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Research Article



Re-Inscribing Identity and Memorializing Performance: An Example of the Dikan Festival in Kajju

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Abstract

The present research article examines the myriad ways that the Dikan ritual performance among the Bajju people of Kaduna State, Northern West, Nigeria, is celebrated. The Dikan ritual performance in its current enactment can be gleamed as a cultural space for the remembrance of the essence and cultural identity of the Bajju tribe, in a world under the threat of rapid globalization, socio-cultural, and historical changes; which is made more prevalent by the exerting force of technology, popular culture, and postmodern elements demonstrated through various social media platforms and news outlets. The study begins by highlighting the background of Dikan ritual performance in Kajju from the precolonial to postcolonial Northern Nigeria. It espouses on the nature and structure of this ritual and its relevance to the Bajju people. It then makes recommendations on ways of sustaining this practice, to save it from extinction.

Keywords: Kajju, Bajju, Identity, Ritual, Performance, History, Traditionality, Ethos, Festivity, Culture, Experience

Introduction

Traditional ritual performances ratified during communal festivals in African societies were a demonstration of the communal ethos that unifies, points to the future aspirations and fears of such a society. It is the same with the Dikan ritual performance in Kajju. The Dikan ritual performance was used to educate the people on their history and the survival techniques the Bajju people had adopted over time to save them from slave raids, tribal clashes and attacks from wild life. As Akoma (2007:3) observed:

The contexts and “uses” of folkloric performance remain dynamic and expansive because “it is constantly reflecting and refashioning the experience of the community, whether in antiquity or [for] posterity” (Akoma 3,2007)

This also applies to the Dikan ritual performance of the Kajju nation. The ritual performance during this festival is given impetus and shape by the communal needs and experiences of Kajju. It is because of this uniqueness, that has made it incumbent on all male adults to fully participate in this annual ritual performance. It is also expected of them to make contributions and support the ritual performance with proceeds from their harvest and meat from their hunting expeditions or farms. This is to demonstrate the communal spirit that is prevalent in Kajju. It also fosters the need to be support each other in terms of happiness and pain. It is from this ritual performance that the idea that grief epitomized during dead, famine, natural disaster, fire outbreaks and a host of others is not a personal experience, but a communal tragedy. The same can be said of child birth, marriage and a host of others are celebrated and enabled through community efforts.

History and Ritual Performance in Kajju

Every group of people bound by the same language has its unique way of living. This uniqueness is brought by their cultures, values, mores, and traditions which are different from other groups. There is a series of cultural events and celebrations in Kajju, out of these is

Dikan. It is a festival that is celebrated at different times by the various villages that make up Kajju. While some villages celebrate it in April or July, others have theirs in October. Each people schedule theirs for a time appropriate and convenient for them even though its essence and functions remain the same in the whole Kajju.

Dikan festival is a three-day celebration that takes place annually. It begins on a Friday evening through Sunday. There is a *npfuwu* (a hut or a room selected by clans for some of the activities of the festival). On the Friday evening, *dutuk* is made of corn or millet and *ajajju* is prepared with *hyuwap* added to the *ajajju* by a male. It is cooked and served to the male adult participants by women. The people believe that this food eaten on Friday has the potency to protect them in times of war. Only male adults eat this food. Females and children are exempted for the simple reason that none of them partakes in war. The *dutuk* is eaten without anything artificial on the body. Clothes, rings, and shoes are not permitted when *dutuk* is eaten for that reason, the entry of the *npfuwu* to partake in the eating is based on age or peer group to ensure freedom and maintenance of respect during and after the eating. People rarely go into the *npfuwu* individually to eat.

Everyone eating must ensure that the *hyuwap* does not touch any part of his body apart from the mouth through which it goes into the body. When it mistakenly does, the affected individuals are expected to report so that the affected spot is torn using a razor blade by a member of the clan who has been assigned to do so. Doing so is the only way of retaining the efficacy of the *hyuwap* on those who err during the eating. People do not clean their mouths after eating with their bare hands, instead, they make use of clean rags, and handkerchiefs or rub their mouths on a wall.

The people believe that *hyuwap* protects them against any form of danger. In times of war, the people are unscathed by any weapon or ammunition that could be used to harm them as long as one moves with clothes. Any artificial covering of the body or ornament worn by the people aids in protecting them.

Saturday, the second day is dominated by hunters' performances. The day opens with gunshots. The village is woken up by these because they commence very early in the morning. *Gbaam* and *nkuwa* are the kind of food and "water" eaten and drunk respectively on this day. They are all mixed with another potion called *cchuk*. This potion is believed to attract beasts such as the tiger and other animals to the hunter to be killed and also protects him from the possibility of being harmed by these wild animals. Killing a tiger brings so much fame to any hunter in Kajju.

The consumption of *gbaam* and the *nkuwa* is guided by principles that are strictly adhered to. The *nkuwa* although brewed by women is served and drunk by men in the *npfuwu*. It is not compulsory that all men must drink it. Only those who are comfortable with drinking alcohol participate in it. Those who do not drink alcohol are given the powdery potion to lick if they are interested in it. When drinking, the drinker stoops before the earthen pot containing the liquid holding a Calabash with folded fingers which makes the Calabash settle on two fists where the alcohol is poured by the person serving it. One must be sure of drinking the whole content of the Calabash without leaving anything in it. The folding of the

fingers indicates that any tiger which tries to confront a hunter becomes feeble and cannot open its claws to harm the hunter.

Gbaam is also cooked on this day. It is also prepared by women but served by men on tray-like calabashes according to age groups or peers as well. It is allowed to cool before the consumption commences because blowing it with one's mouth renders the cchuk ineffective.

A performance called bafuwo kata takes place on Saturday. it is a display of the hunters. In this performance, hunters dress in skins or have them (the skins) hung around their bodies and gbajak tied around each of the legs between their ankles and their shins. There is always a dzundzom played as they sing and stamp their feet to the ground rhythmically. One of the performers could be crawling on the ground during the performance as a way of illustrating or mimicking the strategies or skills employed by the hunters in trying to kill games. The songs sung during this performance are those of heroism celebrating the great achievements of their lives of hunting. Sometimes, songs of predators and preys such as zaki na a ya kura are heard in this display.

The third day of this festival falls on a Sunday. It is not as important as the previous days. Some clans do not have this day included in the festival. This day is the conclusion of the festival where animals especially hens are slaughtered to host and entertain visitors who come for the festival. The broth from the chicken is used for gbaam with no herbal potion applied to it. Just like the meat, it is used to serve visitors and the folks who perhaps are tired from the activities of Friday and Saturday. Unlike the other days of the festival, this day fades out quietly without any important activity.

The nature of the Dikan celebration among villages that make up Kajju varies. Every village has its fixed day or date of celebration. Zuturung Mago celebrates theirs every last weekend of every October. The eating of hyuwap without clothes in Zuturung Mago is not so in villages such as Jei and Duhogwai. The differences in the time of celebration provide people the opportunity to attend other people's. In the traditional Kajju, participation in the festival was mandatory for every male adult, but with the challenges of insecurity and the risk involved in transportation, the celebration now takes place in cities.

Females are so passive in the festival that they only come to light when the males had left the scene. They can be given the gbaam and the meat cooked on the last day to eat with their children. They also ensure the cleanliness of npfuwu by cleaning it after the festival or after each activity and meal before the festival is wrapped up. There is strict observance of personal hygiene and sexual abstinence. Containers and utensils used for eating during the festival must be kept clean. The people must keep themselves away from immoralities like fornication, adultery, and thievery. The maintenance of cordial relationships among the people is paramount throughout the celebration.

Dikan Ritual in Kajju

Dikan festival celebration is obligatory for all adults of Kajju. It is as old as Kajju itself and has been a traditional practice that cannot be left to go extinct by the people. people believe in the protection role of Dikan. It is considered by the people as a force that enhances society's sense of interdependence and mutual attachment. It is a period of sharing

and hospitality as different clans and visitors are treated with equality without prejudice. In the aspect of displays, these do not allow the use of professional performers. Everyone presents can perform the ritual practice.

The Relevance of Oral Culture in the Contemporary Age of Kajju.

Oral culture has been freed from the prejudice of earlier European scholars. For instance, notions such as "primitive" and "savage" are no more used for it. It can be argued that this freedom is a result of the roles played by oral culture.

Traditionally, Dikan provides the people with protection of any kind; physically and spiritually. The nkuwa and ccuk depict one protective aspect of the festival. It protects them from wild animals like tigers, leopards, lions and so on that could pose great danger or harm to hunters in sessions of hunting. For instance, the use of locust beans trees around the pot of the local alcohol and at the entrance of every npfuwu signifies the liquid potion that was sprinkled on people to celebrate the killing of tiger and also protect them from being infected by dikan ccuk which was a kind of affliction brought by the death of the tiger. It also shields the people in times of inter-ethnic war.

One of the ways of knowing the African past is to learn its oral culture. Using a thorough and diligent investigation into the oral culture of a particular people, we can come to understand their belief systems, values, and history embodied in the whole range of African folklore and mythology, as well as in the artifacts and customs inherited from the remotest past civilization. Through the Dikan festival, one gets to know the Kajju as a geographical location that believes and relies upon the protective potency of herbs common around them. Also, this celebration exposes the material culture of the people as their kind of shelter is reflected on the npfuwu, their clothing displayed by hunters in the use of animal skins during their performances, the utensils like the riyei, pfufuo, and ron, as well as their musical instruments such as the dzundzom and gbajak. This celebration regularly reminds the people of their background and identity as such prevents their culture from extinction.

Unity and generosity are prerequisites for peaceful coexistence, progress, growth, and development. Dikan plays a vital role in promoting these in Kajju. Eating hyuwap and gbaam in groups or according to peers promotes unity and further solidifies the bond of kinship among members of a clan. It brings people of different places together and provides a fertile ground where friendship is cultivated. It is an avenue for meeting old friends and making new ones. Some friendships which developed from the Dikan festival have led to marriages.

Dikan is didactic in terms of it facilitating the inculcation of socially desirable values such as hard work, honesty, discipline, and respect for both the young and the elderly. Male adults are constantly cautioned shortly before the festival on the essence of keeping themselves clean and far from promiscuous acts since involvement in these renders the whole exercise futile. This clearly shows that Dikan helps to mould a serene Kajju that is crime free.

The entertainment implications of this festival cannot be overlooked. The hunters' performances earlier mentioned as bafuwo kata which are always accompanied by an indigenous musical instrument known as dzundzom entertains both visitors and the natives. It is also a medium of expression. Hunters express their experiences, satisfaction, or otherwise

of previous hunting sessions and their expectations for the subsequent ones in the songs used in their performance.

Dikan and the Challenges of the Contemporary Age.

Despite the important roles Dikan plays as discussed above and the efforts of the Bajju people to promote the culture through the annual celebration, there have still been setbacks that retard if not hinder the growth of the festival in Kajju. One of these is the lack of participation by all ages and both sexes in the festival. Male children that have not attained adulthood are not fully involved. They neither eat with hyuwap nor drink the nkuwa even though they are not frowned at against the gbaam and the meat. It is argued that some people lack interest in the festival because they are not introduced to or oriented at a tender age on the significance of their culture. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to see the significance and its value at a later time after they have perhaps had a negative perspective about the festival. Women who are the first socializers of children are not allowed to participate to know what it entails making it hard or impossible to tell the children what is expected of them as true sons of Kajju.

It is not out of context to know that the whole Kajju is made up of Christians and the people have embraced Western education. These have tempered with the maintenance of the people's culture. Among the Christians are some people that see the festival as a way of life and find no fault in practicing it. Others see it as a performance meant for the non-civilized pre-Christian community of the Kajju forefathers. They consider the continuity and practice of the festival barbaric and therefore keep it at arm's length. Similarly, most people with Western education think it is meant for only the non-literate. Those of them in cities find it difficult to come to the villages for the celebration because of the "confusion" this education has brought to them. It can be conjectured that westernization is also a factor that has posed another problem to the maintenance of oral culture in Kajju.

Finally, the craze for electronic media and the internet has pushed oral culture far from the people. Young people who are expected to succeed in the aging performers have completely lost interest in the Kajju culture because they prefer a foreign lifestyle that is promoted in the electronic media and seen as a mark of civilization. Social media have taken their attention away from local performances and this is inimical to the survival of Kajju oral culture.

Recommendations

Having examined some of the challenges of oral culture in the contemporary Kajju, it is obvious that the Dikan festival is gradually fading out of modern society and if nothing serious is done to revive it, then future generations will have nothing indigenous to perform. On this premise, some ways of ensuring its survival in Kajju have been suggested.

The documentation of this festival in written form for future generations is very important. Orality has given way to reading culture in the modern age. Consequently, the most appropriate way to inform society is by keeping written records of those events that are important to the people, especially Kajju where Western education has spread to every corner. This could give the opportunity of tapping information about the Dikan festival without

undergoing the strain of frequently organizing with some elders who be unwilling to deliver because of misunderstanding its purpose.

There should be proper and relentless enlightenment, especially for the youths who are believed to constitute the largest number of those that show little or no interest in the festival. Dikan could be encouraged in seminars, lectures, workshops, symposia, and so on. People should equally be told about the benefits of participation as well as the dangers of keeping off from all traditional performances. This should be done in both rural and urban settlements where nonparticipation is at its peak.

Electronic media in modern society is the most efficient means of communication. It has the advantage of reaching out to a large audience within a short time. The radio and the television for instance are accessible to almost everybody in the modern Kajju. This festival can be sustained through them.

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