.

#### **1.4.2- Brief presentation of Nso'**

Nso' is the biggest chieftaincy of the Western Grassfields (Goheen, 1993, 244) and a tribe in the northeast corner of Cameroon's North West region. Recent estimates put the population of this Grassfields group at more than a quarter of a million people. The Kingdom of Nso' corresponds to what is administratively called the Bui Division. Its capital Kumbo is where both the *Fon* and the Senior Divisional Officer (who represents the State institutions) live.

The *Fon* of Nso is the traditional ruler, both respected by his people and the government. The *Fon's* palace is called *Ntoh Nso*, known as the centre for social and cultural festivities.

There are other *Fons* that generally act as advisers to the *Fon* of Nso. Most of them were once leaders of independent tribes but through warfare or peaceful negotiations; or through shared historical events, came to subordinate the *Fon* of Nso.

The *Fon* as a traditional leader is an agent of the government. He has a status of administrative auxiliary according to a decree of 1977<sup>12</sup>. The constitutional law of 18 January 1996 provide their presence in regional councils. In colonial times, the European powers that had succeeded in Cameroon relied on chiefs to establish their power. The traditional leader then became the indispensable aid between the population and the colonial power. (Nach Mback 2000).

They served as a link between the administration and the people of the village and still have the authority to make the traditional justice (especially for land and civil cases, including inheritance). Traditional leaders are appointed on the advice of notables of the chiefdom. The administrative authority then approves their appointment, which is published in the official

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<sup>12</sup> Décret 77/245 du 15 juillet 1977 - JOC 01/08/1977.

gazette. Traditional leaders retain a strong moral and spiritual influence on their citizens. No matter the meeting of the two administrative systems, one still note the preservation of tradition whereby kola nut play a key role.

Nso' is bounded to the east by Banyo and Nun, to the south by various families of the Bamukon tribe, Babungo, Baba, Babessi and Bangolan; to the south west by Oku, Bikon; and to the North by mountainous Wibum areas. Nso is thus part of the Western Grassfields of Cameroon whereby the relief, drainage, climate, vegetation and soils are in some areas propitious to kola nut production. The Western Grassfields, covered with grassy savannah constitutes a high altitudinal ecotype, galleries along streams and fertile mountain sides. Villages have grooves of kola trees, raffia palm plantations, bananas, coffee as well as potatoes, beans and corn farm.

The Kingdom of Nso' is linguistically and ethnically diverse; they share a number of features, including the centrality of the chieftaincy. *Lamnso* is the lingua franca, but other languages such as Oku, Djottin, Fulfulde and Hausa as well as Pidgin English, English and French are also spoken.

I have carried my study among the Nso' as the dominant ethnic group in Bui and within it Capital Kumbo Central which is an area covered by the Nso' ethnic group. I found it necessary to make this distinction because there are also other ethnic groups living within the Kingdom and who are subordinated to the Fon of Nso'.

In Kumbo Central, the Nso' share region with two groups of Fulani graziers, the Mbororo, who are mainly Jafun arrived in the early 1900<sup>s</sup>, and the Aku'en, originally occupants of the high Jos Plateau, who migrated into the area in the 1950s in the wake of a cattle epidemic from what was then the Benue Province of Nigeria.

### **1.4.3- Social Organisation and belonging**

By understanding how the Nso' society is organised through roles, positions; I shall get to understand how people share belonging. Kola nut play a role in this organization in the creation and recreation of these positions or hierarchies.

The introduction of John V. Skvoretz, Jr. and Richard H. Conviser (1974) In *Interests and Alliances: A Reformulation of Barth's Models of Social Organization* says that in his monograph *Models of social organization* (1966), Fredrik Barth expresses that social

anthropologists should not only observe the relationships between social forms but that they should go further to explain them as well (1966, I-2); and that in the last section of the monograph, Barth attempts to explain the relationship between the descent rights relevant to a society's main resource and the political alliances formed in that society over issues of resource allocation and disposition. They further stated that, Barth's explanation holds that the content of the descent rights determines the pattern of shared interests in a society with respect to the issue of resource allocation/dis-position. This pattern of interests, he (Barth) argues, affects the formation of alliances so as to produce those political alliances which are observed.

The general theoretical strategy employed by Barth is to construct and use *generative models* to explain why social forms exist. Barth defines a social form as consisting of *a series of regularities in a large body of individual items of behaviour* (1966, v). Identity exists because people share something in common. They share kola nut and thus, they share common values which are supporting certain organizations. Kola, which is distributed by the chief is joyfully received, accepted and respected. This shows that values are embedded in the nut. The Nso' identify with the system when they share kola nut.

Barth attempts to show how social forms are produced, or generated, by a particular process which is operating under varying parametric conditions. The intent of Barth's model is to clarify the relationship between these conditions and the generated social forms. So, Barth theory will help me to understand the social significance of kola nut through the gathering, the distribution and the eating rituals and how it is part of a social system. Barth offers a perspective where relations are understood in an organization. The understanding of an organization also implies the understanding of object, power, economy etc. Thus following the object kola nut can help to grasp the above mentioned aspects.

Cohen (1982, 21) says that Belonging implies more than merely having been born in the place.

*It suggests that one is an integral piece of the marvelously complicated fabric which constitutes the community; that one is a recipient of its proudly distinctive and consciously preserved culture—a repository of its traditions and values, a performer of its hallowed skills, an expert in its idioms and idiosyncracies. The depth of such belonging is revealed in the forms of social organization and association in the community so that when a person is identified as belonging to a particular kinship group or neighbourhood he becomes, at the same time, a recognizable member of the community as a whole and of its cultural panoply.*

Cohen (1982, 22) further notes that belonging is crucially bound up with identity. Cohen therefore attempts to display ethnographically those processes which associate the individual with the community through the medium of the 'sections' to which he may regard himself, or may be regarded by others, as belonging. According to Cohen, the feeling of belonging involves an account of social structure as a set of devices which constrain behavior and which are given meaning largely by the ways in which they are used.

The expression *nous sommes ensemble* (in French) or *we are together* in English is a popular saying in Cameroon, often used whenever people are leaving each other or saying good bye after a meeting or a conversation expresses this sense of togetherness and belonging. It means though people are separating, they are still together in thought and that they will be contacted whenever for whatever makes news. Thus, *we are together* states a sense of belonging and identity or a symbolic construction of a community given the fact that people are different but they are together around kola nut.

I am going to discuss the role of kola amongst the Nso' people as an ethnic group. In an essay on the social character of ethnicity:

*Fredrik Barth (1969) criticized a then influential view for being overly concerned with cultural content, or substance, instead of focusing on social processes in the study of ethnicity. Like Moerman (and Leach, Mitchell and others) before him, Barth emphasizes that "cultural traits" do not create ethnicity, and suggest that the focus of research ought to be the social boundaries between groups rather than the "cultural stuff" they contain. In fact, he says, there may be a continuous flow of people and information across ethnic boundaries even though they are maintained as boundaries. If such divisions are maintained, this must be because they have some social relevance. (Thomas Hylland Eriksen 2010, 277).*

And Fenton defined the sense of ethnic identity as referring to *the social construction of descent and culture, the social mobilization of descent and culture, and the meanings and implications of classification system build around them.* (Fenton 2003, 3). But given the case in Nso' land where many people of Hausa origin for example, who settled long ago for trading have become Nso', in such a situation it is very difficult to know unless one has been told. For this reason, I would rather use Barth instead of Fenton.

The specificity of Cameroon is that it has many ethnic groups and that the social relevance of ethnic identities is challenged by modernization with school, education and urbanization. But my task here is to study kola nut in the process of identity construction, belonging and ethnic valorization amongst the Nso' in Nso'. Studying kola nut therefore mean getting engaged in



one way or the other to food culture<sup>13</sup> which according to Krzysztof Skowroński, is *a set of practices, habits, norms and techniques, applied to food and eating*; it encompasses food production, distribution and consumption (2007, 362); it also includes foodstuffs and other material artefacts. Therefore, if food culture is not limited to eating practices and manners, but includes numerous issues connected with our daily lives, it is no surprise that even the earliest anthropologists were writing about it. However, they did not use food studies discourse. Yet and in most cases food was not their main point of interest, but rather a mean to discover other features of a given society.

#### **1.4.4- The Nso' hierarchy**

The Nso' social organisation which is linked to power, economy, etc can be summarised as follows: (1) the *Fon* or Paramount Chief and the secret societies, (2) the lineage system.

1-The *Fon* of Nso' (the paramount leader of Nso') and the men's secret societies. The *Fon* who is often referred to as the Sun of the Nso' land is the centre of a complex political system. He is seen as the *father of his people* and as a symbol of their unity. He is the intermediary between the living and the ancestors. The men's secret societies and military associations that form an integral part of the organization composed by an elaborate palace bureaucracy, in combination with the *fon's* primary councillors (the *vibay*), and various lineage heads, provide a check on his traditional power.

His Royal Highness Seem Mbinglo I is current *Fon* of Nso'. The *Fon* is the traditional ruler. He is both the head of the traditional government and the chief traditional religious authority. The *Fon* is supported in his duties by seven notables called *Vibais*. The *Vibais* are also *Shu'u Fa'ay* (*lineage or compound heads*) and their positions are determined by the rather intricate history.

Goheen (1996, 27) notes that

*With some minor caveats, a description of the structure of Nso' political and social organisation serves for both Nso' proper (Kimbo, the Nso' capital, and its immediate environs) and the sub-chieftaincies. The articulation of the various strands and threads (all changing in relative importance but none disappearing) that make up the traditional social net bears evidence of the ability of the Nso' social system to remain flexibly recalcitrant in the face of changes brought by colonialism, the market place, and national independence.*

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<sup>13</sup> Kola falls within the categorization of *food-drug*. Kola is a *food-drug* like coffee, tea, coca, and tobacco, a substance considered neither food nor medicine. (Ref. anthropologist Sidney Mintz, 2008; and historian Edmond Abaka, 2005).

The seat of divisional administration as well as the capital of Nso', Kumbo today is a bustling town, the focal point of commerce and government in the area. Divisional offices of various national ministries as well as the district officer and the senior district officer have headquarters there. Thus, many functionaries from various regions are present to carry out their duties. As the capital of the chiefdom and home of the paramount Fon of Nso', Kumbo is the center of politics. The Fon of Nso' is the most important local political figure, and little gets done without his knowledge and approval. He is the paramount traditional leader in Bui Division and one of the four Grassfields leader who receives a salary from the national government of Cameroon. The Fon is at the center of the traditional Nso' system of redistribution. Goods and services pass into the palace as the material realization of public and symbolic fealty.

2-The lineage system. Nso society is divided into groups according to lineage often referred to as the *Compound*. Each lineage group is led by a *Fa'ay* or *Shu'u Fa'ay*. Tradition dictates that the hand of a *Fa'ay* is not to be shaken. *Fa'ay* can be recognized by their glass bead necklaces, regalia, dress, neglects, caps and fancy walking sticks. They were given the right to control access to land. A *Fa'ay* is instituted by a *Fon*. Sub-lineages are headed by *Sheys* whose level are below the *Fa'ays*.

### **1.4.5- Economy**

The main economic activities in Nso' are agriculture, animal husbandry and trading.

Animal husbandry. Animal rearing which is also one the earliest economic activities is now practised in the division by both natives and non-natives. Cows, goats, sheep and fowls are reared. Cows were introduced by the Fulani and have now superseded the goats which were the principal animals reared in the region. This shows how the Fulani culture and economic life influenced the Nso' whereby some of them have completely converted to cattle rearing after getting money from kola nut trade. Some Nso' have strongly entered into the rearing of cows. Goats and fowls are reared essentially for rituals and social celebrations. It is said that pigs were once reared, but due to the vast destruction they did to crops they were eliminated following orders from the *Fon*.

Agriculture dominates the other activities in the economy, as this is where most of the active population is involved. This is evidenced by the contribution that food production and

marketing has made in the economy of the division. As far as kola nut is concerned, this is what Elder Berinyuy Francis Bime has to say:

*In Nso' land once kola nut is fallen on the ground it doesn't belong to the owner of the tree anymore; it belongs to the earth or to whoever picks it the first. There is no particular period to plant kola. Kola is different from coffee, corn, bean and Irish potatoes which have given planting period. There is no kola plantation here in Nso'. If someone decides to have kola plantation, where will he be going to plant food crops such as corn and beans.*

The person, to whom a plot has been allocated to, has the responsibility of caring for kola nut trees and raffia plantations, which are really lineage property once he becomes a *Fa'ay*, though vested in him. He reaps the major profits from the sale of the products, but he is expected to help his peoples in time of hardship. Nso' is a society where everyone has access to kola nut though there are villages which have more kola trees or which produce more than others due to the relief and the climatic conditions. Those who live in the villages can gather kola nuts fallen from the trees whereas people living in the city have to buy.

The growing of Kola nut in Nso' is not the same as it is the case of coffee and cocoa. It is not growing in the strict sense of the word. Here, we have to do with the spontaneous act of the countryman who for one reason or another decides to plant a nut of kola. The countryman used to choose the best nuts (generally the biggest) after the harvesting or he bought them from the market or got them from a neighbour and then, directly planted them under bunches of banana trees.

Unlike other cash crops in Nso' such as oil palm, raffia palm, rice, tobacco, cotton, wheat, coffee that take few years to bear, the kola nut tree takes quite a long time to bear, usually after 10 to 18 years. After the harvesting, the fallen nuts germinated under kola trees shade. The young plants could not vegetate well under these trees even if the ecological conditions could permit them to grow and people did not want to have grove in their farmland. They argued that this could have as consequence the reduction of the surface reserved for food crop. These considerations bring the farmer to transplant those young plants to less congesting places.

Kola nuts are also eaten by wild animals such as monkeys, squirrels and giant rats. These animals planted them unwittingly (unconsciously) when transporting kola nuts through different bushes and compound surroundings. The giant rat played and continues to play a capital role in the popularisation of kola nut trees. Some growing trees that constituted great

impediment to food crops were simply transplanted to compound lands<sup>14</sup>. However, people could also leave the plants where they have germinated and take care of them by eliminating trees or surrounding grasses. Thus all kola trees were not planted people.

#### **1.4.6- Market**

The Bui Divisional capital and the regional commerce centre, Kumbo offers economic opportunities to the people of Nso'. The market meets every *Ntangrin* (the eight and last day of the week) and *Kaavi* (the first day of the week) which are respectively the small and the big market days of the regional market cycle<sup>15</sup>. Thousands of tons of agricultural product (Irish potatoes, beans, corn) are exported yearly to the neighbouring countries.

The market days constitute social occasions, providing an opportunity for local people to come together and share a few drinks, chew kola nuts and exchange the weekly news. The only thriving business on market days is conducted in the off-licence and raffia palm wine houses surrounding the market square.

The dominant economic activity was long distance trade in kola which made the Nso' country very famous (for kola production) to its outside neighbours. They traded kola nut as far as to the Northern territories of Nigeria, and Cameroon. The economy which was dominated by kola trade in the pre-colonial period gradually changed during the colonial period with the introduction of coffee (Brinyuy Bime 1984, 100)<sup>16</sup>. Its importance can best be illustrated by the number of stalls occupied by cola nut traders at the Kumbo weekly local market. Raffia palm which culturally belongs to the same family with kola nut had been growing at Dzekwa and Mbokam in the wild. Since then many valleys have been planted with raffia palm. Their bamboos are used to weave kola nut baskets (amongst other things).

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<sup>14</sup> *Compound land* is the land around the area of residence. This land is distinguished from *farm land* which is actually land allocated for food crops. The former is preferred for coffee because of its fertility due to compound refuse and the shed provided by kola nut trees, banana and plantain trees (*Musa sapientum* and *Musa paradisaica* trees), and the proximity of the area of residence.

<sup>15</sup> The local calendar has 8 days.

<sup>16</sup> The rate at which people took up coffee farming was alarming, especially as the Reverend Father Figl had advised that coffee produces more revenue than kola nut and in due course, if good market could be secured, the farmers would reap great profits. Since then, coffee production has been rising steadily and greatly stimulated the socio-economic development in the region. In fact, coffee had become the main income generating activity for Nso' people. Though with the recent introduction of rice and food crops farming, some people tend to give less care to coffee. People also get involve in other activities such as animal husbandry, modern trade and professions such as brick-laying, tailoring, shoe-mending, carpentry and wood-carving.

The kola market, where I spend some of the time with Hassan Fonkpu my main protagonist, is located in the Kumbo Central market towards the big mosque of the Hausa quarter. On *Ntangrin*, the kola market day<sup>17</sup> which is often extended to *Kaavi*, one notices movements everywhere, kola traders counting and recounting kola nuts, packaging them in bamboo baskets, young boys loading those baskets in trucks which are ready for the northern regions and other part of Cameroon. The kola market has more than 20 stores. Here and there in the market, kola traders are negotiating prices for banana leaves (which they use to protect the nuts in the basket), and bamboo baskets. They do not just concentrate on kola nuts. There are many other items sold alongside such as brooms, Irish potatoes, beans and animal skin. It is worth mentioning that they are whole sellers in this market, they buy, package, stock and send them out of Nso', though at time they also retail. Hassan Fonkpu connected me to other people with whom they are more or less interconnected via kola nut. Thus, I was not just concentrated on the kola market. I went many other places within Nso' land such Kikaikelaki, Kitiwum, Miliim, which all fall under Kumbo Central and Mbiame.

Trading in manufactured goods and foodstuffs is carried on in the Kumbo. Other ethnic groups have settled in Kumbo such as Ibo and Bamileke and control the greater part of trade in manufactured goods while retailers who buy from the big traders have retail stores in the town and in the numerous villages. Wholesale trade is almost absent while retail trade dominates and is carried on by traders who go to Bamenda, Douala or Nigeria, each month to get goods. These traders do sell some of their supplies to retailers who are found in the towns and villages. Some of the well-to-do retailers in Kumbo travel the village markets with their goods according to the local market circuit.

#### **1.4.7- Religion**

In Nso' there are Muslims, Christians (with many denominations among which; the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church) and those who belongs to the traditional religion/belief. Contact by the Nso' with world religions was first made with Islam. In the 1880s, Hausa kola nut traders were in regular contact with the Nso' and there were occasional Fulani grazers.

Kola trade is an activity which brought Islam in Nso'. The Muslem leader of Nso' told Camille Yuven Lawong that: *l'islam fut introduite chez les Nso' par les commerçants en noix*

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<sup>17</sup> The kola market falls within the Kumbo small market day.

*de kola qui provenaient de Yola au Nigeria du Nord. Les premiers Nso' convertis à l'Islam furent des intermédiaires dans le commerce de noix de Kola ( Yuven Lawong 1976, 117).*

Thus, Islam came through traders who went to sell kola nuts in Northern Nigeria and adopted it and through a group of Hausa immigrants who settled in Nso' for trading (amongst others). Thus trade has been a factor for the spread of Islam in Nso'. The Nso' who adopted Islam called it *Lii Gasah* meaning *Hausa way of life*.

In the 1960s, when relations with their Bamun neighbours and the Tikar of Bankim improved, the then Nso' ruler, Fon Sem II (Mbinkar Mbinlo) implemented public policies that favoured the Muslims. For example, he provided them with land in the palace yard for a mosque and adopted some of the Islamic practices (Mukum Mbaku, 2005, 52).

-Other activities. There are locally trained bricklayers, tailors, shoemakers and carpenters found in nearly every village. Some of these people are equipped with much more modern techniques learnt or perfected their skills in Bamenda, Douala or any other big town of the Republic. Wood-carving is also gaining ground in the modern economy as carved articles are exported. The Oku people are specialists in this trade.

Tapping of raffia palm wine, hunting, weaving and making of local house furniture are chiefly indigenous crafts. Hunting used to reign but has deteriorated for two reasons: firstly, hunting grounds have been converted to farmlands and secondly, recent orders from the government prohibit hunting in the region.

The economy of Bui division is diversified. It is open not closed and highly influenced by trade with neighbours in and out of the country.

### **1.5- Assumption and Research perspectives/research questions**

Two men were recalling a conflict resolution meeting which they just assisted. One of them said:

*This resolution was nothing else than a mockery. How can they say that the problem at stake is solved without sharing kola nuts? I haven't eaten kola nut! There was no kola nut at all! How dare them to invite people for a conflict resolution without kola nut! I am not satisfied at all, I am not happy.*

These upset two men felt that they have been cheated after they have assisted at the reconciliation meeting which is part of the juridical system without being given kola nuts. Both the system and those two men are treated here as social persons. The use of kola nut here contributes to the feeling of being Nso' and thus of ethnic-identity. In this context,

Appadurai (1986) and other anthropologists of consumption, such as Daniel Miller (1987, 2009) have inspired me when they acknowledge that objects and artifacts form taken-for-granted part of our environment which in my case is kola nut and thereby contribute to shaping our habitus on the one hand; and that on the other hand, they are consciously selected through consumption to create meaning and a particular self-identity. This show why the Nso' are so much attached to it and that is why nothing is done without it.

This excerpt above, added to my childhood memories as mentioned above and some other remarks I made as a grown up person. Each time I go home the first thing that always strikes me is the constant use of kola nut everywhere. Nothing is done without it. Once, I was invited by a friend to attend a traditional weekly meeting during which, the executive committee decided to sanction one of its members for not bringing enough kola nut during the previous meeting (when it was his turn to do so). Later they explained to me that one of the rules and regulations of the meeting is that the person in charge of kola nuts has to satisfy people's expectations in kola nuts. They further said that kola was the most common thing here, and as such one should make sure to provide enough. His act was qualified as shameful and disrespectful towards the committee members.

Mbinkar Emmanuel Keelen took me to the Nso' palace where the Fon (the ruler) was receiving the Muslim community. Many people were present at the meeting, the Nso' and the non-Nso' people, Christians, Muslims and the traditional religious faithful. He ended his speech with these words: "let us continue to keep peace and leave together in unity as it is the case now". He then gave an order to one of his men to distribute kola nut to people who were very excited to receive what they named as *the chief's kola*. I also went to my cousin's graduation from a Qur'anic school where kola nuts were shared among the attendants. During the same period; Foka, a Roman Catholic Priest, took me to a *Catholic Samba*<sup>18</sup> meeting, where again kola nuts were shared to both the group's members and to us. Thus kola nut is part of all religions religious gatherings.

The last but not the least remark is the fact that my parent and I are always welcomed back home with kola nut and on the day of our departure, relatives and family friends will carefully wrap kola nut in a piece of cloth as a gift for us, saying *take these kola nuts and do not forget you neighbours when you are eating them*. The sharing here is a sign of friendship and family relation. The distribution or sharing of kola nuts in all those events means or aim at constructing belonging.

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<sup>18</sup> Samba is an exclusively men's traditional group. With time the Catholic Church have accepted the creation of religious Samba within the church. They usually meet on Sundays after mass where they dance (traditional), drink palm wine, share and eat kola nut, discuss on burning issues. There are strict rules to belong to the group.

I then came out with the assumption that kola nut is an item around which the feeling, and lived *reality* of belonging, togetherness, being together is being expressed amongst the Nso'. Kola nut is surely playing a great role in this context of bringing people together and thus, it is a nut or seed symbolising togetherness. I was captivated by the way people live together no matter their religious affiliation, the lineage where they belong to, *literate or illiterate*, gender, economy, urban- rural.

According to historic facts, traditional and religious practices, I have noted the active sharing and eating of kola nuts in all kind of socio-economic groups, despite the socio-economic activities and the globalization trend. The new religious practices (Christianity and Islam) increased the use of kola in the sense that they have adopted it into their practices. And then I thought that the use of kola nut has a social significance. I believe that kola nut plays a crucial role in the construction of belonging and sense of togetherness amongst the Nso'.

The lexical meaning of *togetherness* is *The state or condition of being together or being united; union, association, and The fact of getting on well together or being well suited to one another; a sense of belonging together, fellowship* (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989 vol. xviii).

My investigation of the notion of *togetherness* expressed by adverbials like *together* in English or *ensemble* in French enables me to say that the notion of *togetherness* is an association between events or objects often expressed by an adverbial or a preposition, such as the following ones, encountered in well-studied Indo-European languages: *together* and *with* in English, *samen* and *met* in Dutch, *zusammen* and *mit* in German, *insieme* and *con* in Italian, *juntos* and *con* in Spanish, *ensemble* and *avec* in French. And that these adverbials have many values. They can express summation, spatio-temporal colocalization and eventuality coordination. And thus the notion of togetherness is embedded in all concepts of love. The Greek word *philos*, which means dear or friendly, combines to form the word philosophy (in Greek wisdom and love), and wisdom conveyed to one's fellow human being can be constructed as an expression of love for a peaceful living together with one another no matter the differences.

In one of my interviews with the paramount chief, he said that kola nut was an item of peace, and blessing. And what he meant by peace here within the Nso' context is in relation to order, harmony and equilibrium. So, peace is a value in the sense that the order, harmony and even the equilibrium in the universe and society is believed to be divinely established. And good



conduct which is required of human beings if the order, harmony and equilibrium are to be maintained is manifested in Nso' land by kola nut sharing. And thus, the interpretation of the whole world through differences and sameness is done around kola nut. So, after reading *Comparative Studies of African Religions* (Emefie 1987, 78), I do agree with the author when he says that *no attempt is made to deny or cancel out differences, rather all effort is devoted to finding a way in which differences can continue to harmoniously co-exists... In the community, harmony entails smooth relationships between persons ...* and this smooth relationship is being portrait or materialised by kola nut gift giving and I understood that kola nut is an item of peace-making which requires religious and moral value.

In this thesis, I am approaching foundational anthropological and social science issues, that is how the social order or social world is produced and maintained at a particular time and in particular circumstances. The examination of these issues and practices is a process that involves reconstruction of the socio-cultural context, which brings it into focus. Thus, the overall aim of this thesis is to offer an analysis of the socio-cultural context where kola is used and its cultural significance. The sense of unity, togetherness, and belonging is one of the issues that is connected to the production and reproduction of the social world we are engaged in. How is the use of kola nut in various social situations contributing to the sense of constructing and re-construction of Nso' identity and belonging?

### **1.5.1- Follow the People and the Thing (kola nut)**

Marcus thinks that the technique of following the people is perhaps the most obvious and conventional mode of materializing a multi-sited ethnography (George Marcus, 1995, 55).

I decided to follow many people and not just one because I thought that, that was the best or one of the best way to enable me to understand the meaning of kola nut in a diverse society, wherein are found the literates, illiterates, traditionalists, farmers, traders, scholars, Christians, Muslims etc.

Following the thing means, again according to Marcus, *tracing the circulation through different contexts of a manifestly material object of study, such as commodities, gifts, money, works of art, and intellectual property* (Marcus 1995, 106). Considering the *thing* kola nut, my travelling around to different happenings, I put my project within the framework of a multi-sited approach in a Marcusian way. I realised that kola nut could not be researched at one single site (spatially), but (re-)presents itself at various sites or venues in different forms.

He traces the shifting status of things as commodities, gifts, and resources in their circulations through different contexts (1995, 107), politically, socially, gender, religion, etc. The most important and influential statement of *follow the thing* techniques for multi-sited research on the circulation of things is Appadurai's introduction to his collection, *The Social Life of Things* (Appadurai 1986. see also Coombe 1995).

Marcus supporting Appadurai argued in

*following the metaphor that: When the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of ethnography. This mode involves trying to trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media. (George Marcus 1995, 92).*

Thus, it is following the meaning of kola nut in various social contexts in discovering its social significance.

The research lasted for three months (May, June, July). The actual filming and research started in May and lasted till the end of July. The main places (arenas) within the Nso' land were Kikaikelaki, Kitiwum, Miliim, Kumbo town which are all under Kumbo Central and Mbiame which is another subdivision Under Bui Division. The fieldwork took place during the rainy season which is the period of greenery. All is indeed green because people have planted their various crops. Roads were not tarred, and thus there were a lot of mud as a result of heavy down fall. Trucks transporting kola nut from Nso' to the northern market took many more days than usual. I could not film people who were eager whenever I wanted because it rains almost every day.

### **1.6- Thesis outline**

I conducted a study on the social use of kola nut, focusing on understanding the role of kola nut in the construction of belonging and the sense of togetherness amongst the Nso'. The study has two products: a thesis and a short film (Together as one).

The thesis is organised in four chapters:

1-Introduction. It offers an introduction to the topic and my fieldwork by starting with a brief presentation of what kola nut is and continues with the motivations of this research and the background information on the fieldwork area or location, followed up with the assumption, the research questions I am addressing in this thesis, the participants who took part in the research as well as the research period and ended with the thesis outline.

2-How and where the research was carried out? This presents how I approached my field, my informants or co-participants in the stated research. Furthermore I have discussed issues such as *multi-sited ethnography* (for I had not just one place but many places to carry out research within the Nso' land) and *following the thing* which is kola nut in my case, as well as the challenges of going back to homeland for fieldwork.

3-Previous research: into *Food studies*; Introduces concepts and theoretical reflexions emerging both from the data and from the on-going discourse such as *food studies*.

4- Empirical Descriptions (What? Who? Where? When? ).

Empirical descriptions: Aims to give specific and contextualised information about the places, people, and their activities (as well as the period when those activities are being carried out) I have been dealing with throughout my fieldwork.

5- Conclusion: Kola, a small thing with big issues: Sums up the entire work with comments and reflects on the project as a whole.

The theme of the film is the importance of kola nut use amongst the Nso' people.

This film shows what a thing, a nut mean to people. Kola nut is an item around which the feeling, experience, sense, and lived *reality* of belonging, togetherness, being together, unity, oneness, friendship and peace is being expressed. The kola nut thus plays an important role in bringing very diverse people together, irrespective of their religion, village, quarter, or thoughts. In this sense, kola nut brings about a feeling of togetherness, fellowship, and belonging to a group.



## **2- How and where the research was carried out?**

### **2.1-Approaching the area and the people**

For this study I have used *participant observation* with a camera as the main method. James Spradley (1980, 5) says that what people do, what people know, and the things people make use of are fundamental aspects of human behaviour. He argues that *whenever you do ethnographic field work, you will want to distinguish among these three*. In order to distinguish between them there is a need to go closer and observe.

Participant observation is not simply approaching people and seeing what they do but goes beyond that. For example Crang and Cook argue that *it is an immersion of the researcher's self in to the everyday rhythms and routines of the community, a development of relationships with people who can show and tell the researcher what is 'going on' there* (2007, 37). It became clear to me that it is about being there, taking part and understands the way of life.

Observation is essential both with and without the camera. At the beginning, I was interested in getting in touch with key actors. So before starting with the shooting, I first of all met my informants and discussed the issue with them, though I had contacted them on telephone long before going for the fieldwork.

The camera was to me almost like the microscope is for the biologist (Loizos 1993, 17). I was also aware of the fact that doing anthropology at home, one may be affected by what Eriksen qualifies as home blindness (Eriksen 2004, 34). In this sense, every single fact was handled seriously because I was very curious and keen to discover all aspects of the importance of kola nut in the Nso person's life both with and without the camera. Discussions and conversations were held with people whenever the opportunity arose. I attended every event/occasion where kola nut was used such as naming ceremonies and reconciliation ritual.

The video camera was also used, because an ethnographic film has to be produced beside the masters' theses. It was used to record important social situations like kola harvesting, kola sharing, eating together, reconciliation ritual, inauguration of a mosque, kola gathering and discussions between Francis Berinyuy and his friend under a kola tree. I used the camera because, as Barbash and Taylor argue, *film offers possibilities of its own, such as the portrayal of living experience, in ways that are unavailable to writing* (1997, 35). Through the film, one can see and feel how people were passionately engaged or involved not only in the sharing and eating everywhere but also how they happily received them from the giver.

There are things in our relationships we cannot tell in words only, there are feelings that cannot be written, but can be recorded with a camera. Therefore, I used camera to observe, explore, discover, and understand the way of life in and around my characters/collaborators. And more precisely to explore the meaning of kola nut through naming ceremonies, divination, reconciliation, courtship, social gatherings or meetings, and commercialisation.

I made use of visual approach to understand or to explain visually the relation between Nso' and kola nut because:

*film brings people and cultures alive on a screen, capturing the sensation of living presence, in a way that neither words nor even still photo can. The accumulation of successive film frames evokes the sensation of movement over time quite literally through movement over time. Film language is the language of moving, seeing and hearing. More than any other medium or art form, film uses experiences to express experience (Barbash, Ilisa and Taylor, Lucien. 1997, 1).*

I have also employed semi-structured interviews. *Semi structured or in-depth interview is a scheduled activity. It is an open ended, but follows a general script and covers a list of topics (Bernard 2002:203).* I needed to be structured to follow my project plan and to get the data required. At the same time, I do believe that freedom should be given to my subjects to express their views in the way they like. Therefore, this method allowed me to do both things at the same time. By doing so, I have tried to assess the social organization of the Nso'.

## **2.2.-On multi-sited ethnography**

During my fieldwork I travelled to various different events of the community whereby kola nut where used and to my informants' places and homes. I was following both the kola nuts and the people using them.

### **2.2.1.-Presentation of the participants**

To study this topic, I have selected a number of people to take part due to their rank and status, religious affiliation, socio-economic activities with Mbinkar Emmanuel Keelen and Shey Chin as the main characters linking us to others. They are both Nso' cultural entertainers.

His Royal Highness Seem Mbinglo I, the *Fon* (paramount chief) of Nso'; Shu'u Fa'ay Kuif Djem, the family head of the compound of Kuih Djem; Fa'ay Djoum, the family head of Djoum; Francis Berinyuy, a retired teacher and an elder from the Fikov compound; Sheikh Mohammad Halid, the Imam (the person who leads the Muslim prayer) of the central mosque of Kumbo; Hassan Fonkpu, a kola nut trader and I, were the main participants in the research.

James Spradley (1980) clearly stated that a social situation is about actors in activity/activities in a specific place or arena (there are also other elements such as time and social networks introduced by a British anthropologist called Barn). One can therefore understand a social situation through participant observation which is getting access to what people know, do, and what they make and use. Thus, the following elements have been taken into consideration in my fieldwork: the on-going activities, actors involved and their statuses, roles implied by each status.

Shufai Kuih Djem, leads the compound/lineage of Kuih Djem. The lineage of Kuih Djem is situated at Kitiwum, about 8 km from the Kumbo city centre. Here is the place where the head of the compound who is the custodian of the tradition lives, leads gatherings, takes decisions, manages his people. In addition to this, Shufai Kuih Djem is also a diviner or trade-practitioner and belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. A lot of people go there for consultation, for healing, to find out the source of their problems or misfortunes.

As a lineage head, he always move around with kola nut in his pocket or bag. In each lineage tract amongst the Nso', the lineage head organizes and carries out the rituals. Each lineage head visits his ritual sites and bestows gifts such as kola nuts and wine on everyone he encounters along the way. On this last aspect I could recall that when Mbinkar Keelen Emmanuel (one of my characters) from the Ntur lineage once call me to film a ceremony whereby the lineage or compound chief of Djoum (a newly installed chief) was paying allegiance to the paramount ruler of Nso'. He was sharing kola nut to people he encounter on his way. The first person who attracted my attention was a woman standing beside the road and begging for kola nuts from him. Immediately after receiving them, she happily turned to her friend and said: *He is the lineage Chief of Djoum at Meluv, the little boy who grew up here with us. Here are some kola nuts, he gave me.* Then, she also offers a nut to Mbinkar Emmanuel Keelen.

As I was surprisingly watching them, someone whispered to me that:

*The Nso' believe that during such tour of the chief, one could meet a god (Nyuy) who is disguised as an earthling, most likely a stranger passing through the village. Thus, showing kindness to such a stranger could produce blessings for the family in particular, and the community in general and that it is also a way for the chief to commune with people.*

So, at the end of the ceremony I turn to Mbinkar Emmanuel Keelen one of the chief's kola recipients who happily said: *This is the kola nut the chief gave me. It's very big, what a privilege!*

He turns to his friend Shey Chin and said to him: *Let's share it before explaining what kola is.* Then came back to me afterwards and continue speaking:

*At today's ceremony, at the hosting place, kola nuts were everywhere. People were eating kola nuts and drinking wine. Going to the palace, kola nuts were still distributed. At the palace, there were kola nuts everywhere. In the women's section of the palace, kola nuts everywhere. In the palace yard, kola nuts everywhere. On the road, kola nuts everywhere. Kola is very important. It's used in many contexts.*

*The new lineage chief wanted to prove to people that today was his day as someone chosen by the lineage members to be their leader. He has to share kola nuts with people when someone bows down in respect. He opens the bag, takes out kola and hands it to the person to express his joy on this special day. He wouldn't have given me this nut which I'm eating now if he didn't acknowledge me.*

His friend named Shey Chin responded: *Of course, here's a piece which I also got from you.*

Mbinkar Emmanuel Keelen: *This nut shows his respect towards me and to allow our hands touch one another.*

Shey Chin: *As yours have touched mine, thanks to the chief's kola.*

Mbinkar Emmanuel Keelen:

*Kola played a great role today.  
There was nothing else in that bag than kola nut.  
It's the most precious gift from a chief.  
Be it bride price, be it divination kola is there.  
Whether it's a child's blessing ceremony or any  
other ritual in Nso' culture kola must be there.  
It just wouldn't work without it.*

In addition to their explanation, I also understood that kola nut is always because it went from the chief to the woman and from the woman to Mbinkar, from the chief to Mbinkar also, from Mbinkar to his friend Shey Chin. This trajectory of kola nut as a result of the interaction amongst the Nso' made me to read Herbert Blumer (1969) who set out three basic premises of the perspective of human actions towards things or symbolic interactionism:

*-Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.*

*-The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.*



*-These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.*

I was introduced to those family chiefs by Mbinkar Emmanuel Keelen, after explaining to them why I was there for, they accepted because according to them my research was a way to promote the Nso' culture as he repeatedly mentioned in the footage. Nso' calendar has eight days per week, and I mostly followed him on *Rəəvəy*<sup>19</sup>, *Kiloovəy*<sup>20</sup>, *ηgoylum*<sup>21</sup>, which are respectively the second, the third, and the sixth days of the week. These are the days during which he gathered his people for a meeting on given issues (such as conflict resolutions), or make some rituals (such as the *kidiv* ritual or reconciliation with the deaths, the ritual of felling down a kola tree, the initiation of diviners) whereby kola is always omnipresent. He is one of the people who supplies Hassan Fonkpu with kola nuts.

Francis Berinyuy Bime, an elder from the Fikov compound was another protagonist. Fikov is a compound situated at Kikaikelaki, some few kilometers from Kumbo town. After he has retired as teacher, he went back home to take care of his coffee and kola nut grooves. I followed him picking kola nut under a kola nut tree. He gave me many explanations on the place that kola nut occupies within the Nso' community. In fact, he made a review from the perception of the kola tree and kola nuts (how the Nso' looked at them) to the customary prohibitions over kola nut tree and kola nuts. Through his answers, one clearly understands what a natural resource can mean to people. He is also one of Hassan's customers. After gathering a lot of kola, he calls Hassan who comes, pays and picks them up to his shop in the kola market.

Mohammad Halid, the Imam (the person who leads the Muslim prayer) of Kumbo. I met him for the first time in Ngaoundere (Northern Cameroon) where he went to a visit to some of his relatives who live there. So, when I went to Nso for the research, the contact was quite easy when Hassan introduced me to him as one of his regular customers. Mohammad Halid often drives to the kola market and buy kola nut from Hassan Gongba destined to be distributed to

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<sup>19</sup>*Rəəvəy* is the second day of the week. All activities are allowed to be carried out. It is also the day during which the *Paramount Chief* enters in contact with his ancestors, he makes sacrifices and offerings.

<sup>20</sup>*Kiloovəy* is the third day of the week. The first paramount chief of Nso' died on this day, when the Nso' people were still at Kovvifem. This day was then ordered the resting one, the day during which only ceremonies and sacrificial rituals are allowed. Those who break the law are punished by the Gods of the land.

<sup>21</sup>*ηgoylum* is the sixth day of the week. *ηgoylum* like *Kiloovəy* is also the day of the death of one of the Paramount Chief of Nso' notably the successor of Ngoun'nso', the first Nso' Paramount Chief. This day was then declared a holiday. It is the day during which the news of the death of a Chief is made known to the public. Funerals are also made on this particular day of the week. Work is not allowed on this day for the reasons that I have just mentioned above.

people during Muslim ceremonies and gatherings. I followed him during the Friday Muslim prayer at the biggest mosque, located at the Nso palace where I interviewed and filmed him distributing kola nut to his fellow Muslims, and later on at the inauguration of the mosque of Takum at Kikaikelaki, and finally during a Muslim naming ceremony at Ro'oh Majayi (few kilometers from Kumbo town). I interviewed the Imam on the use of kola nut within the Muslim community of Nso'. He stated that Prophet Mohammed ate, shared and advised dates to his entourage as the Iman of Mbideng in Ngaoundere earlier mentioned (2004). But that the absence of dates in Nso has pushed them to replace them by kola nuts which are readily available there. This shows how traditional practices or tradition survivals and modern religious practices meet. That is how kola nuts had come to have a cultural key symbol among the Muslim.

Eugene Ngah and Cornelius Nyuyki Binirla, are both priests from the Roman Catholic Church officiating at the Meluv Diocese in Kumbo. I met them because I was informed by Francis Berinyuy that a priest once pleaded with the people of Fikov to always be together as one like a nut of kola during the end of year's family gathering. Attracted by this idea, I then decided to meet those priests for further inquiries on the symbol of kola nut within Christianity in Nso. So, the day I went to meet him, he was not alone. I then decided to interview both of them.

Hassan Fonkpu is a kola trader. He is from Mbiame (a village situated about 35 km from Kumbo Central) and more precisely from the Gongba compound. Hassan is about 30 years old, he inherited the kola store from his father who decided to rest after a long period of illness. His father is the compound head of the Gongba family and is now taking care of the compound, the coffee plantations, the kola grooves at Mbiame where he lives. Hassan pay him visits every *Waylum* (the seventh day of the week) which is the Mbiame market day to seek some advice from him and to find out how the family is doing. He also profit to collect kola nuts or to order for more from his clients in this village. Hassan belongs to the Muslim religion. He has a wife, a child, a house, a kola store at Kumbo Central, another in Ngaoundal and Ngaoundere (northern Cameroon) and a truck to transport the goods from Kumbo to the northern market. I met him for the first time many years back in Ngaoundere, when he was still selling kola nut in one of his father store there. By then, I was a student at the University of Ngaoundere. Later on he left Ngaoundere (after that he has been replaced by someone else) and went to Ngaoundal where his father owns another kola store. After selling kola

there for few years he went back home when the illness of his father started, and later took control of the business.

### **2.3.-Going back to Nso' for fieldwork**

Being from Nso' or a *child of the land* and considering the short time frame (three months) in which the research was conducted, my main method of data collection was participant observation because I thought I had no time for passive observation. This method of data collection, one may contend, is associated with “outsider” enduring to comprehend each and every aspect of the way of life of the people in order to derive meaning out of a long period of time. ...*involving continuous and intimate contact with those whom we study* (Bloch 1985).

Children of the land go back to live together with their people and in a process they are gathering information. For instance where an outsider sees informants, child of the land sees mothers and fathers, grandparents and siblings. Where an outsider conducts interviews, child of the land engages in a discussion. Do we call it participant observation?

To address this concern I may borrow from Marcus on his concept of reflexivity. Marcus says that

*reflexivity involves working into ethnographic texts a self-conscious account regarding the conditions of knowledge production as it is being produced. This move replaces the observational objective eye of the ethnographer...there is a move away from the naive assumption of objectivity and unmediated realism and a greater tolerance for the explicit treatment of reflexivity in ethnographic analysis...* (Marcus quoted in Borofsky 1994, 45).

My identity exposes me to two roles, both as an *insider* and as an *outsider*. As I consider I am not an observer but *child of the land*. In the process of gathering information, I cooperated with people as one of them. My local identity enables me to access information efficiently and effectively. My interactions with the people are incorporated into everyday life. We developed a relationship based on dialogue. What I learn is a reflection and an awareness of self. However no one refers to me as a student from Norway but they acknowledged that I am a learner of my own culture. Being a learner did not make me an outsider in their view but it had rather introduced me into what Marcus calls a ...*discussion of dialogical and collaborative relationships...* that enables me to construct a collective text of the way of life of the Nso and their surrounding kola nut trees and their nuts.

Producing critical knowledge, as Marcus puts it, of the significance of kola nuts within the Nso people, within a period of three months, comes with the recognition and responsibility of being a *child of the land*. The information I have gathered reflect both being an *insider* as well as being in a way an *outsider*. Being at home was a resource for gathering information.

### **3-.Previous research: into *Food studies***

I would like to contextualise my study within a given area of research by stating what have been done by other researchers and link the perspective to my ideas on identity, belonging and social organisation.

Kola, the *thing* which I am following, is something which is eaten and for this reason, I am going to study it within the framework of *food studies* because it is referred to as *food-drug* as earlier mentioned.

The first association coming to minds when we hear *food studies* may be dietetics or agroeconomics, but these disciplines are not food studies – simply because *food studies is not the study of food itself*. (Deutsch and Miller 2009, 3). Therefore it is necessary to define the main theme of my thesis.

The definition I am using here, taken from a book by Jeff Miller and Jonathan Deutsch, states that food studies is

*the interdisciplinary field of study of food and culture, investigating the relationships between food and the human experience from a range of humanities and social science perspectives, often times in combination* (2009, 3). Scholars doing food studies come from various backgrounds: history, sociology, geography, psychology, marketing (to name just a few). Food studies emerged some thirty years ago because *scholarship is following wider urban middleclass culture, which, since the seventies, has become much more interested in food-related matters of taste, craft, authenticity, status and health* (Belasco 2008, 6).

Since then, topics like globalization, inequality, changes of family structure, tradition, environment and identity have been discussed within this interdisciplinary field. To examine them, a broad spectrum of theories and methods was (and is) being used. In a search for them, food studies have basically no limitations as long as the methodologies and theories are somehow related to food culture.

In the paragraph above I have underlined the main interest of the discipline on human experience with food and eating. If knowledge, feelings and behaviour connected with food are the crucial issue for food studies scholars, it should be obvious that the discipline itself has to be grounded in anthropology. However, they did not use food studies discourse yet and in most cases food was not their main point of interest, but rather a mean to discover other features of a given society, just as I am trying to follow the kola nut within the Nso' in order to grasp how Nso' identity, belonging and social organisation are constructed.

I was inspired from Siewicz's paper (2011) which presents the legacy of anthropology in helping to establish or to contribute to the development of a new, interdisciplinary approach to food in culture known as *food studies*, and in this process it has mingled empiricism with theories; showing how early anthropologists, for example, Bronislaw Malinowski<sup>22</sup>, and Edward Evans Pritchard,<sup>23</sup> stressed the social meaning of food and then how the symbolic meaning of food was given priority after that the functional approach had been replaced by structuralism. Therefore, the construction of Claude Levi-Strauss<sup>24</sup> famous culinary triangle showed the connection between culture and nature in human thought.

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<sup>22</sup>Malinowski was one of the pioneers of participant observation in anthropology and proved that it is a good way to obtain rich, valuable data. With regards to the Trobriand, this new research method has given the insight into their economy, social system and magic, all of these elements being connected with cultivation of gardens. *To sum up the part about Malinowski's contribution to food studies, the elements of Trobrianders life connected with food culture should be enlisted once again. First of all, phases of collective, tribal life depended on gardening (1935: 93), so food influences their perception of time. In this horticulture-based economy food is a mean of competitive display and also a source of aesthetic feelings. Obtaining food is strongly entwined with magical practices on one hand, and with communal work on the other. Gifts of food are essential to maintain kinship bonds and the relations of power among the Trobrianders. As Malinowski clearly points out, 'the gardens of the community are not merely a means to food; they are a source of pride and the main object of collective ambition'(1935: 101). His detailed study of gardening, which also includes information about cooking and food exchange, makes us notice the variety of functions of food, which are present not only in the so-called 'primitive' societies.*

<sup>23</sup> In "BOVINE IDIOM" AND THE NUER'S DIET, Functionalism emerged as an answer to previous approaches – evolutionary anthropology and diffusionist anthropology – and has criticized them for focusing on speculations about historical progress instead of observing present situation in its context (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 120). Although Evans-Pritchard himself pointed out weak points of functionalist approach: creation of speculative, very general 'laws' and crude teleology (according to functionalists, every habit has a social value and helps to maintain social bonds), and finally withdrew his support for this theory (1950: 120), it does not mean that there is nothing worth saving from functionalism.

-Evans-Pritchard writes that relations between the Nuer were expressed in the *bovine idiom* (1940: 19), which means that families and individuals are bounded not only by blood ties, but also by cattle.

-*The importance of cattle cannot be seen only in terms of pasture-based economy. It is true that various resources were obtained by every single family from its cows and cattle have functioned as the most desired form of wealth. But oxen and cow were also treated as a medium necessary to maintain contact with ghosts and spirits; relations with neighbors were shaped according to the possession of herds; and – last but not least – identity of an individual was defined with a strong connection to cattle (Evans- Pritchard, 1940: 16–50). What the Nuer ate, influenced all other aspects of their life, both secular and religious, and it can be clearly seen in Evans-Pritchard's writings. One may conclude that cattle shaped relations inside and outside a Nuer tribe; in micro- and macro perspective. Food production in the case of the Nuer, as well as in the case of the Trobriand Islanders described above, is a key to understanding how this society lived.*

<sup>24</sup> When the functional approach was replaced by structuralism, the symbolic meaning of food was put in the first place. Claude Levi-Strauss, one of the founders of structural school, has constructed his culinary triangle to show the connection between culture and nature in human thought. The article explaining this idea was published in 1966 and although it is not as famous as Levi-Strauss' works on myths and kinship, it is definitely worth discussing in the context of anthropology's contribution to the new discipline exploring food cultures.

What I am drawing from Claude Levi-Strauss on structuralism is the symbolic meaning of food rather than the cooking techniques because kola nut in my case is not cooked.

As such, it shows the connection between classical schools of anthropology and modern food studies, and is inspired by the opinion of Ivan Karp and Kent Maynard who noticed that *lack of familiarity with our ancestry prevents significant advances in anthropology and thus an appreciation of the achievements of the above named predecessors is essential for current thinking* (1983, 482).

Although food consumption was not a main field of interests for the anthropologists mentioned in this article, I would like to emphasize that food production; distribution and eating definitely were not ignored by them. The way they have shown how food is connected with economy, power, and kinship and with human thought is still inspiring for food studies.

The omnipresence of kola nut in all aspect of life of the Nso' people as I noticed, makes me to think that there is an emotional and psychological attachment of kola with the Nso' people just like the Nuer are attached to their cattle. Evans-Pritchard describes the Nuer people as, *a people whose material culture is as simple as that of the Nuer are highly dependent on their environment. They are pre-eminently pastorals. The only labor in which they delight is care of cattle* (Evans-Pritchard 1969, 16). His description of the Nuer fits with the life style of the Nso' I am dealing with, except that in the case of the Nso', it is not cattle but kola.

The thing which attracted me in Evan-Pritchard's expression of the relationship between the cattle and the personality of the people is that, *they are not only dependent on cattle for many of life's necessities, but they have the herdsman outlook on the world* (ibid). Cattle are not just only an animal to the Nuer. They are part of the personality and their knowledge system. Similarly, kola holds a deep rooted section of the Nso' life. Thus, this feeling exhibits the interwoven relationship between kola and the Nso'.

From what I saw during my fieldwork in all the settings where kola nuts were being shared in Nso', I can say without doubt that it is not all about kola nut itself but about being Nso'. It is all about ethnic identity in the sense that whether they are literates, illiterates, traders, farmers, scholars, Traditionalists, Christians, Muslims; they all share and eat kola nut. It is about the construction and reconstruction of social identity despite the forces of modernisation and globalization.

The expression *we are together* often used in Cameroon as a whole and in Nso' in particular as earlier explained creates and reinforce a sense of belonging and identity or a symbolic construction of a community as the Nso' themselves usually say that people are different but

that they are also together around/with kola nut. This notion of togetherness in Nso' is being portrayed by the production and reproduction of social form through rituals and interactions whereby kola nut play a key role in belonging, identity and social organisation. The social organisation which is a key factor to understanding the notions of belonging, togetherness and identity built around the significance of kola nut, enable the understanding of the social setting which help to apprehend the consequence of the use of kola nut in the Nso' community.

The way anthropologists have shown how food is connected with economy, power, and kinship and with human thought is still inspiring for food studies. They have inspired me a lot in my study on kola nut and how identities, power, gender roles are constructed and re-constructed around the practice of gathering, distributing and chewing of kola nut.



## 4- Empirical Descriptions and analysis of the material

### 4.1-Kola, lineage properties

In Nso', a notable or a chief publicly displayed his status by inviting people to come forward for kola nuts as it was the case at the Kuiu Djem compound where people would stop before the chief with cupped hands to receive a cotyledon or a whole nut from the chief. This is what we see happening in the opening scene of the film when Fai Wo Djoum is sharing kola nut and people receiving it. The event is similar to what happens in churches when people take communion from the priest. Back in their seats, or after receiving, the recipients happily eat it with a sort of reverence which someone qualified as religious, and then a calabash of raffia palm wine would follow. Emmanuel Keelen told me that: *The frequency with which a father, a notable, a lineage/family or compound head asked a son to bring him a kola nut reflected their degree of intimacy. A family member not called up for a long time, knew at once that he/she was out of favour with the family head.*

After the confirmation by the paramount ruler of Nso' of the compound ship head of Fai Wo Djoum, the latter offers what the Nso' qualifies as a special and most precious gift to the passersby and to his fellow people. It is also an occasion for the people to communion with him by touching his hands on this single occasion, because the compound head is not allowed to greet by shaking peoples' hands. Kola is the only item which he offers to people to express his gratitude for the compound headship. Shey Chin has this to say:

*Kola is precious for it comes from a tree which stands for a woman and as we all know, a woman gives life. A kola tree is the strength of the compound. Thus the compound head of Djoum in Meluv was giving the nut which is the most precious gift. A compound head does not go out of his compound without kola nut. He continues: the strength of the Nso' person was a woman. The women are the ones who take care of the compound or the strength of their compound rely on them. Kola trees are also strength of the compound; they were the only source of income in the past. So, the compound head shows his gratitude by sharing what brings peace, strength and life. In Nso' land, woman are the ones who take care of the compound as far as decision making is concerned before a new chief of the compound is enthroned. Women also decide on who is to be enthroned. Women are mothers around whom the children or people are gathered, they give life.*

The above affirmation of Shey Chin triggers me to read *Cosmologies in the making...* of Fredrik Barth (1987) to try to understand how a tree is said to be standing for woman. The focus of Barth's book is in particular the local variations in cosmological traditions among

the OK people<sup>25</sup> who comprise a number of communities and possess similar material and ecological traditions and speak similar languages. But their social organization and cosmology vary, and Barth, rejecting the existing anthropological theory as inadequate for explaining this variation, presents a new model of the mechanisms of change which emphasizes the role of individual creativity in cultural reproduction and change and which asserts that cosmologies can be adequately understood only if they are regarded as knowledge in the process of communication, embedded in the social organization, rather than as fixed bodies of belief. Barth demonstrates how processes of codification, transmission and creativity operate to generate the pattern of variation which the ethnographies record and not how the first bit of knowledge may have been created. He emphasizes on cosmology as a living, dynamic tradition of knowledge and not as a set of abstract ideas *enshrined* in collective representations. Thus, kola nut standing as a human being and precisely a woman in Nso' is a conscious way of the tradition to protect the tree which the nuts are sources of income as well as an item of togetherness, peace and joy.

This idea of *kola is precious for it comes from a tree which stands for a woman and as we all know, a woman gives life* triggers me as I was trying to gather as much information as I could. The reflexion pushes me to the myth of Ngonso in order to make a connection with the special attention given to women. Ngonso', who founded the Nso' Kingdom and had her son accede to the throne, suggests something in relation between women and power. Women have clearly had significant power in Nso'. They are said to be *like God (nyuy)*. They have had important political roles in the palace. Women have been recognised as the backbone of the country by virtue of their work in the fields and their role as wives and mothers of the lineages (Phyllis Kaberry and Mitzi Goheen, 2003, 44). After a series of inquiries, I came out with the hypothesis that kola nut tree is a special tree in Nso' culture. Thus I decided to find out who owns a kola tree in Nso' and if the notion of *togetherness* is also portrayed around the ownership of this tree. So, I turn on toward Francis Berinyuy Bime to find out from him why he was gathering kola nuts under trees which were not his. Then I understand from his response that in Nso' land, once kola nut is fallen on the ground, it belongs to whoever picks it first, it belongs to the earth. Kola and raffia are qualified as *things of the lineage* kept under the care taking of the lineage chief who is the repository of the lineage. So they (kola tree) are family/lineage properties in the sense that they belong to them (lineages) and they are also

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<sup>25</sup> The OK are a population of cultivators and hunters living in a remote part of Inner New Guinea.

community goods in the sense that whoever can pick up or gather kola nut under kola nut trees without having to face any sanctions.

I wanted to know more about the power of the lineage head over the kola tree by reading Phyllis Kaberry and Mitzi Goheen (2003, 45) who have conducted research in Nso'. They state that, in Nso', farms, kola trees and raffia ought not to be given away, because these are things of the lineage/family. They are its capital or, one may put it as *the source of salt, oil and even school fees for the kids*, the means by which money is obtained to buy necessities. Though a lineage head reaps the major profit from the sales of the produce, he is expected to assist his people in times of necessity. They added that like land, kola nuts these are

*regarded as the property of the lineage, and their management is vested in the lineage head. If a man plants kola or raffia trees he enjoys the fruits of his labour, but at his death they are taken over by the lineage head, and not by his own sons or brothers. This applies also when they have been planted on the land of another lineage head from whom, in the first place, permission must have been obtained. The landholder, in this case, would have neither right to a gift of produce nor any right to the trees. There is, however, one minor exception to the rule of inheritance. A man or a woman may plant one or two kola trees and small raffia stand in the name of a son, who is then assured of rights of usufruct to the produce. But when the son himself dies, the trees are inherited by the lineage head. Women do not own kola or raffia, but an exception is made for a Yaa or Yewon<sup>26</sup> who is often given a little raffia and a few kola trees by the Fon for her own use during her lifetime. At her death they are taken over by the Fon, who may entrust the care of them to her son.*

*A lineage head often superintends his own trees and plantations—weeding, gathering the nuts, tapping the wine, and cutting away the midribs. But he normally entrusts the care of some of his property to one of the members of the lineage; or, if it is in another village, then to a kinsman or friend living there. The man in charge is allowed to keep some of the wine, providing he supplies the lineage head with some on request. If he is entrusted with a few kola trees, he weeds them and gathers the nuts, receiving in return some of the small ones—a hundred or so. Much depends on the generosity of the lineage head. It is exceptional for a lineage head to manage all his sylvan resources; when this does occur, he is regarded as mean and selfish. In gathering the nuts, those present in the compound help the lineage head and, it must be admitted, help themselves to a few which they either conceal in their loin cloths if they are men, or which they rush to hide in a corner if they are women. The lineage head reaps the major monetary profit; but, on the whole, this is equitable since he usually has several wives and many children for whom to provide, as well as his other dependants in times of emergency (Ibid.).*

Through this excerpt, I understood the preminent position of the lineage chief who is given right over the lineage goods (kola tree) and who also receives kola nuts from the members of the society as a sign of respect when he is paid visit. As the central actor in the lineage, he then commits himself to redistribute those nuts as a sign of hospitality and acknowledgement. His gesture is interpreted as a symbol of greatness, dignity and respect given back to his people. Thus, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2010, 193) is right when he said that *This kind of system confirms and strengthens the legitimacy of the ruler, as well as creating a social safety net for the needy. Redistribution is thus centralized and can be described as a*

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<sup>26</sup> Queen Mother and deputy high-priestess of Nso.

*hierarchical principle of distribution, ... which according to me contribute in strengthening the sense of togetherness amongst the people.*

#### **4.2.-Kola nut, a cash crop**

Hassan, my main informant has a little chair where he seats and separates spoiled nuts from the good ones. After this process, the goods one are counted in thousands and put in baskets (well protected with a selected type of banana leaves). He always makes sure to treat them with some chemical product to keep them safe from insects or nut borers. The hands are the unit of measure used at the kola market.

Unit of measure	Number of Kola nuts
1 hand	10
10 hands	100
100 hands=1 basket	1000

Table 1: Kola nuts measures

NB: One hand here designates (or stand for) the numbers of kola contained in two hands, five kola nuts on both.

He also makes phone calls to his northern partners to find out the number of basket they need from him. He supervises the loading of the nuts, brooms, beans, Irish potatoes into the truck before it leaves. He orders banana leaves and bamboo baskets for the next market day.

It is worth mentioning that the kola market days which I have just mentioned earlier is as a result of another market which takes place earlier between the harvesters, gatherers and the kola buyers in the villages and/or middlemen who play the linkage between the whole sellers who have their shops in the Kumbo and those gatherers. Thus I came out with two types of markets, one which does not have a fix place and which can take place wherever notably in villages and compounds, and the other one which is materialised by a fix place as an institution which is the one I have just given its location at the beginning of this subchapter.

The kola market day is periodic, it on this day that the whole kola traders gathered the nuts they have bought from various areas in Nso' and send them to their partners in others regions as Hassan put it himself: *I meet my suppliers on certain days, the days before the market. Kola is loaded and taken to the north. It is also on this day that traders from other regions come to buy kola nut from the Nso' whole sellers.*

Theodore Bestor (2001) added that:

*Marketplaces embody a localized set of social institutions, social actors, property rights, products, transactional relationships, trade practices, and cultural meanings framed by a wide variety of factors including, but not limited to, 'purely economic' or 'market' forces. Of course, anthropological analyses of markets in the first sense are often ethnographically focused on marketplaces in the second sense.*

*Anthropological approaches to markets sometimes focus on the formal properties of exchange systems as frameworks for organizing behavior, relying on quantitative analyses of exchange relationships. However, anthropologists generally place such analyses within wider ethnographic contexts that see marketplaces as specific locations and social frameworks, characterized not only by economic exchanges in and among them, but also by their equally vital roles as arenas for cultural activity and political expression, nodes in flows of information, landmarks of historical and ritual significance, and centers of civic participation where diverse social, economic, ethnic, and cultural groups combine, collide, cooperate, collude, compete, and clash. Anthropological and sociological analyses emphasize this 'embeddedness' of markets in ongoing patterns of social organization and cultural meaning (Polanyi et al. 1957, Granovetter 1985); that is, economic behavior is not analyzed as an autonomous sphere of human activity, but as inseparably intertwined with a wide variety of social, political, ritual, and other cultural behaviors, institutions, and beliefs.*

The above quotation of Theodore Bestor on the importance of the market also fit within the context of Nso' in the sense that market days in Nso' is also an occasion for people to meet, to be together, even kola traders who have no goods to sell still go to meet friends and discuss about current issues such as; information about the newly enthroned lineage chiefs. It is also a day whereby the *Fon* message is usually communicated to the population. The *Fon* messengers would leave the palace in their traditional regalia, go round the market and stop under a tree planted by the traditional authority to mark the market site. It is under this tree that the message is delivered. I assisted in one of those message deliveries, where the *Fon* was warning his people not to sell out all their crops in other to avoid famine in the land. It was also on the market day that Fai Wo Djoum, the newly enthroned lineage chief of Djoum communed with the rest of the Nso' people by sharing kola nut with them as Emmanuel Keelen explains: *According to Nso' calendar, ... So, it is on Kaavi, the Nso' market day, ... that the Nso' people usually gather. Then the lineage chief is taken round the market. He does nothing but distribute kola nuts. He never lacks kola nuts in his bag. He shares them with people to express his position as the lineage leader.* I understood that the sharing of kola in the market is the demonstration of his newly attribute. I have noticed that no matter the modernization of the market nowadays in Cameroon as general and in Nso' in particular, I

mean no matter the control of the market by the government officials, the market is still highly influence the traditional authority notably the *Fon*.

I have just mentioned that the kola market is for wholesale but there are also people who sell in retails but this form of trade is not developed as each person can have access to kola nut if he/she wishes to. Those who buy in little quantities or in retails are mostly the functionaries, I mean government workers who have been transferred to Nso' land to serve the state such as teachers, nurses, doctors, lecturers, police men, gendarmes, legal practitioners, as well as those who move into the area for one reason or another (for business purposes for example).

Kola trading has brought people together in the sense that many Nso' kola traders have settle in the Adamoua region and gotten married there, thanks to kola trading. Many Hausa kola traders from Nigeria have also settled in Nso'. These settlements brought about inter-ethnic marriages between them and the Nso' people.

As I was carrying out my research in the kola section of the Kumbo market, I realised that, the particular area where the kola market is located was called *Ro'oh Gasah* in *Lamnso*, meaning *Hausa quarter*. It was quite surprising for me to see a Hausa quarter without the people which the quarter refers to. My surprise was due to the idea I had of Hausa quarter in other Cameroonian cities where the Hausa are found such as Loum and Douala just to name those few ones. After pushing further my research, I understood that the Hausa quarter was one of the places where the Hausa from Nigeria settled for trade with the Nso' people. As I earlier mentioned kola trade which made the Nso' kingdom famous (as a kola producing area) in the Hausa land of Nigeria was one of the activities which brought Hausa<sup>27</sup> and Islam in Nso'. Thus kola trade open Nso' to the outside world and brought in economy, goods/exchanges.

Thus it is interesting to know that Islam which came through kola traders who went to sell kola nuts in Northern Nigeria and adopted it and through a group of Hausa immigrants who settled in Nso' for trading was called *Lii Gasah*, meaning Hausa way of life by the Nso'

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<sup>27</sup> In fact, history has it that kola trade has brought about inter-ethnic marriages between the Hausa (The Nso' partners in kola trade from Nigeria) and the Nso' people according to the information given to me by the kola traders. This fact enabled the Hausa to have the favour of their local partners and to enter in the management of public affairs within the Nso' kingdom. The post of *sarkin Hausawa* (in the Hausa language meaning chief of the Hausa community) was created and held by a Hausa, nowadays the post is held by the descendants of the intermarriages between the Nso' and the Hausa. This phenomenon help in contributing to social integration and harmony in the Kingdom in the sense that they have became one. The powers of *Sarkin Hausawa* in Nso' is limited; he cannot take a decision without sounding the opinion of the paramount *Fon* of Nso'.

people. And from my field work experience, many tend to confuse the word *Gasah* (Hausa) for Muslim or Islam in the sense that they say: *we are Gasah* to say we are Muslims. Sheikh Mommadou Halid threw some light on the issue when he say that the Nso' language have adopted this appellation (*Gasah*) for Islam or Muslim that is why the Muslim religion is often identified as *bunri Gasah* (Hausa religion) as the Muslims who were so much in contact with the Nso' for trade were the Hausa. Thus, kola trade is one of the major factors that spread Islam into Nso'. The Hausa<sup>28</sup> understood that good relationship with the Nso' could only be created through trade and once this was done, it would be easier to spread Islam and hence spread it to other parts of Nso'. This spread was in line with the Islamic stipulation that a *Muslim who professes Islam, must be armed and determined to spread the word of God.* (Bonyi Tata 1999, 12). The Hausa Muslim trader later on inter-married with the local population of Nso'. This increased the number of Islamic believers in Nso' and hence its spread.

Even more important in the spread of Islam in Nso' was the fact that a majority of Nso' traders had to learn Hausa and Fulani languages for communication purposes. What hastened the spread of Islam in Nso' is the hospitable nature of the people of Nso'. Fon Ngah Bifon I sent Umaru Dor and Garba Langwa to Ngaoundere to study Hausa and Fulani languages so as to ease communication problem between himself and the Hausa Muslims (who preach in their language), this gesture also worked in favour of the spread of Islam<sup>29</sup>. The above stated reasons help me to understand why the Hausa and the Fulani languages are broadly spoken (in some area in Nso') beside the *Lamnso*. The fact that even the Fon of Nso' could send some people to learn those languages for communication purposes show the good atmosphere which reigns amongst them.

I also learned that the successor of Fon Ngah Bifon I, Fon Sehm II (1947-1972) went much further in the dealings with the Hausa Muslim and Fulani that he converted to Islam and took the name Ibrahim. He became the first Nso' Fon to become a Muslim. But, before his death, he converted to Catholicism with the name Thomas. His successor El hadj Mohammed Dini, Fon Ngah Bifon II (1972-1983) was a former Catholic Christian who later converted to Islam and was the first Nso' Muslim Fon to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. He was converted at the

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<sup>28</sup> The Hausa and also the Fulani who were cattle rearers used trade as the main vehicle for the spread of Islam.

<sup>29</sup> This was a unanimous answer during an interviews carried out earlier in Nso' from May 15<sup>th</sup> to June 29<sup>th</sup> 2005.

same time as some of his great lords and counsellors, notably *Shu'u fa'ay* Yuwan, Ndzendzev, Taakum, Luun and *Shu'u fa'ay* Mvem.

His successor El hadj Saidou Fanka, Fon Ngah Bifon III (1983-1995) was also like him a former Catholic Christian who later took to Islam in December 1986. He also went on pilgrimage to Mecca. He completed the building of the Mosque begun by his predecessors. It can be said that Islam which entered Nso' before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through traders who were involved in the long distance trade gained grounds in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The present Fon, Sehm Mbinglo I is a Christian. The shift of the Nso' Fon from one religion to another, show how religious identities are used as strategy depending on life situation (Gausset, 1999).

Some of the Muslim converts in Nso' still find it hard today to part completely with the traditional culture which they practised before. The Kingdom has become so diversified that some quarter are mostly inhabited by Muslim in what are called *Sagneres*. With the introduction of Islam in Nso', some Muslims are gradually moving away from ancestral worship. Islam has imported on the Nso' Muslims community a new code of conduct. For instance, after birth the mother and the child remain indoors for the first seven days. On the eight day the child's head is shaved and a goat is slaughtered and sweets and kola nuts are distributed. No matter the changes, the use of kola nut remains constant. The name is then chosen from the Qur'an. A Nso' traditional name is also given to the child beside the one chosen from the Qur'an. That is why it is likely to see names such as Adamu Wirba, Ibrahim Wirba, Njoh Abubakar Tatah, Usmanu Wirsiy, Hassan Wirbongtin, Ibrahim Fomo, Abdu Kongnyuy.

Thus, trade in kola nuts laid a strong economic foundation enjoyed both by the Moslems community in Nso' and Nso' society as a whole. The introduction of Islam changed the socio-economic, cultural and political way of life of Nso' people who have become Muslims. This new way of life or outlook was achieved through common religious practices. This can be seen through the establishment of the Home Quranic and Anglo-Arabic schools, the manner of dressing and the way of worship. This community has become more economically strong as trade between Nso' and other Muslim has resulted in wealth for the Nso' Muslims. During pilgrimages some Nso' Muslim go to Mecca to purchase goods from there. It has also created links between the Nso' people and the outside world enabling them to study in some



Arab countries such as Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia. Apart from the introduction of Islam, there are also other new ways of life introduced in Nso' through kola trade.

The Nso' people then called Islam *Lii Gacah* which means Hausa way of life. This is because the famous and well-known Muslim traders with whom the Nso' interacted were the *Gasah* (Hausa). That is why Nso' Muslims are sometimes called *wir Gasah* (Hausa people). The Muslim prayer itself in Nso' is called *bunri Gasah* meaning Hausa prayer. Thus the history of the introduction of Islam in Nso' and the history of the Hausa in Nso' are very much linked. The Nso' people have adopted many things from the Hausa people apart from Islam which we said is qualified in Nso' as *Hausa way of life* or *Hausa religion* in Nso'.

The Nso' people adopted some new dishes from the Hausa. They have also become like the Hausa, the producers of fritters and doughnuts such as *Massa*, *kuru-kuru* and *dakwa*. The last but not the least item is a condiment called *daddawa*, the Nso' called it *dawadawa*. This condiment is linked to the cultural repertoire of the Hausa people.

The Hausa language which entered in Nso' through kola nut traders is widely spoken nowadays, especially as some Muslims have used this language in preaching Islam. There have also been new toponyms from this language which influence the *lamnso* spoken by the Nso' Muslims such as *Gidan Mutuwa* (cemetery); *Masan lachi* (the Mosque); furthermore, Takum, a name of one of the Nigerian city where the Nso' kola traders used to go in the past for kola trade was given to a quarter in Nso'. It is the Nso' Muslims quarter of Kikiaikelaki (a village under Kumbo Central). It is said that the people of this village were famous kola traders who used to go to Takum in Nigeria for trading where they met Hausa Muslims and saw how these people were living. After their conversion to Islam, they decided to create their own Takum in Nso'.

It was very interesting for me to realise that there are no *pure* Hausa in Nso' in the strict sense of the word because those who live in *Ro'oh Gasah* and in other places are the offsprings of the intermarriages between the Nso' and the Hausa. Thus, in *Ro'oh Gasah*, I found both the Nso' who are offsprings of Hausa-Nso', the Nso' who embrace Islam are both living together. And it is difficult for an outsider to distinguish unless the latter has been told.

In many constructions site in a village called Kikaikelaki, I came across songs on kola nut which I understood are songs that were composed by the Nso' people in remembrance of their way to Nigeria for kola trade. Those songs give account of the kola trade route from

Nso' to Nigeria and back to Nso'. *Kaáyá wo Béèyin* is the most globalising song which includes nearly all aspect of the kola trade routes. It was sung during by the builders as they were mixing the soil for doing bricks and after the building of a house. The builders usually formed a circle when dancing. Sometimes they performed the *carrying of luggage* like the traders used to do.

The production and marketing of kola nut has accelerated the region's economy. The numerous quantity of nuts exported from the division is evident of an equal in-flow of cash in the division. This has led to a general improvement of the housing condition in the villages where corrugated roofed houses are now very common. Thus, the much money derived from kola nut and its related activities such as basketry, the sale of banana leaves and plastic wrappings for the conditioning of kola nuts has greatly raised the standards of living of the people by causing the improvement of health, education, nutrition, recreation and housing as mention above.

Kola nut has helped to bring about rise in the education standards of Kumbo Central. This is because the income from kola trade facilitates the paying of children fees. The number of schools and school children has been rising in the region every year helps to explain this fact. It is very rare nowadays to find a village without a primary school.

Thus kola nut trade have impacted at the social level with social integration, the composition of new songs in remembrance of trade routes to Nigeria, sang at constructions sites. At the economic level, kola nut constituted a source of income and finally the cultural influence with the introduction of Islam and some other new ways of life in Nso'. As we have seen so far, kola trade brought about some changes as well as a revitalization of Nso' tradition.

#### **4.3.-Kola, symbolizing togetherness**

During my stay in Nso' I often heard people saying that kola nut is always shared. This pushes me to put the following question to Francis in order to find out why the Nso' are so attached to kola nuts. And this is what he has to say:

*The pieces of kola nut are joined together in the middle.  
That is how they also bring people together.  
So, when you give a piece of kola to someone, you become one with him/her.  
Nso' people do not like the kind of kola which has just two pieces.*

And then Francis Berinyuy Bime turns to me and said:

*The people of this compound gather here at the end of year.  
Whoever you are, be you a Rev. Father, a Pastor...  
Then chairs are put all over the place. We pray together.  
Share kola nuts, and acknowledge that we have to be one like this kola nut.  
Can you sow a piece of kola?  
You can only sow a whole nut, not a piece of it. That we should be like kola nut which is the  
sum of many pieces joined/attached together.  
If someone feels like detaching himself from the rest like a piece of kola  
He/she'll never prosper.  
Unless you have been sown as a whole nut, you won't prosper  
That's how it is.*

Those statements above led me to say that food has many meanings and functions: social, psychosocial, cultural, economic, religious, artistic, and metaphorical. I am not able to describe all of them in this short thesis, so I would only like to borrow Rozin's approach by emphasizing that the social function of food is indicated even by the term *company* itself, being coined from two Latin words: *com* – *with*, and *panis* – *bread*, and therefore referring to a group one shares food with (Rozin 1999, 23). In the late modern era as well as in the traditional societies at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, food was and is being used to construct individual and group identities. Food is entangled in relations of power and gender; it's also connected with kinship and social structure, so it is no surprise that some elements of food cultures were and are examined by anthropologists.

The choice and combination of particular items of food and drink (kola nut and palm wine) thus embody the notions of status and value, as well as conceptions of identity and belonging, whether actual or desired. The practice of breaking kola nut provides the setting for people to share experiences, to talk about life and its vicissitudes. Just as coffee drinking provides occasions for socialization among friends in the Western world, so does kola eating and even much more.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the word *consumption* should denote not only the process of eating and digesting food but also the whole social arena of using material culture, (Parry 1985, 612-30.). The consumption of food is a paradigm for understanding. It is an especially useful medium for approaching the way in which societies and cultures are constituted and the manner in which they change.

Kola thus attained significance cultural importance because it was transformed into a system of symbolic social meaning undergirded by cultural practices that encompass both the sacred and the profane (Edmund Abaka 2005, x).

In Ibo culture in Nigeria, where I have spent some of my holidays, the ceremony of the breaking of the kola nut is tantamount to *a prayer that the will of God manifest or that may it please God*. The symbolism the Nso' attributes to the kola nut can be better understood from these excerpts of Abani's *Graceland*:

*The Eucharistic qualities of the kolanut ritual are clear. There are close parallels to Catholicism, as there seem to be some kind of transubstantiation involved in the kolanut ceremony, similar to the communion wafer in the Catholic ritual of mass. We worship in different ways, ... But greatest of all his is the offering of kolanut in communion, the soul calling unto life (2004, 18).*

But the kola nut goes beyond this near-scripture usage. As Ené notes:

*African peoples of all faiths offer, bless, break, and share kolanut. The custom is probably the only authentic African ritual that revealed religions of the Middle East have not degraded... the ubiquitous witness, "communion" confer on the kolanut rites the rightful relevance it richly deserves (2005, 3).*

Though it was an *authentic African ritual* as Ene said, I would like to argue here that the Nso' have adapted the use of kola nuts into the new religions. The kola use has therefore adapted to modernity and globalization. Kola nut linking tradition and globalization shows the continuity of its use despite changes.

But in this process, the use of kola nut which according to Ene (2005, 3) is probably the only authentic African ritual which has not been degraded should be regarded the other way round because I do not consider human as being static but dynamic and as such their tradition is also dynamic. So, I think that far from looking at tradition as static, one can rather look at this process as tradition finding its way out in the process of modernisation by trying to adapt to new challenges posed by globalization. Thus, instead of seeing the sharing of kola nuts as the only African ritual that has not been degraded, I would actually look at it as an aspect of the African tradition which has managed to adapt to the new challenges (of globalization).

Kola nut is also used for excommunicating the undesirables or those who have committed grievous offences. A notice would have been sent before a possible ostracism. The process of rescinding the sanction also requires using lots of kola nuts, as does the process of the individual responding to the charges against him/her.

Convention has it that when kola nut is presented; the host must first hand it to the oldest man in the gathering. In Nso' palace, when the Paramount Chief gave kola to be distributed,

during my visit, it was done following the social status starting from the Lord to the commoners via Sub-Lords. The sharing of the palm wine followed the same process.

#### **4.4.-Gathering kola nut and Gender Roles among the Nso'**

Francis: *Women and kids have gathered all of kola nuts. Women usually wake up early in the morning to gather them. They are the source of money which they use to pay children school fees (with). Kids also help their mothers in gathering them (nuts). There are also some men who gather.*

The gathering of kola nut is mostly done by women and kids. Men are also involved in a smaller scale. Women and kids usually wake up early in the morning around 5pm and go round to gather fallen kola pods under trees. As for Men, they generally walk from one house to another to buy, assemble and take kola nut to the whole sellers in the markets. These men are usually middlemen between the trades (from the kola market) and the *kola gatherers*. Kola gathering is a gender based activity. Strathern (1988, ix). said that Gender covers *categorizations of persons, artifacts events, sequences and so on which draw up on sexual imagery-up on the ways in which the distinctiveness of male and female characteristics make concrete people's ideas about the nature of social relationships*. Based on her study of a Melanesian culture, she describes the concept as the categorization of persons. It is the categorization of persons as male and female, weak and strong, powerful and powerless, etc. Besides, it is about the things and the events associated with persons to distinct male and female group of a society.

Mascia-Lees and Black also see this concept from different angles. They argue that it can be understood as the *meaning* that a particular society gives to the physical or biological traits that differentiate males and females. These meanings are like guidance for the society in the social organization. They further explain this concept as, *these meanings provide members of a society with ideas about how to act, what to believe, and how to make sense of their experiences* (Mascia-Lees and Black 2000, 1). In Nso', the *meanings* that are associated with how men and women act, the belief system and the value of their contribution are relatively clearly seen. There is a shared behavior in the community (Spradley 1980, 6-7). For example, as *universal act* (Rosaldo 1974), women are dedicated in the domestic activities such as raring of children and feeding the family. As opposed to many societies, gathering is the duty of women and children in Nso'. It does not mean that men do not harvest kola nut. They rather enjoy harvesting and come out with great quantity than to waking up early every

morning just to gather few quantity of kola and thus, wait for many days for the quantity to be huge and ready for sale.

In my observation, what I have learned is that the division of labour here (the gathering of kola nuts) is not seen in term of weak and strong, powerful and powerless. Some men think that it is good for women and kids to do the gathering because it is a source of money for their immediate or primary needs. Other simply argue that women and kids form a better team for that, while men can be doing something else. Gathering is not an easy task in the sense that it needs a lot of patience.

In my understanding from the literature about gender, what makes the issue a point of argument and keeps on as a topic of discussion is because of the differences in understanding the contribution of women in different societies all over the globe. Rosaldo argues that, *what is perhaps most striking and surprising is the fact that male as opposed to female activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men* (Rosaldo 1974, 19).

#### **4.5.-Kola within the reconciliation ritual**

In the case of misunderstanding between two persons who are ready to forgive each other, a reconciliation ceremony is done by the family/compound or lineage head with a calabash of palm wine, water and kola nut. I took part in a reconciliation ritual over farm land dispute between Fonyuy and Bime at a village named Kitiwum. But, before this last seating or gathering in which I took part, there have been a first step few weeks before during which the family head of Kuih Djem compound at Kichi (Kitiwum) brought the two parties together. After a thorough discussion, the farm land was said to be given back to the owner who was Bime. So, this seating was scheduled to officially and accordingly to the tradition put an end to the misunderstanding.

After inviting the two people to the family meeting, the family head then speaks first:

*I have called all of you here today to ..., we are all gathered here today to definitely put an end to the misunderstanding between Fonyuy and Bime over the farm land which Bime inherited from his father and which was snatched from him by Fonyuy thinking that the farm was his deceased uncle's. After a thorough investigation and together with you people during our first meeting, it was established that, the farm belongs to Bime as an inheritance from his late father and that his father (before passing away) had lent it to Fonyuy's uncle to cultivate it for two years. So, Fonyuy claimed the farm after the death of his uncle. Therefore, we are all going to share kola nut to mark the end of the land dispute.*

Public: *yes, that is how it is done; our fathers did it that way.*

The two quarrelling people, who are asked to forgive each other, got engaged in this conversation:

Fonyuy: *I am sorry for what happened. I sincerely apologise from the bottom of my heart for my wrongful attitude. I have accepted the verdict. I was wrong in doing what I did to you. Please, forgive me.*

Bime: *Thanks, I am glad that you have realized your wrong doings. I have forgiven you. I do also acknowledge that I was wrong by adopting a violent attitude towards you. Yes, all is well now.*

Shufai Wo Kuih Djem, the family head then asks them to shake hands (after they have publicly forgiven each other) and to share water from the same calabash to purify the heart. The public also drink the water to testify that they have witnessed the event. In the next step, the family chief opens a pod of kola, take out a nut. If the nut that he has just taken has even numbers cotyledon, then it is qualified as good and may mean that the Gods have blessed the circumstance. But if it is the opposite, then *njò se biy*<sup>30</sup> or *Vighvər vé biy*<sup>31</sup> are thrown on the ground to find out what is wrong or what went wrong. It may be that one of the persons has not really forgiven the other or it may also be that a particular sacrifice needs to be done to appease the Gods.

Thus, a piece of the nut was taken out from the pod and presented to the two persons in a manner which, the Nso' say explicitly, converts it into an oath. The first person bites and chews it then, hands the rest to the other who does the same. Taking part in this act simply means that, one is going to honor the oath of not troubling the other person's life and that the decision of the chief has to be binding. The rest of the nuts are shared to the rest of the family members who join them in eating and drinking palm wine.

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<sup>30</sup> *Njo se biy* are well shaped white kola envelop or pearl used for divination (they are five in numbers and are). They are thrown on the ground or on a saucer to unveil the veil, to probe the future, to seek for the will of the Gods.

<sup>31</sup> *Vighèr vé biy* are well shaped empty pods of kola nuts used for divination (they are two in numbers). Like *Njo se biy*, *Vighèr vé biy* are also thrown on the ground to unveil the veil, to probe the future, to seek for the will of the Gods.

The following day Shufai Wo Kuih Djem invited me to attend a Kidiv ritual at Kidjem compound. A Kidiv ritual is in fact a reconciliation ritual between the living beings and the dead. In this particular case as the lineage chief told us that few week after the death of the former chief, his son angrily left the compound over a dispute and went away. He spent many years without coming home. He did not come for his father's funeral as well. He decided to comeback or he was advised to come back by traditionalists who told him that his sickness, accidents and misfortune were due to the fact that he went away from the compound and thus he was not in good term with other lineage members. So, he decided to come back with some of his relatives. And according to Nso' tradition the Kidiv ritual has to be conducted first before any other thing.

Shufai Wo Kuih Djem: *God, may you welcome this delegation. The children of this compound who've come back have acknowledged their mistakes. Bless us from the beginning to the end of this reconciliation ritual. Let this family prosper like fresh grass.*

Wo'oh Shuruh (the one leading the ritual) took a pod of kola and with a knife, he opened it, took out the nuts and threw them on the ground. He uses the two particles of the opened pod for fortune telling/divination. He touches the ritual site with those pods saying:

*Did you hear what your children have said? They are saying that they have come back to reconcile with you*

The chief and the children: *Ask him to accept the ritual joyfully. Tell him that this is just the first stage of reconciliation with him. The organisation of the funerals will follow later.*

After that all this have been said, Wo'oh Shuruh throw those pods on the ground and suddenly I heard: *Good! Good! God! It is over.*

As I was busy struggling to find out what was over I heard them saying: *Our father has accepted the ritual!* Then I understood the meaning of *Good! Good! Good! It is over.*

Wo'oh Shuruh: *They (the pods) have clearly shown that the ritual was successful.*

He then explained to me that whenever two particles of kola pods are thrown on the ground and one looks up(not covered on the ground)and the other covers on the ground it means that what one is doing is good. Then, he continues: *Each person has to pick a piece of nut from one another.*



Shufai Wo Kuih Djem:

*This is a clear demonstration of the role of kola in the Nso' tradition.  
On such an occasion, kola pods, kola skin and kola nut itself are used.  
They're interpreted in search of a joyful ending.  
Shufai Wo Kidjem: I got five pieces.*

Shufai Wo Kuih Djem: *You actually got five pieces because the funerals haven't yet been organised.*

Another person: *I got six pieces, I was the luckiest.*

*- He got four.  
- I also got four.*

Shufai Wo Kuih Djem: *Even numbers: good signs.*

Kola nuts with odd numbers of cotyledons (3, 5 and 7) are qualified as bad ones (something may be wrong somewhere). While the goods are the ones having even numbers (2, 4, and 6) and they are signs of luck and happiness. When kola nut is given to someone, the first thing he does is to count the number of cotyledons. It is believed by the Nso' people that, what is pair is good because God created things in pair and thus, when things are in pairs, nothing remains single and nothing is also added to disturb the pairs, (while the contrary is synonym of oddity). Kola nut is an item of togetherness amongst the Nso and also an item of togetherness with the ancestors which aim at seeking for peace, joy and life.

#### **4.6-.Kola, a tool of communication in demanding a woman's hands**

Kola nut is one of the items which is used in Nso' traditional marriage approach. Usually a man offers a calabash of palm wine or a pod of kola nut known as a gift to a girl's father and says *I am dying of hunger*. If the girl's father and other relatives do not return the pod of kola nut, it means that the person has been accepted as their prospective son-in-law. But if it is returned, then the applicant is rejected.

In the case of a calabash of palm wine a man is accepted as a son-in-law designated as *séjuu*, if the girl's father and other relatives drink the wine and do not refund the cost. If the money paid back to the man is less or equal to the estimated cost of the wine, this is a sign that he may repeat his visit with some more wine. If on the other hand, the money paid back to a man for his wine is very much more than the actual cost of the palm wine, then he is rejected.

In the case where I attended at Keeri compound in Tadu, the above phase was already completed. The family of the girl have agreed to give the boy a wife after they have set

themselves to the task of investigating that none of the following offenses have been committed:

-Possible blood relationship of the boy with the members of the compound.

-Whether or not there exists an old grudge between the boy's family and theirs. Frequently there are such grudges as *your family seized our raffia palm bush. Your family seized our kola nut trees. Your family seized our wife. Your brother committed adultery with one of our wives.*

After sincere thorough and honest investigation, the lineage head from Keeri found out that none of the above impediments exists, that is why the young man's family was invited and he declares *we have found your boy a good person and we intend to give him food* meaning that they intend to give him their daughter as wife.

In this context of seeking for a life partner, kola serves as a medium of ritual communication, and gift exchanges, and as such, they are enmeshed in a tangle (Rogan 2005, 16) of relationships. What characterized the craze for kola are precisely these enmeshed functions, concrete as well as symbolic, and the layers of meaning invested in it. Due to its predominantly social aim, kola may be viewed as a form of ritual communication. The function in this case is to keep up reciprocal social contacts. Kola has expressive value. It represents a practical realm that of message and information exchange in a peaceful way in the sense that actors do not engage in an oral interaction which may end in catastrophes.

#### **4.7.-Kola nut in Christianity and Islam**

Though, I had the intention of meeting a priest to find out what kola is to them, but the fact that Francis Berinyuy constantly stressed on the fact that the last yearly meeting held in their family compound at Fikov and during which one of the priests expressed the wish for the people to be united, solidified my idea or galvanised me towards meeting a priest. I notably met Eugene Ngah, Parish Priest of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish Meluv, in the Diocese of Kumbo and his assistant Cornelius Nyuyki Birnirla. And the following question was put to them: Do you often use the image of kola nut to pass whatever religious messages?

Eugene Ngah:

*Yes, normally we do. Even in church celebration kola nut symbolises unity, oneness and togetherness, and since the message of salvation or the gospel message is all about togetherness, forgiveness, oneness and unity; ... kola nut symbolises unity*

*oneness and togetherness and since the message of salvation or the gospel message is all about togetherness, forgiveness, oneness and unity even in church circles, we do use kola nut. And I would like to take that prayer.*

*The kola nut fruit is very significant especially in our African culture. It is used for various occasions including marriages, births, and death celebrations and also reconciliation and peace. It is a great sign of sharing, of friendship and unity.*

*God our father, friendship is one of the greatest gifts you left with us. We pray for all broken relationships, families and communities. May you heal their brokenness and restore them to the kind of unity manifested in the kola nut fruit, and even more like that of the Trinity so that our families, relationships and communities will be outward signs of life in the kingdom. LORD, HEAR US...<sup>32</sup>.*

He continues: *and from this prayer, it is an eloquent proof beyond any reasonable doubt that kola nut symbolises unity, it symbolises peace, it symbolises reconciliation, it symbolises togetherness and oneness and so we use it even in our religious celebrations.*

The reality behind the word appears throughout the Bible under many images and figures. In all instances the notion of togetherness in purpose and spirit is understood and underscored.

It is the word of togetherness, unanimity, not necessarily because of feelings and thoughts held in common but by reason of a common cause. There are tensions in the togetherness of any human group, but the group purpose presents a constant challenge and spurs to maintain a working harmony. The tensions and occasional disagreements between members test the depth of personal commitment to the cause; they also test each member's openness to work through any differences to reach a new level of caring for each other.

Sheikh Mohammadou Halid was the next religious leader whom I followed. He invited me to an inauguration ceremony of a Mosque at Takum-Kikaikelaki, where after cutting the ribbon, He started sharing kola nut with people who took them very happily.

*Sheikh: It was quite a successful event today. We thank God. The event is over, we're now sharing kola nut with people. Kola nut is a sign of love and unity among us. Like kola nut, human beings are all one as the offspring of Adam. A kola with its many pieces is a clear demonstration of oneness in diversity.*

Being surprised at the way kola nut was being shared and the happiness on people faces, I decided to find out from Sheikh if kola nut was mentioned in the Qur'an.

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<sup>32</sup> A reflexive prayer as it was qualified, given at the celebration of the 15 anniversary of CHALICE, a Catholic based charity organisation on July 18<sup>th</sup> 2012 at Fikov in Kumbo.

Sheikh:

*No, kola nut is not mentioned in the Qur'an.*

*Kola is something which is readily available here.*

*It replaces the dates, which are mentioned in the Qur'an and which the Arabs use on similar occasions as we do here with kola nut. Dates are found in the Qur'an.*

*Kola is the only thing here in Nso' which is a single item but which is comprised of many pieces (cotyledon).*

*The fact that a kola nut is comprised of many pieces (cotyledons) is a clear demonstration of diversity in oneness. People are all one, though they are also differences and those differences do not mean that they cannot come together. Though different, but we are all together, we are one.*

*Kola is something that portrays or sows love amongst people. Like kola nut, we are all pieces of one another in the society. We are complimentary, a wife for example is a piece to her husband and the husband is also a piece to the wife. We are all pieces of the same humanity.*

*Kola is something which is used whenever the Muslims have an event. Be it naming or wedding ceremony, kola is put in a pan or plate and kept aside. After the speech, it's shared with people. The distribution is done the same way, be it in a wedding or naming ceremony.*

The feedback from the priest and from the Sheikh enabled me to come out with this conclusion borrowed from Mukum Mbaku John (2005, 42) that:

*Both Islamic and Christian beliefs require that the believer be community oriented ("love-thy-neighbor-as-thyself"), and help those who are less fortunate. Most of Cameroon's traditional religions also share this approach to personal behaviour and interpersonal relations. The concept of the "extended family" is an important part of traditional religious practice in most of the country. Those who are blessed and showered with wealth, property, and good health are expected to share these gifts with the less fortunate.*

Thomas Hylland Erikson (2010, 199) added that:

*Consumption creates solidarity and reinforces social ties as well as cultural meanings. Anthropological research in consumption teases out the cultural meanings of what may appear hedonistic behavior at first glance, and it often arrives at surprising conclusions. Take, for example, the commonly held view that globalization, in the world of goods, is a kind of Americanization which threatens diversity and local cultural values; the global dissemination of American films, popular music fast food and so on is seen as a – if not the – main form of cultural globalization.*

It was strange for me to see that no matter the globalization trend, the symbol and the images of kola nut haven't been threatened. On the contrary, the modern religious practices have to

fit in the Nso' meaning of kola nut which is more or less transposed to theirs. Kola has a cultural key symbol among the Christians, the Muslims and the traditional religious believers. Thus tradition survival and modern religious practices invite themselves around this little nut.

Religion being a paradigm of culture and cultural globalization, and knowing that Globalization<sup>33</sup> have brought challenges and changes to bear on African tradition in general and traditional religions or religious practices in particular, as Ngozi (2012) mentioned that *With the globalization facilitated indigenous knowledge loss, the peoples' indigenous religious practices are on the part of decline and extinction, as both traditional knowledge, local languages and religion are wrapped up together in Africa and that Consciously or unconsciously many of such ideas and practices are adopted, incorporated and internalized in a host culture and religion. This type of cultural borrowing is moreso in West African societies like Nigeria, where the people are held sway by things foreign.* I was thus surprised that in Nso' it was the opposite in the sense that an element (kola) or a practice (the sharing of kola nut) of the Nso' tradition has instead been adopted by foreign religions. Both the practice and the interpretation fit in both Christianity and Islam.

#### **4.8-The emotional and psychological attachment to kola nut**

Cornelius Nyuyki Binerla, the assistant parish priest of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish meluv in the Diocese of Kumbo:

*I eat kola nut because of what I hear it signifies in my cultural milieu. I hear that in my culture, the Nso culture, kola nut signifies unity. So, whenever it is eaten amidst any group, it is meant to signify that those who eat it together live together or intend to live together". So, I eat kola because it is a sign of unity and also it is used in the resolution of conflict to express the desire of people who were living apart caused by whatever differences, that they are resolving to live together. Thus it is the symbol of unity and I eat it for that particular reason. It symbolises unity and that is why even though personally I have no desire to eat kola nut whenever I am offered it I receive*

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<sup>33</sup> In an article *Globalization Challenges and Change Factors in the Religions of Africa: The Nigerian Experience*, Ngozi N. Iheanacho (2012) notes in her concluding remarks that: *Globalization wave is sweeping across nations and cultural boundaries. Hence African countries like Nigeria are not destitute of the phenomenon. In all spheres of life and human endeavour, and the transformation of society, globalization is in process in Nigeria. However, one facet of the world system which is taking much toll on the people is the religious, and cultural perspective. The challenge and change factors which follow this aspect of globalization is profound in Nigeria society, and other African countries. This is because culture in countries like Nigeria embrace everything, and all are rapped up and consummated in religious perception and aura, especially in the traditional religious system.*

*The feature of interconnectivity, relations and integration in globalization, expose the people to alien cultures and traditions, values, ideologies, uncritical cultural borrowing, ... All these challenge and cause strain to indigenous value system and traditions.* Ngozi's interesting remarks from Nigerian also fit within the Nso' case.

*it joyfully in order to signify that I am united with the one who offers me the kola nut.*

I was very much attracted by the last aspect of the above quotation which says: *even though personally I have no desire to eat kola nut whenever I am offered it I receive it joyfully in order to signify that I am united with the one who offers me the kola nut.*

This takes me to the discussion of the emotional and psychological attachment of the Nso' people to kola nut. It also reminds me of the attachment of the Gurade people to their *esset* plant. as Haile Seifu Woldeyohannes (2009, 29) explains that his grandfather used to go around and inspect his field before having his breakfast. and that sometimes wild animals come to the village at night, dig a hole at the root of one or more *esset* and eat part of it. And that when it happens, the *esset* will die out. He continues that on that unfortunate day, his grandfather would not want to talk or eat breakfast; he would sit at the door and grieves. He then concluded that he understands the feeling which is like losing a member of the family. He added and that *One esset takes four to seven years to get ready for harvest. If a fully grown esset is eaten or destroy by wild pig, I think it is not difficult for my reader to understand the sadness of my family. Thus, this feeling exhibits the interwoven relationship between esset and the Gurade family.* His description fits with the life style of the Nso' I am dealing with, with the exception that in the case of the Nso', it is not the *esset* plant but the kola tree.

Haven heart from the Priest and the Sheikh, I also went to the Nso' palace to find out from the Paramount Chief himself the place of kola amongst the Nso'. And this is what the Paramount Chief has to say: *Kola nut is an item of blessing/peace. Secondly in those days, kola nut trading was the only income generating activity. People were involved in long distance trade which brought in money to pay for the education of their kids to buy oil and clothes for the mother.* This, kola nut trade has opened the world for Nso' people.

What interested me more in Haile Seifu Woldeyohannes' (2009) expression of the relationship between the *esset* plant and the personality of the Gurade people is that, they are not only dependent on *esset* for many of life's necessities, but as I understood it, *esset* is not just only a plant to the Gurade. It is part of their personality and their knowledge system. Similarly, kola holds a deep rooted section of the Nso' life. Thus, this feeling exhibits the interwoven relationship between kola and the Nso' people.

Above all and accordingly to what I saw during my film work in all the settings where kola nuts were being shared in Nso', one can say without doubt that it is not all about kola nut itself but about being Nso'; It is all about ethnic identity<sup>34</sup> in the sense that be they literates, illiterates, traders, farmers, scholars, Traditionalists, Christians, Muslims; they all share and eat kola nut. It is about the construction and reconstruction of social identity despite the forces of modernisation and globalization.

#### **4.9.-Kola, a precious gift**

Oseloka Obaze<sup>35</sup>, reviewing Ene's book (2005) assert that:

*for this writer the symbolism of the kola nut assumed an added importance, when Chief Bob Ogbuagu told a story last fall at a Nigerian gathering in New Jersey. He recalled how in pre-independence Nigeria, the founding fathers were looking for a common symbol acceptable to all Nigerians that would serve as a icon on the coat of arms and as a unifying national symbol. The consensus was the kola nut; but, regrettably for reasons still unknown, it was never used. Nevertheless the national affinity to the kola nut remains strong.*

Shehu Shagari, a Hausa-Fulani and former President of Nigeria once noted, treat the *kola nuts* (*gworo*) with the same discriminating passion which some men reserve for women and horse (Ibid.)

Cornelius Nyuyki Binerla, the assistant parish priest of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish Meluv in the Diocese of Kumbo:

*I eat kola nut because of what I hear it signifies in my cultural milieu. I hear that in my culture, the Nso culture, kola nut signifies unity. So, whenever it is eaten amidst any group, it is meant to signify that those who eat it together live together or intend to live together". So, I eat kola because it is a sign of unity and also it is used in the resolution of conflicts to express the desire of people who were living apart cause by whatever differences that they are resolving to live together. Thus it is the symbol of unity and I eat it for that particular reason. It symbolises unity and that is why even though personally I have no desire to eat kola nut whenever I am offered it I receive it joyfully in order to signify that I am united with the one who offers me the kola nut.*

-O'oh:

*It is a sign of luck (it gives luck). It is ever the first thing to be shared when people meet along a street for example, before discussion on what makes new. Kola is a necessity for a Nso person. I am a night watchman, so eating kola enable me to stay awake and thus, to carry out my duties properly. Kola is part of our culture.*

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<sup>34</sup> Identity is a social phenomenon which is the feeling of the unity and wholeness which is based on the harmonization of the behavior, actions and value judgments of the people. (Wheelis 1958, 27).

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.kwenu.com/bookreview/obaze/moe\\_kolanut.htm](http://www.kwenu.com/bookreview/obaze/moe_kolanut.htm), consulted on 01-04-2012.

Kola nut is a highly significant ritual item in Nso'. This edible seed is usually obtained by breaking open the hard fruit pod that dropped (or was harvested) from the kola nut tree. A kola is consisted of many pieces/cotyledons joined together to form the nut. This physical description, composition or wealth being of kola nut has inspired (meaning making such as) the notion of togetherness, oneness, and unity which is often pronounce when kola nuts are being shared. This is what Francis Berinyuy Bime has to say on the issue:

*we may be different on many aspects, but still we are one as human being and thus we have to stay together as one like kola nut. We need each other in life. We have to share our differences and accept each other. A nut portrays love, mutual respect, acceptance, peace, unity, togetherness. A hand is made up of many fingers, and thus, one finger cannot carry out a duty alone. He concluded by quoting this wise saying: Together we stand. No matter our differences, we are one.*

The Nso' people consider kola nut as one of the most precious gift of *Nyuy Mbom*<sup>36</sup> to *Lè* and *Jij*<sup>37</sup>, the ancestor of the Nso' people and their offsprings. It brings happiness and joy, through its virtue, efficacy and its hidden force. The broad spectrum of beliefs and rituals associated with the kola nut can best be grasped by the saying: *He who brings kola, brings life*. The being of kola nut, its significance, symbolism, and the communion that goes with it are elements to delve into. Kola nut is never eaten alone in public; it is always shared with others. When it happens to be eaten in private, then a piece or some pieces are kept in the pocket to be given away as soon as someone shows up. There is an expression in *Lamso*<sup>38</sup> generally addressed to stingy people. *À san biy e kibam* literally means *you are splitting pieces of kola nut in your pocket* and can be translated as *you are eating kola nut alone* or *you are eating kola nut from your pocket*.

Kola nut is so important in the social and politico-religious life of the region that no ceremony and or ritual would be complete without it. They are also regarded as highly divination tool, with sorcerers using them for fortune-telling. To engage a girl in Nso' traditional marriage, kola nuts played an important role. The kola nut was also a sign of welcome when offered to a stranger or visitor. At funerals, kola nuts were an important item in the closing ceremony. Most Nso' rituals and kingdom sacrifices required kola nuts. They represent peaceful communion with the gods. A youth guilty of wrongdoing could, after tactful negotiation, have his heavy fine reduced to a kola nut.

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<sup>36</sup> God the creator.

<sup>37</sup> The first people on earth, referred to as Adam and Eve.

<sup>38</sup> The language of the Nso' people.



Kola nuts, used in sacrifices signified the friendship that existed between the living and the ancestors. Just as human relationships were made whole by kola nuts, so too man's relationship with the ancestors was strengthened by them.

The few months I spent amongst the Nso' brought me to acknowledge that kola nut is considered by them as being a meaningful or precious gift and that some gifts can be of little significance for example a pair of shoes or a cap does not really communicate a great deal to the gift's receiver, but the meaning behind a gift like kola nut is more profound than shoes or cap. Through symbolism and deeper meanings, some gifts such as kola nuts can have much more value than their price in Euro, Dollar or Yen. From what I saw, the right gift can be a way of telling someone that you have strong feelings for them, value friendship or a variety of other things. By engaging some of the different symbols associated with different gifts, it can be understood how truly meaningful a gift can be. And that is why Cornelius Binirla the priest has no desire to eat kola but he does take it whenever he is offered.

Though each person in Nso' has access to kola nut as I was told and noticed and also as I have earlier explained, they still give kola nut to one another when they meet, be it in the streets, in farm, in the market, in the bus, in home, in gatherings... Thus kola nut has a symbolic value : friendship ,when it is offer between equals ; respect, when it is given as a present to a superior ; hospitality when it is given to a visitor (it is a social obligation to offer cola to any guests, lest an insult be given); reconciliation ,when it is shared after a problem ; the sealing (or embedding ) of a political , commercial or matrimonial alliance.

This aspect can be well elucidated in Nso' with the lineage head who receives kola nuts from his people, in addition to the fact that he own kola trees which are said to be *lineage things* and has to redistribute to them and to others as well each time that need arises like Fai Wo Djoum who had to share kola nut with people to express his joy as the new chief of the Djoum lineage and those who received did so joyfully. I was very much fascinated by the ritual of receiving kola nut from the new chief of Djoum by the people with lot of care, respect and joy as if it was gold. Everyone wanted to have a nut from the chief. I stood up in surprise for few minutes with my camera starring at a woman who after receiving two kola nut from the chief when to show then to her friend, expressing joy and happiness to have been one of the recipients of the chief's kola. But more striking for me was the fact that immediately after receiving, she also went on giving one of those nuts to another person as a demonstration of togetherness and oneness through kola nut.

From all the scenes where kola nuts are being used, I could clearly see how the Nso' have appropriate kola nut which is part of the material culture of their environment to strengthen their own sense of personhood and identity. Viewed in this way, I do agree with Miller that *things become important elements in cultural projects; they objectify social relationships and hierarchies, are used in the articulation of self-identity, are variously interpreted by different persons, and contribute to defining social relationships* (Ibid.199).

Then, I got the answer to the following question with Mauss and Malinowsky: why do people exchange kola nut which seem worth so little in every circumstance? This question reveals an implicit assumption that exchange ought to be about individuals transacting an object of utility and value (which in this case is kola nut). Mauss, who stressed the way that actors are linked and obliged to each other and who saw the things exchanged as bearers of social identities and relationships; and Malinowski, saw *actors as relatively self-interested and autonomous, and concerned with equivalence, with getting as good as they give. This tends to ignore the fact, documented in studies of consumption that value and utility themselves are not naturally given, but are products of social and cultural identities and relationships* (Parry, 1986 quoted by Thomas 2010, 199). What I would like to argue here is that, be it the social or the individualistic orientations respectively with Mauss and Malinowski, both contribute to social integration of social groups which are linked to conflicts elsewhere.

Furthermore, I realized how who we are or who we are seen to be can matter enormously to the Nso' people when it comes to giving and receiving kola nut which to me illustrates the interplay of individual and collective identity. The eating, the giving, the receiving, the sharing of kola nut, is not all about the nut because everyone is Nso' as earlier mentioned has access to kola nut, but it is all about identification; it is all about what make them feel proud as Nso' people. So for me studying the social life of kola nut was not really about kola nut which is a thing per se. But a study of a process of identification, it is not something that one can have or not; it is something that one does, feels, as a Nso' person. That is how I saw all the joy, life and excitement around the *thing* kola nut. Then I came to the realization that the reality one should attributes to a group which in this case in the Nso' derives from people thinking that the group exists and that they belong to it; and that kola giving or receiving gives the shared feeling of belonging to the community or of being acknowledged a member of the community.

What I mean by identification is the production and reproduction during interaction (through kola nut or where kola nut is used) of the intermingling, and inseparable aspects of human similarity and differences. And the persistence and stability of the everyday common sense of ethnic identification is likely to be routine and no matter how many times someone receives kola nut, he/she is still happy when he/she is given some more and I saw during my fieldwork. Then the trajectory followed by kola nut amongst the Nso pushed me to agree with the three basic premises of interaction on human actions towards things or symbolic interactionism set by Herbert Blumer (1969) that: Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things; the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with others and the society; these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.



## **5-.Conclusion: Kola, a small thing with deep meaning**

This thesis entitled: *We are all one. Kola, the nut which brings peace, joy and life in Nso' society, Cameroon* is the result of the research which I carried out in my father's village (Nso' land). In fact I went there to find out the use of kola nut and its consequence amongst the Nso' people. All the people I met were engaged in my research irrespective of their social position. Literates, illiterates, traders, farmers, scholars, *Traditionalists*, Christians, Muslims argued for the importance of kola nut from their view point. It was important for me to notice how people were proud to see me with the camera and how proud they were excited to take part in the research because according to them, a research on kola nut was worth participating. They argued that kola nut is a small thing which gives meaning to life and to human existence as *we are all one*. Thus, kola nut was qualified as being a small thing with deep meaning in the sense that it brings peace, joy and life amongst the Nso' people. It was important for me to see how people were showing the importance of the kola nut. They were proud of it. Instead of thinking about the bitterness of kola nut, I actually saw the sweetness of life as it is a thing which brings cohesion amongst the people. I discovered how the social construction of kola nut use was deeply rooted within the Nso' society.

I have discovered how the use of kola nut in various social situations, contributed to the sense of construction and re-construction of Nso' identity and belonging. So, this study on kola nut is all about how identities power and gender roles are constructed and re-constructed around the practices of gathering, distributing and chewing of kola nut.

I have followed many people during my fieldwork which was for me the best or one of the best ways to fully grasp elements enabling me to understand the meaning of kola nut in a diverse society.

Thus this study was not all about kola nut per se, but it was all about ethnic identity. It was about the construction and reconstruction of social identity despite the forces of modernisation and globalization. So, no matter the changes over time, I have noted tradition and continuity, continuity in belonging amongst the Nso' where kola nut still plays a crucial role in the vitalization of Nso' identity. The *modern* religions (Christianity and Islam) increased the use of kola in the sense that they have adopted it into their practices.

The understanding of the Nso' society (which is organised through roles, statuses) enabled me to understand how people share belonging and that kola nut plays a role in this organization in the creation and recreation of the positions or hierarchies no matter the modernization processes with education for example which changes aspect(s) of social organization as elsewhere in the world. The modern education system which is the result of colonization or which is based on the colonial masters' model is carried out in French and English languages and do not often take into consideration local realities.

But in Nso', no matter the modernization of the state with the presence of the administrative authorities, the Fon is still the most important local political figure, and little gets done without his knowledge and approval. The Fon is at the centre of the traditional Nso' system of redistribution, where kola nut practices still find their way out.

The Nso' people often referred to kola nut as a small thing with deep meaning in the sense that the little nut deals with issues of existentialism interpreted around the words *oneness* and *togetherness* and the expression *we are all one*. As a symbol of greatness, dignity and respect, kola is a precious gift to which the Nso' people are emotionally and psychologically attached to.

I really enjoyed the paramount chief of Nso' statement when he summarised kola as an item of peace, and blessing. What he meant by peace within the Nso' context is in relation to order, harmony and equilibrium. So, peace is a value in the sense that the order, harmony and even the equilibrium in the universe and society is believed to be divinely established. And good conduct which is required of human beings if the order, harmony and equilibrium are to be maintained is manifested in Nso' land by kola nut sharing. And thus, the interpretation of the whole world through differences and sameness is done around kola nut. So, after reading *Comparative Studies of African Religions* (Emefie 1987, 78), I agreed with his author when he says that *no attempt is made to deny or cancel out differences, rather all effort is devoted to finding a way in which differences can continue to harmoniously co-exist... In the community, harmony entails smooth relationships between persons ...* and this smooth relationship is being portrayed or materialised by kola nut gift giving and I understood that kola nut is an item of peace-making which requires religious and moral value.

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## **Glossary**

(Meaning in English of Lamnso' and Hausa words and expressions).

*Fa'ay, Shu'u Fa'ay*: A title for Lineage /family/compound head.

*Fon*: Paramount Chief of Nso'.

*Jij*: Eve.

*Kaavi* is the first day of the week (Nso' calendar).

*Kourmin goro* (in Hausa): Country of kola nut.

*Kighvôr ké biy*: Empty pod of a kola nut.

*Lamnso*: the language of the Nso' people.

*Lè*: Adam.

*Njò' se biy*: kola nut skin or pearl.

*Ntangrin* is the eighth and last day of the week (Nso' calendar).

*Vibäi* : Traditional Lords and councillors.



## Appendices



Appendix 1: A kola nut tree



Appendix 2: Kola nut pods hanging on a kola tree

At Kikaikelaki, Kumbo, Bui Division, North-West Region of Cameroon 07-07-2012.



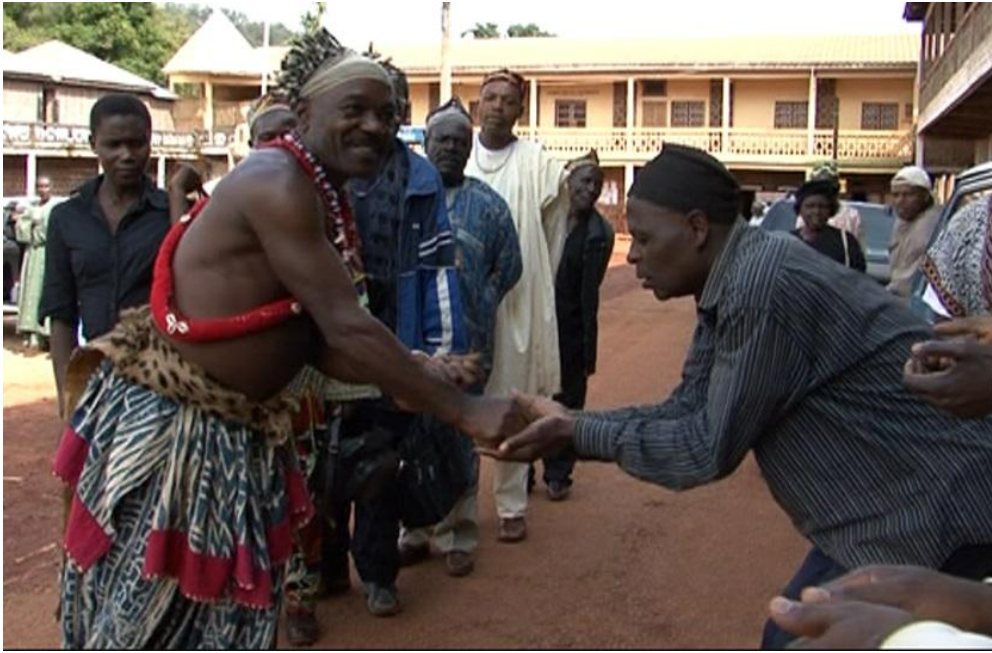
Appendix.3: Mature kola nut pod



Appendix Fig.4: Kola nuts taken out of their pods: two of them are still in their white peels or envelopes.

At Kikaikelaki, Kumbo, Bui Division, North-West Region of Cameroon. 07-07-2012.





Appendix.5: The lineage chief of Djoum distributing kola nuts to people. Nso' palace, Kumbo 2012.



Appendix.6: A kola nut shop in the Kumbo Central market, Bui Division, North-West Region of Cameroon. Kola nut traders are busy counting, packaging (in baskets) and storing kola nuts in their stores. 07-07-2012.





Appendix.7: Kola nuts



Appendix .8: A kola nut trader packaging kola into baskets (in his shop). Kumbo Central market, Bui Division, North-West Region of Cameroon. 07-07-2012.



Appendix.9: Sheikh Mohammadou Halid distributing kola nut to people. From this picture one can read the seriousness with which the Sheikh is carrying the distribution task and the joy and the excitement surrounding him from the receivers. Takum Kikaikelaki, Kumbo 2012.