

FESTIVALS AND THEIR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AMONG THE KADUNG PEOPLE OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper sought to examine the types of festivals prevalent among the Kadung people of Plateau State and their significance in an ever changing world. The Kadung people like many other societies in Africa possess cultural indices which are unique to them and which help shape and sustain their age long history in the face of modernity and change orchestrated by globalization. Some of these cultural practices seem to have lost their value due to globalization in the form of western education and religious factors. The essence of this article is to highlight the values of the Kadung culture in relation to festivities and their crucial significance to the society.

Introduction

Communities the world over have their own forms of festivals which serve as a symbol of the culture of such communities or people or even a race which distinguishes them from other people or cultures. A people's culture signifies their way of life. Among the Kadung people, there are various aspects of culture; these include dances, festivals, social way of life and many others. However, for

the purpose of this paper, we shall concentrate on cropping, harvest (tangha ma awundya), nghan-tughi (beer festival of the ancestors) and hunting (par) festivals and their cultural significance to the Kadung people.

Types of Festivals Among the Kadung People

Among the Kadung people, festivals play a very prominent role. This is attributed to the fact that some of these festivals determine the period of cultivating crops, harvesting and also serves as a way of generating resources for the general development of the community. The various types of festivals shall be discussed below in relation to their significance to the society.

Cropping (Yaksa) Festival

Rites of passage of temporary cycle are related to the cropping or planting season among Kadung people in the sense that it marks the period of cultivation, sowing, followed by weeding. With the onset of the rains, the priest of *Yilum* consults the spirit world for the most auspicious day to perform cropping rites. He may however procrastinate the date through divination. The priest then goes to the shrine of *Yilum*, offers sacrifices and prays on behalf of the people for a bumper harvest and protection from the perils of machet, hoe, and snakes.

The priest also prays for health through out the rainy season for two reasons: this is the period when farmers need strength to work on the farms; to clear, cultivate, sow, apply manure, weed and nurture the crops. Secondly, the beginning of the rainy season is a particularly difficult period because their food resources were usually low and almost spent by this time. This is the beginning of the year, and most farmers are usually anxious over whether their food stores would last to May ending or the beginning of June when early crops would be available. Thus, they needed good health, for any ill-health during this season would be disastrous since it would imply that fewer hands would be present on the farm. It is for this reason that nobody may work on the farm

unless these cropping rites have been performed and accepted by the spirit world. The processes of change such as westernization ushered into Kadung by Christianity, colonialism, Hausa-Fulani and Islamic influences have influenced Kadung rites of passages of temporary cycle to the point that most of them have been largely abandoned.

The cropping season was not a period of marriages or festivities. The festival of cropping was the major socio-ritual activity opening the year. When desperate couples married during the period, they placed their parents at awkward situations because there would be the need for time and resources to entertain in-laws in the face of very scarce resources. Furthermore, not many people would like to take time off their farm work to attend to such issues. In most cases, the Kadung society frowned at rainy-season marriage because it was usually suspected that the couple had something to hide, particularly in the form of the abominable case of teenage pregnancy or pregnancy out of marriage.

In addition to the description given above, Kadung festival is usually and mostly dominated by men. It should be noted that women were not totally left out. *Ndaji* was a cropping festival organized by women in *Kadungland*. This festival was organized by women only at the beginning of every rainfall, between March and April. This is performed in anticipation of increased soil fertility and bumper harvest. Dances like *kamas* and *buskur* featured prominently during this rite. It signified the closure of social activities and signaled the beginning of more serious farm work.

Harvest (Tangha ma Awundya) Festival

Like in the case of planting or cropping, the same situation obtains during harvest period. Before anybody harvested his crops, the priest had to give his authorization by traditionally announcing the new crop festival. Before the communal commencement of harvest, some secret rites are performed in honor of the deity of harvest in *Limchin* and in other high places of

the deity throughout *Kadungland*. In this rite, the first fruits were ritually offered to the deities as a token of two things: first, it was a symbolic act of presenting the new crops on the farm to the collective body of the spirit world including God, the deities and ancestors. They were symbolically supposed to taste fresh crops before any human being did. In this regard, all foods presented to the gods were prepared from new crops and the beer brewed was from new corn or millet. To breach this taboo was to incur the wrath of the gods which could spell doom for the entire community. Where elders violated this taboo, they did it secretly and ritually, and not publicly.

Secondly, this was a rite of thanksgiving to the spirit beings, beginning with Almighty God, Vi, through the deities and ancestors, who tasted the first fruits on behalf of Vi, the supreme being. Thus, the priest performed thanksgiving rituals and concluded with a plea to the spirit world that the people are thankful, but that like the proverbial chicken, they will eat what has been brought into the barn, and when it is finished, they will wipe their mouths clean and look up again as if they had eaten nothing. This is a way of reminding the spirit realm to bear with humans because they are often ingrates no matter the good blessing bestowed upon them by God, the deities and the ancestors!

Harvest time usually coincided with or was closely followed by threshing festivals which inseparably formed a part of it. As discussed below, masquerades like *Njang-gai*, *Wang-kang*, *Anvu'ush* and *Awaghan* were harvest and threshing masquerades who served as guards to the crops being harvested and threshed. Any individual who was able to provide enough beer, (ngham) and food to organize this festival could equally host it.

Ngam-Tughi (Beer Festival of the Ancestors)

Ngam-tughi was a festival that was carried out after every three years, whereas that of the Mupun, known as *bwenene* occurred every fourteen years (Danfulani 1996, cf. 1995, 1995a) and the Ngas mos (maws) won (wong) septennials, that is, after an

interval of every seven years, according to Wambutda (1991). It was performed in the month of November to commemorate the departure and return of the spirit of Kadung ancestors. It was also celebrated in very exceptional cases where a prominent member in Kadung traditional cult worship died.

This festival lasted for three days. Food was prepared and beer was brewed in abundance to be eaten and drunk by the public, mostly the initiated and the aged, as people moved from house to house, greeting the people, particularly, homes that lost loved ones in recent times. It was also a period where several types of Kadung masquerades visited the society. *Madok* and *Yikun ma vwool* were however exceptions, because the first does not visit unless with great and careful preparations and the second signifies a category of masquerades that do not mingle with women and the uninitiated.

Anybody who wanted to marry a widow *Yi-kumak*, waited until after this festival to do this. This was so because the moment a husband died, his spirit was said to have entered a small hut (normally found in every compound) and resided there until after this festival. His spirit came out during the festival and returned with the visiting ancestors in the form of masquerades. This informs the reason why people and masquerades alike go round greeting in houses that lost some of their members in recent times.

It was a rule that any body who went to the woman to befriend her before the festival was over was heavily fined by the relatives of the deceased man accordingly. On the night of the final day of the festival, masquerades went and opened ritual huts that housed spirits of deceased men and released them to the land of the ancestors. It was then that any interested persons approached the *Yi-kumak*, widow, proposing marriage. Dances like *bel* and *ngundiang* usually feature during this festival.

Hunting (Par) Festival

Hunting is for seasoned men of valor, who look forward to it with hope and happiness. They welcome and embrace the hunting as the art that will provide them the opportunity of demonstrating their magico-macho powers, courage, experience and skills which had been acquired over the years. This is another season for the proven soldiers to begin rehearsals for real action at the war front. Hunting was a mini battle ground where new crops of Kadung warriors were discovered and trained. It bore all the characteristics of war and brought with it all the fame, pomp, fanfare, pageantry and trophies that success in war could confer on an individual. There were numerous kinds of danger in hunting. Here, we mention three outstanding ones. There was the peril of being killed by a dangerous animal such as those that belong to the cat family. Very often when hunting, heroes strayed over their line and mingled with men of other clans (that was never done, for hunting men stay together in groups; the person may then be abandoned to face the tiger or lioness. Secondly, men often fought over the kill, arguing that it was their arrow, dog, machet or any of their weapons that first hit the animal, gave the fatal blow or the death blow. It was to avoid such quarrels that hunting men go out according to blood kin. However, in rare instances, the quarrel may get out of hand and a person or group of persons may be fatally wounded or even killed. Thirdly, a person may deliberately harm another person because of some flimsy excuse or enmity, all in the name of an aim that went awry or astray.

Naska Kadung (Kadung Day)

This a more recent 20th century phenomena compared to the other four discussed above. It is a festival which usually holds at the end of every year to thank God for long live and prosperity every December. During this festival, all Kadung sons and daughters from within and those in diasporas gather at Kumbul, the district headquarters, to observe the various cultures of the people as cultural groups display their talents to the admiration of their

kinsmen and visitors alike.

However, before the commencement of the events for the day, the various cultural groups from all the villages will converge at the chief's place and lead him to the festival arena dancing along as they moved. This festival is usually organized by the Kadung Development Association (KDA), an umbrella body of the entire Kadung people. It is during this festival also that all kinds of masquerades come out and display their masquerade dance. The primary purpose of organizing *naska kadung* is to bring Kadung people together to contribute both in cash and in kind towards the development of the land most especially in terms of education, health and other social challenges bedeviling the Kadung community. This is done through fund raising; the proceeds of which is vested under the custody of the Kadung Development Association.

In conclusion, the five festivals, planting, cropping, harvest, hunting and Kadung day are regarded as rites of passage of temporary cycle because they are seasonal. They come and go like the wind, but during their set times, and are aided in their passage by the appropriate performances of rituals that usher and terminate them.

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