

A Critique and Evaluation of Dikkan Cultic Meal of the Bajju People as Eucharistic Communion

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Abstract

This paper critically evaluates the Bajju culture's use of cultic meal to worship the Supreme Deity called *Kazzah*. Through the use of empirical evaluation method, the investigation determines and extracts the cultural elements of *ya Dikkan* that have doctrinal semblance to the Eucharistic Communion to enhance pastoral life of the Bajju people. The inculturation motive is to evoke quality faith-based worship in the celebration of the Eucharist in Bajju land. The reality of the above is captured in the African worldview, by which Professor Justin Ukpong expressed in his methodology of inculturation and contextualization of Christian doctrine to explicate clear assimilation of divine truth. The method adopted in this empirical research coupled with field interviews are meant to cast cultural variables on the platform of doctrinal faith expression. Like the Jewish people in their religio-cultural expression build on the sacredness of life, the Bajju people live their lives too, exemplified by farming, planting, labouring and harvesting. In-between they celebrate the sacredness of life. It is in this perspective that this paper argues that some basic features and elements of Dikkan have some Christian Eucharistic content of Communion; its significance builds on the thanksgiving meal and the centrality of ancestral cultic blessings. Its core resonates on the form and matter enunciated in the celebration serving as the basis of its liturgical character. Its features principally are memorial, unity, koinonia and diakonia, pulling these resources together to explicate strong elements of culture-faith-eschaton into a perfect symmetrical bond of God-Community-love.

Keywords: Eucharist, Dikkan, Ethnicity, Communion, Ancestors, Elders, Efficacy, Restoration

1.0 General Introduction

The word ethnicity has multiple meaning depending on the usage, context or situation. Ethnicity refers to what Deng (1997, pp.28-31) examines as "the embodiment of values, institutions and patterns of behaviour, a composite whole representing a people's historical experience, aspiration and worldviews." This contextual reality is very well captured in this paper that

expresses the way and manner the Bajju cultural group distinguishes apart from others in celebrating cultic meal. The Bajju is an ethnic group located mainly in Kaduna State, Northern Nigeria, as a socio-cultural and a politico-religious group. It is unique and has a sizeable population. According to Blench (2008), "They speak Jju, a language spoken by over approximately 570,000 Bajju people of Southern Kaduna state area in the Northern Middle-Belt area of Nigeria. The Bajju people are found mainly in Zango Kataf Local Government area. They are also in Kachia, Jema'a, Jaba, Sanga and kaura Local Government Areas (LGAs) accounting for its high number of speakers." This strong, virile and hardworking people originated from present day Zamfara State, re-located to Bauchi State through the Plateau to the present location. Aboi (2018, p.19) wrote: "There are several traditional theories of the Bajju origin but the most popular and acceptable one is the one surrounding the personage of Baranzan." The name Ka'jju was derived from the name which Baranza (ancestral Father) gave the new settlement by which it was *Kazzu*. Following on the authenticity of history of verified and documented sources available to the public, the evidence suggests that the Bajju have been in their current location as early as the 1800s (Aboi 2018, p.19). Being an agrarian people by nature, they are professional hunters as much as being committed business men and women who engage in trading of food stuff, livestock, honey and carved local utensils for domestic and arts show rooms. To their credit, they have bestowed on themselves, respected and ancestral cultic rites, rituals, which they observe at seasonal and privileged times to showcase their rich heritage to the wider society.

The research is cast within the socio-cultural network of the Bajju people, examining the acts of eating food and drinking liquids are personal as much as communitarian in nature. The *Ya Dikkan* agricultural celebrations are expressed within the cultic ambience of worship of (God above) - they transmit through the sacred meal, its rich elements bequeath religious beauty. Its celebration espoused Africans living the Christian life uniquely to endeavour to explicate the essential rudiments of cultic meals to display aspects of the Sacred, *Koinonia*, *Diakonia* and *Liturgia*.

It is in this perspective that this article examines the praxis, the meaning and the contextual axis by which *ya dikkan* can and does become sacramental within the cultural expression of the Bajju people. Evaluating its relevance pastorally puts it within the context of pastoral initiative at appreciating cultural metaphors and symbolism. As the proposals advance a positive argument, it raises the value of *ya dikkanin Ka'jju* higher, making the church sensible at appreciating cultural practices for pastoral integration. It further means that the hidden mystery encapsulated in partaking in Bajju's cultic meals becomes a sacred and transformational encounter which illustrate that, that cogent sacredness contained in its womb, can further unveil the communitarian character that

transmits the act and aspect of promoting unity, sustaining the bond of friendship and preserving cultural and religious rituals.

The research reveals the role that food plays in the lives of humans in Africa, underscoring its importance. It further examines the significance and the sacredness of cultic meals by explicating its locus and deep symbolism. Amongst the ancestral beliefs and practices which are further expressed in the cultural heritage, eating food is tied to mythic ritual that has deep religious symbolism. In Africa generally, the type of food, drinks and dresses people use define them as a people and more so classify their culture and religion. The Bajju People according to Aboi (2018, pp.17-18) are not an exception, that is "why they have a rich cultural heritage. The Bajju people being a homogenous people with a rich cultural system that distinguishes and defines their peculiarities, pride, religious, social and military might, set them aside as progressives to other cultural groups in Kaduna State, Nigeria." Added to the ingenuity of the Bajju people, amongst her socio-cultural ethos, food and drinks are either normal or cultic celebration which on its own elevates the value of her diary of engagement during the *Dikkan* festive celebration.

2.0 Cultural Praxis and Significance of *Dikkan* in *Ka'jju*

The significance of a meal in Bajju culture is a prepared dish that nourishes and refreshes. It gives life and energy to the whole body. It is a socio-cultural substance that adds value to life and raises the prestige and dignity of a person, family or community. It is therefore an edible substance that is naturally prepared or it is set aside as sacred for certain functions like naming and marriage ceremonies. When it is prepared for domestic purposes, it is meant to satisfy hunger and give energy. It can still be prepared for cultic purposes, making it a ritual meal for celebration. So for the Bajju people like any other African ethnic group, they are proud to eat, live and play as they prepare different types of seasonal meals which gives them the opportunity to observe dietary laws that promote love and unity centred on domestic or cultic meals. If a meal is set aside for cultic functions, it is eaten by only the initiates like *ya Dikkan*.

Meals used for cultic purposes are special and reserved for initiates. In specific ritual circumstances, the ancestors of the Bajju people used food and drink to perform religious and social functions which now the Elders are commissioned to continue. Aboi (2012, p.39) wrote: "The Bajju consulted the ancestors, using traditional medicines in order to get their wishes. The need for protection from evil spirits and dangerous animals was also crucial being a hunting community. People seek protection for themselves as well as their family members (at the cultic meal of) *ya dikkán*... This act and participation in taking the sacred meal assures that the participants are seeking protection. It is in this sense that the

Bajju Elders continued this occasional celebration to enliven this refreshing experience, thus invoking the transforming power that is derived by acts of eating and drinking at meals, these acts sometimes involve the aspects of partaking in cultic meals, as this adds mystic and spiritual content to the religio-cultural consciousness of the Bajju person.

Meals that are tagged sacred are celebrational and unique. They are used at the celebration of cultic functions like: naming ceremony of infants, wedding ceremony of young people or the burial of very elderly people. The Bajju people use rites and engage in sacred rituals to distinguish the personalities being honoured. It further means that the utility of customs and traditions at these special occasions is a link to the ancestors, which shows the strong beliefs and teachings of their religion bequeathed by rich traditional values. This is the semblance to the *epiclesis* or the *memorare* of the Eucharistic Communion of the Christian Liturgy. In Exodus (12) the Jews ate the Passover meal to indicate their departure from the land of Egypt. While they ate the Passover meal, they sang a "todah" hymn, expressing the distress and lament of slavery in Egypt. Philo (1993, p.5825) wrote, "And this festival is instituted in remembrance of, and as giving thanks for, their great migration which they made from Egypt." To this, Bako (2017, p.14) echoed that: "Philo focuses here on two key reasons for the Passover: remembrance and thanksgiving (cf. 12:14; 13:3)." In contradistinction, for the Bajju people, the *ya or swa dikkan* liberates families and communities from the massive effects of hunger that they might have suffered in the past dry season prior to the harvesting of new crops which might have caused hardship and pain. The aspect of *ya Dikkan* we are currently examining is that cultic meal celebrated by Bajju people to "welcome the new crops of a year in early August." Apart from this very aspect, there are many rites performed by Bajju people that involve the use of cultic meals (for instance, naming ceremony of a first male child), which also indicates that the Bajju people at different seasons express joy or sorrow; the happy mood of harvest, showing abundance or the cultic ritual that ushers the preparation to begin the farming season or to go for hunting. Amongst the traditional mythic celebrations therefore, lies the most cherished rites of naming ceremony to receive a new (first) child in a family or even to give out the hand of a young maiden in marriage. In addition to these ceremonies mentioned above, the reception of a chieftaincy title brings joy to a family and thus calls for the preparation of delicacies of dishes or most especially to partake at the revered ceremony of *ya or swa Dikkan*.

In the actual ceremony of *ya or swa Dikkan*, the Bajju cultic *Sacred Meal*, numerous blessings flow. Aboi (2012, p.39) wrote "putting (natural tree roots) medicine about 150 different herbs into liquor called *nkwa*, but before taking it a chicken has to be offered as sacrifice. The goal is to enable the person to receive what he/she desired." Thus, *Ya Dikkan (participating in Dikkan festival)* in Ka'jju

land, is a compulsory rite for males aged fourteen years and above as part of the many Bajju Rites called *Hyihyum Bajju* (Aboi 2018, p.82). There are multiple, valuable and rich cultural blessings that the ancestors bequeath through this unique cultic meal. The meticulous preparation brings out its delicacy and sacredness. The fact that the *Àgado* and Elders are the officiating ministers and acolytes at cultic celebration of the *ya dikkan*, in a unique way, places the families and community in *Ka'jju* land as the direct beneficiaries of its mystical value. This further confirms the reality of the Bajju people, living an agriculturalist life, they constitute the basic order within which the prestigious annual ceremony of celebrating and partaking in the cultic meal called *Dikkan* festival. It enhances and promotes the bond of unity. The mystical element captured in the ritual acts of cultic meal on its own, invokes in the worshippers at *ya dikkan* the sacredness that begins with the process that nourishes, replenishes, beautifies and grows the human body, spirit and psyche in the encounter with *Kazzah*, God.

The exploits of the mystery beneath exercising the *Ancestral cult* by "the ruling elder" (Aboi 2018, p.94), places the cultic meal of high value for public celebration. This by its character makes *ya dikkan* unique, mystical and a sacred meal needed to usher participants into farming, hunting and the rite of passage. In an interview with Hakim Zonkwa, Musa Gaiya (2019), he reiterated that there are two types of *Dikkan* festival. The first is celebrated during the raining season, prior to eating fresh crops and tubers of yam or cocoyam when the elders of each Bajju community must perform the rite of 'medicine' - *Dikkan*, to purify the fresh food to be eaten by each family in the community. The second comes at the winter, after harvest, those clans that are professional hunters, must perform the act of *Dikkan*, to purify those selected prior to entering the forest to hunt for game or animals.

3.0 The Locus of *Ya* or *Swa Dikkan* in Bajju Cosmology

The administration of *ya* or *swa dikkan* ceremony is pivotal and a motivation for hard work and industry. It clearly demonstrates that in the cosmology of the Bajju man and woman, commitment to hard work in terms of hunting or farming exercise is mandatory. The Bajju people do not entertain laziness, idleness or inimical behaviours that degrade the dignity of persons in the family or community. Every fully developed man or woman must work hard to earn a living. What they cannot farm like meat that is necessary to garnish and add to the quality of the meal eaten in the family is obtained by hunting. Thus, according to Isuwa (2015, p.2):

The main value of the Bajju man is that one has to work hard to sustain his life and that of his family which makes them to farm, marry as many wives as they can so as to give birth to children that will help them in farming and cultivation. Because they love good dishes, hunting was

also embarked by the Bajju men to get meat that will supplement the food. Before going out for hunting, they have to be blessed by the *Gado* or any traditional ruler that oversees a particular community. There are cultural medicine that will be administered both on the people going for the hunting and the arrows. They are not allowed to go close to a woman for one week and will not engage themselves on negative thinking but will only focus on the hunting.

From the foregoing, the ritual element of purifying, penance and reconciliation with *Kazahñ Tazwa* (God in heaven) and the immediate community are the main cultural features that are needed for the participants of *ya dikkan* to perform prior to the hunting season for the hunters. The act of purifying is a sole preserve of the *Àgado* (Gado) in the clan or community.

Stating the cultural relevance of purifying the participants engaging in the risky task of going to the forest for hunting prior to *ya Dikkan* is necessary to underscore the cultural praxis of the sanctity of life in the socio-religious consciousness of the Bajju person. Therefore, it is a unique cultic act that is required prior to eating and drinking the sacred meal, constitutionally this active participation is the sole preserve of only members of *Ka'jju* land. Visitors are not accommodated as it is a taboo to welcome non initiates to partake in it. In semblance to the Eucharist, it is the preserve of only those who are baptized, wedded and in the state of grace.

At *ya Dikkan*, special blessings are mandatorily given by the *Àgado* or the most senior Elder in the family or of *Ka'jju*. The ancestral nature of bestowing the rite, cult and celebration of *Dikkan* through the leadership of the *Àgado* (traditional priest) or the most senior Elder in the clan makes it unique, sacred and special. That it can only be for the Bajju people is an act of love, sustenance and seeking protection from God. The fact that the cultural festival of *Dikkan* is a repeated feast and a memorial act demonstrating intense features of unity, love and thanksgiving celebrated in a festive mood, joy and sharing that makes it a *koinonia* exercise in *diakonia* to enhance the deep spirit of communitarian service. This is another semblance it has directly with the Christian Communion service, that it juxtaposes its sensibility: mystic value, dietary content and spiritual relevance to an adult convert of Bajju descent to Catholic faith.

4.0 The Cultic Efficacy of Dikkan as Semblance of the Eucharistic Communion

The strong aspect of ritual cleansing prior to the celebration of *ya dikkan*, lies heavily in the words of exaltations, exhortation and blessings of the *Àgado* (priest). This researcher places the ritual cleansing closely to the cultural

symbolism of cultic purification that leads to an act of reconciliation and the offering of food and drinks to the Supreme Being as a further semblance of the features the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharistic banquet of the Christian faith. This however does not juxtapose or place the Bajju cultic meal of *Ya Dikkan* celebration in this current study to be equal nor placed side-by-side with the deep spiritual, mystical and sacramental character of the sacraments of Penance and the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. The later is doctrinal, dogmatic and is the expression of the Paschal Mystery with a rich Christian content. So, by far it is richer, more splendid and Christocentric in content, context and character than the former. A critical presentation of *ya bu swa dikkan* is offered in this paper as a cultural variable, to be explored, discussed and examined by future researchers based on its richness in order to select essential contents to facilitate inculturational process in the context of giving pastoral catechesis. This effort can lead to an assimilation of cultural vintage that can serve as a tool for evangelization, to win the souls of native persons still practicing Traditional Religion for Christ.

The cultural semblance of *ya bu swa dikkan* to the Eucharistic Communion of the Christian faith lies within the form and matter presented for the exercise. Isuwa (2015, p.3) further demonstrated that:

Swa nakan (literally, drinking medicines) or *Yanakan* (eating of medicines), which comes at the end of the farming celebration, is another festivity that every man in the community has to donate *Nyon* (a big chicken) and contribute to the making of a local drink (*Nkwa*). Only men go in front of the traditional pot, kneel facing southward and drink. Men in the community drink one after the other to signify the end of farming year. The traditional medicine normally makes the men to get more strength, it was gathered.

Closely following the cultural ritual of preparations prior to the second aspect of drinking the liquid that is provided for the sacred festive mood, the clan or the community makes a generous donation to the chief priest (*Àgado*) and Isuwa (2015, p.3) once again opines that, "The gizzards of the entire chickens are gathered and donated to the Gado. He eats alone but can give to any other person he wishes to share with. The meat stock is normally used to cook *Gbaam* (porridge)." This is then followed by the drinking of the *nkwa*, (the cultic drink provided for the festive celebration). At this point, only the initiated adult men and elderly women can partake in it. The analysis and cultic evaluation of the Bajju *ya bu swa dikkan* (eating and drinking of the special sacred or cultic meal), demonstrates the existential cultural semblance that this has some strong reminiscences of a strong doctrinal elements of the Catholic Eucharistic Communion. The Bajju cultic meal of *Ya Dikkan* is unitive with a deep expression of love and cohesion of spiritual life of a selected group. It signifies a

bond of sacred union with the gods by observing a memorial bequeathed by their ancestors to cement perfect communion, fraternity, love and unity in every community. The cultic and medicinal value of *ya Dikkan* in Ka'jju land is so significant and important that it can be perceived as a ceremony for initiating 'young boys into the cult of adulthood, which can be viewed as similar to the reception of First Holy Communion." This is the rite to obtain favour. It was an ancestral ritual performed only by men and male children. Every man slaughters a chicken or goat, beans were cooked and liquor (*nkwa*) brewed for that ceremony" (Aboi 2018, p.84). This is love shared by brothers and sisters, elders and the young persons growing up in the clan or community.

5.0 Inculturation and Relevance of Bajju's Festive Celebration of Dikkan to the Eucharist

It is worthy to clarify the Christian doctrine of Eucharistic Communion before placing the Bajju cultural variables of *ya bu swa dikkan* as an ancestral asset. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC: no.1333), the *Form* and *Matter* of the Christian Eucharistic banquet is the unleavened bread and the wine made of grape. The Church teaches that "At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood." Many Bajju converts to Christianity partake and celebrate this Christian mystery everyday and on Sundays. They go to Church to worship God. In the consciousness of the Bajju person, certain traditional rites and rituals have sacred connotation and relevance to what they believe and receive in their Churches.

Locating the sacred location or sacred room provided for the *ya bu swa dikkan*, according to Patrick (2017, p.42) the Bajju high priest called *Agado*, raises his eyes to *Kazzah ñ tazwa* (God in Heaven) and utters these words:

Atyyi Agwam ñ tazwa bu kabzyen, zi na gwai yi bu suchet bu chet ndwam bu soo. Nwan ami a zaryi nyang a zi bzini, zi na naai a za brang, a wwon a za cham a ya dikkan ti ni, zi ga ya chat, rwot zi gu na tswup a wwon zi ga shiya chet na zi nin brang bu kyang zi bzyi ni. Ryok kun dyi. This prayer is translated as follows: Father, King of heaven and earth, we thank you for the gift of life, body and soul. You are the giver of all that we have and own, we beseech you to bless us and protect us through this sacred meal we are to share in order that we may worship you and have the grace to help one another, Amen.

From the foregoing, the Bajju people offer the prayers of thanksgiving directly to God over the *form and matter* to be offered prior to the prayers of the consecration to be directed to the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. It portrays that the triple actions that ushers the unique celebration of *ya bu swa Dikkan* to the sacred realm of the Supreme Deity are "the words of

consecration uttered by the traditional priest - *Àgado*. It configures the offerings of the ritual meal and drinks offered for the actual celebration by a selected few and the active participation and consumption of the species." The actual celebration, cultic prayers and the very act of *ya bu swa Dikkan* by the selected Bajju adult is a unique process of initiation of the young (First Holy Communion), signifying and indicating the strong elements of it being strictly a cultic meal, a sacred sacrifice and a sacrament of union and love.

In the sacred sanctuary where the *ya bu swa dikkan* is offered, only adult men and initiated boys are admitted to watch as the *Àgado* (the chief priest) exercise the cultic function as he offers these carefully selected words ever used by the ancestors directed to *Kqzah ñ Tazwa*. The sanctity of the words according to Dodo (2017), are:

Atyyi Kqzah, Agwam Nmmmai-basarei, zi na gwai bu zanang ahwuai yak a ni bu azizrak nkyang suchet ani. A yin ziaak battyi njit bu aziyrak swat, bu swat ndung. Ba ya brang a kigak bu swat myyi ryia sang kangbap. Zi na naai a za brang, awon za kup bu Tswa wan ji zi ga cham. Awwan a za brang an Tswa jiring kayat tswup." - **The translation goes thus:** Our Father, the Almighty and all knowing God, we thank you for the gift of new crops and fresh food which are the labours of our hands; you taught our fathers how to live in harmony and helping each other, we beseech you to bless and shield us with your spirit to live in unity and love for others.

(With the above sacred words uttered over the meal and drink presented to the *Àgado* and the Elders, the festive mood, participation and celebration of *ya bu swa dikkan* takes place as selected Bajju adult filed in one-by-one to partake. The solemn ceremonies ushers blessings and freshness of spiritual presence. What follows later comes afterwards, the older women and other members of the family or community partake in the eating of the *Gbaam* and the chicken that were slaughtered, which demonstrates more of the socio-cultural charity of the Bajju people.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In the African and Asian continents, this twenty-first century has witnessed academics and scholars proffering through research strong elements for inculturation and contextualization. Through the models and approaches, they are placing deep religious symbols, biblical and faith content at the service of cultural variables for conscious assimilation and integration. Perhaps they are seeking to reduce the heavy content expression of the Europeanization of Christian faith, theology and worship that was promoted by the Medieval Theologians, Scholars and the Magisterium. Now, it is acceptable and a welcome proposal that engaging on the exposition of faith and culture, these

variables do not oppose each other, but appropriately agree on the level of praxis or on the field of evangelization is an existential reality in the twenty-first century. The transposition that faith can be expressed in cultural sensibilities of any given people by their language, stories, proverbs, symbols, dance and music has been the huge development taught by the Second Vatican Council as a clear symbol of inculturation that promotes evangelization. Weighing ethnic values in cultic meals and putting them at the service of Christian practice, as Communion Service, uplifts and promotes features of indigenization and reception of faith. The Catholic Church teaches in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 37 that:

Even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people's way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.

The empirical evaluation of this study seeks to underscore and propose the Bajju cultic meal of *ya bu swa dikkan* to become integrated and inculturated into the liturgy of initiating, giving the young people *First Holy Communion* and preserving a culture-faith tradition, extracting and purifying cultural elements that have deep nuances thus offending the Christian faith.

As evaluated and analyzed above, the very act of eating and drinking in Bajju cultic meal is not just the same as domesticating a normal meal which just gives daily nutritional energy. As evaluated and presented that the Bajju people celebrate cultic meals alongside ceremonies like naming a new born child, the marriage of young couples or the burial of distinguished elders or title holders in the community, it is clearly demonstrated that in more unique occasions, food and drink are heavily used by the Bajju People in what can be termed a "liturgical ritual" by which they demonstrate and illustrate in symbolic gestures the religio-cultural variables in the special feasts of *Dikkan*. We made the point that the cultic meal eaten to usher the eating of new crops or roots is cherished the annual festival of *ya bu swa dikkan* in Ka'jju (Bajju land), which literary means: participating in a ritual meal that is the *bond that promotes love and unity*. By its practice it brings people together to appreciate nature, culture and faith.

Finally, it is expected that this paper will promote and enliven the richness and cultural value that lies in the communal sharing, to worship the Supreme Deity, *Kazzah ñ Tswa*, while servicing the immediate need of the people in the family or

community at large. The aspect of inculturating *ya bu swa dikkan* in the religio-cultural world view of the Bajju people is working towards practical evangelization, catechesis and growth of the Christian faith in Kal'jju. This discipline if properly assessed, taught and accommodated will help in the deep-rooted integration, application of cultural values that will promote the quick assimilation of faith-cultural variables, thus leading to a comprehensive praxis-faith-culture.

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