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# THE TRADO-RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW OF BARANZAN PEOPLE: AN ETHNOGARHY OF THE BAJJU IN THE MIDDLE BELT OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT This paper explores and evaluates the Trado-Religious Worldview of the Bajju, a tribal group in the middle belt of Nigeria. The study reveals the historicity and worldview of the Bajju people, who were traditionally horticulturalists and hunters, valuing large families. The research delves into the socio-cultural structure of the Bajju, their traditional beliefs, and their contemporary religious context. By utilizing data from questionnaires and emic experiences, the paper provides insight into the unique cultural and traditional heritage of the Bajju people in their milieu. The findings shed light on the Bajju culture, including leadership, relationships, marriage, family, social activities, kinship, and religion, offering a comprehensive understanding of this indigenous tribe in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Bajju, Baranzan People, Ethnography Study, Trado-Religious Worldview

## Introduction

The *Bajju* is a tribal group located in the middle belt of Nigeria. McKinney notes the change of name of the people group. They were formerly known as *Kaje* who speak *Jju* but later known as *Bajju.* The idea of *Kaje* is mostly known and used by outsiders especially Hausa-Fulani, who first used the term. It was probably derived from

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the *Kajju,* the territory or land of the *Bajju.* Today, the term *Kaje* is considered a pejorative term by the *Bajju*. (McKinney 2019: 129, 312). Presently, they have established a chiefdom with its administrative headquarters based in Kurmin-Bi (*Dibbyi*) Zonkwa, Zangon Kataf Local Government Area, and their paramount ruler is the *Agwam Bajju I,* Malam Nuhu Bature (Wundengba 2019). Traditionally, Carol V. McKinney argues that the Bajju were horticulturalists and hunters, so they cherished large families (McKinney 2019: 363–65). Also, in "Nigeria: In Bajju Kingdom, Respect for Traditional Values and Taboos Take Centre-Stage," Sunday Isuwa notes that the Bajju are popularly known as great hunters and farmers (Isuwa 2013). Rebecca Luka Aboi (2018: 17) explains the geographical features of Southern Kaduna in a state that is politically acknowledged as a Northern State. The people's land, *Kajju,* is between latitude $90^0$ and $10^0$ North and longitude $7.50^0$ and $8.50^0$ East in Southern Kaduna. It is located in the savannah region of Nigeria, with some clusters of hills scattered throughout the domain. The state's Northern region is predominantly Muslim, and the Southern region is primarily Christian. So, the Southern region prefers to be identified as a Middle Belt region, identifying with the predominantly Christian states within the Middle Belt of Nigeria. McKinney reveals that the Hausa-Fulani from the most extended Zazzau Emirate, with its principal city in Zaria, claimed Southern Zaria, including the Bajju area, within their territory. So, the Zazzau Emirate refuses to acknowledge the Southern region as part of the Middle Belt (McKinney 2019: 577). The tribal group is the most populous indigenous tribe, as alluded to in 1900 to the last census of 2006 (Aboi 2018: 18; Kunhiyop 1984: 10). Aboi notes that Bajju covers three different local Government areas. A significant part of the people resides in the Zangon Kataf Local Government area of Kaduna State. The others are in Jama'a and Kachia Local Government areas. The Bajju are the third largest group, following Hausa and Fulani (McKinney 2019: 366; Aboi 2018: 18; Kunhiyop 1984: 10). Like the rest of Africans, *Bajju* have their unique cultural and traditional heritage. The Traditional Religion or worldview was dominant and cherished in *Kajju. Kajju* simply means the land occupied by the *Bajju* in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. The *Bajju* communities were rooted in culture and Traditional Religion, which reflected their worldview and beliefs until the advent of Christianity.

In this paper, I explore and evaluate the Trado-Religious Worldview of the *Bajju* in an ethnographic study that reveals their historicity and worldview. Using assessed data collected from Ten questionnaires and my emic experience, I provide an understanding of the traditional Religion and culture of the people in their milieu. First, I begin with the *Bajju* socio-cultural structure and traditional beliefs to achieve those above. Secondly, I focus on the *Bajju* trado-religious worldview, and thirdly, the con-

temporary religious context of the people. The research is an enlightenment on the *Bajju* culture, showing the socio-cultural structure comprising of leadership, structure of relationships, marriage, family, social activities, kinship, and religion of the *Bajju* in the Middle Belt of Nigeria.

## The Bajju Historiography, Sociocultural Structure and Traditional Beliefs

The *Bajju* chiefdom, with its administrative headquarters based in Zonkwa in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area, is the location of the palace of their present paramount ruler, the *Agwam Bajju* (Wundengba 2019). The *Bajju* speak the *Jju* language, and their land is called *Kajju*. The *Bajju* have their unique historiography and locally conditioned socio-cultural and traditional Heritage. John S. Mbiti (1990: 101) acknowledges the distinct nature of Africans that reflects the particular social and political organization. The language of the people is a gift from God and serves as their identity. *Jju* is based on the rich culture and tradition of the people, a member of the Central Platoid group of languages within the Benue Congo language family (Aboi 2019: IV; McKinney 2019: 129–30).

According to the oral tradition, the *Bajju* emerged from Bauchi State and later settled in the Plateau state of Nigeria. Musa Asake traces the history back to the father of Baranzan, Achinge, and reveals his broad perspective on the foundational historiography of the migration of Bajju. (Asake 1982: 2–5). Six out of ten respondents to my research study, aged 25–34 and 65, believe that Bajju's years of existence as a people are unknown. The remaining four respondents believe the time can be traced to around 1000–2000 years ago. Considering the two opinions, it can be concluded that the Bajju ethnic group has an ancient background.

The people belong to the *Jarawa* people group, and it is said that due to overpopulation around the *Fubir* hills, a group among the *Jarawa* people broke up and settled at *Dutsen Kwon*. Samuel W. Kunhiyop (1993: 50–51) notes the relationship between Bajju and Jarawa, known as *dangi*, which exists between them to this day, which means they have a family connection. According to oral tradition, the group is known as the *Irigwe*, and they settled at *Miango* in Jos, Plateau state. The two brothers of *Miango*, *Zamfara* (elder) and *Awai* (younger), moved and settled at *Chawai* in the Kauru local government area of Kaduna state. *Awai* became the founder of the *Chawai* people group. At the same time, *Zamfara* moved and settled at *Fabuwang*, which is a place found in a community called *Angwar Tabo* in Zangon Kataf local government area (Aboi 2018: 19; McKinney 2019: 549–60; Kunhiyop 1993: 50–51; Kato 1974: 17). *Zamfara* had two sons, *Baranzan* and *Aka'at*, and their mother's name was *Zambrang*. The two sons took their father's occupation, which was hunting, and their

hunting areas were the forest and plains of *Dubbyi* (Kurmin Bi). *Baranzan* migrated to Kurmin Bi, showing many animals (Aboi 2018: 20–21).

According to oral traditions, *Baranzan*, the ancestral father of the Bajju, gave birth to five sons. Ten respondents/participants in my research study (interview) affirmed that the ancestral father of the *Bajju* is *Baranzan* who had five children that later turned to the five clans in *Kajju*. These five sons founded villages over time through fission, just as Mckinney (2019: 570) affirms notes fission and occasionally fusion typified Plateau and related minority ethnic groups such as Bajju and other Southern Kaduna tribal groups. These villages developed into larger territorial units or clans and are related to each other even though they are semi-autonomous (Aboi 2018: 21; McKinney 2019: 570). The units or clans are named after the five sons: *Banehuwan*, *Bayintsok*, *Bayinbyin*, *Batadon,* and *Bayidwang*. *Baranzan* cleared a place for a meeting called *Kazzu*, and that is where *Kajju* (a place occupied by *Bajju*) derived its name (Gunn 1956: 110; Aboi 2018: 21). Notably, there are linguistic-cultural similarities among the *Bajju*, *Jarawa,* and *Miango* because they are considered as close relations.

The five Bajju clans were structured and had leaders who were the elders. They had the final authority on matters that affected the entire people. So, they met once a year at *Dibbyi* to deliberate on issues (Aboi 2019). McKinney acknowledges the system of Bajju leadership exemplified by Baranzan. She avers, "Baranzan and the elders oversaw the well-being of the entire ethnic group. He, as the ruling elder (Gado), was a political, religious, and judicial leader" (McKinney 2019: 619). The leaders in each clan, known as *Gado,* led the people as the Chief Priest who handled both spiritual and socioeconomic matters (Aboi 2018: 23). The leadership was decentralized leadership, with ruling elders of the clans as leaders (McKinney 2019: 739). Mbiti observes that clans are subdivisions of a tribe, and the system varies across Africa. He acknowledges that clans can either be patriarchal or matriarchal. So, some clans are founded by men or women (Mbiti 1990: 103; McKinney 2019: 487). The *Bajju* clan system was patriarchal primarily because of the *Gado* system of leadership handled by men. McKinney observes that the leading *Gado* mostly wore the skin of a leopard as a sign of leadership, and the second *Gado* wore the skin of a goat. All others wore the skin of any kind of animal (Mckinney 2019: 630; Vasina 1990: 74). Vansina (1990: 74) states the essence of wearing leopard skin is the quintessence of leadership in Western and Central Africa.

**Banyethwan.** The people in this category are known as the people of the mountains, and it is the clan of the first son of *Baranzan*. The *Gado* (leader) of the clan lives in a village called *Sakwak*. The villages of this clan include *Sakwak*, *Kamrum*, *Marsa*,

*Kurdan*, *Zauru, Afana, Chenchuk, Durhwan-jjim, Katsit, Kpunyei, Ungwar Rimi* and *Abofot* (Aboi 2018: 23).

**Bayidwang.** This simply means people of *Dwang*, the name of a stream. The leader lives in *Dibyyi* (Kurmin Bi), and *Kangurara* (*Dwang*) is a stream found within *Bayidwang* near a village called *Azuturung Karyi* (Kato 1975: 52). Kunhiyop observed the changes in the names of villages as a result of interaction with the Hausa and British colonial administrators. *Bayidwang* was changed to *Bayiduwang* (Kunhiyop 1984; Aboi 2018: 23).

**Bayinbyin.** The clan simply means people of the drum. The leader, known as *Gado,* lives in a village called *Akadon*. The people of the clan are found in other villages like *Abvuwan*, *Arebvok*, *Awadon*, *Tsoriyang,* and *Ciyuwa* (Aboi 2018: 23–24).

**Batadon.** The name means the people of *Tadon*. The *Gado* was Twan, who migrated from *Kukwan-Ayagan* and settled in the present-day Madakiya village. Precisely, Twan left *Tsok-Akanuwang* in *Kukwan-Ayagan* in search of greener pastures. The first people who migrated from *Kukwan-Ayagan* in search of fertile farmlands and animals to hunt settled at a village called *Azankirwa*. The name was difficult for the Hausa rulers to pronounce during the reign of Gimba Allahmagani under the Jema'a Emirate around 1925. The name Madakiya was given by a Hausa ruler who could not pronounce *Azankirwa* correctly. It was also believed that the name came from a river called Madaki Kogi by the tax collectors of the Jema'a Emirate. In the settlement of this clan, there is a Hausa settlement located close to the Railway Bridge and waterfall near a town called Kafanchan. According to oral tradition, its inhabitants descended from formerly enslaved people (Aboi 2018: 24–25). Presently, twelve villages are under the Batadon clan. They are *Kukwan-Ayagan, Amanstok, Asansun, Azankirwa, Azuhuwo, Bodari/Atutyen, Bvonkpang, Duccu-adon, Dunyring, Hurgyam, Kpong,* and *Zat.*

**Bayintsok.** This means people of the hills. The *Gado* lived in a village called *Kanshua* (Tsohon Gida in the Hausa language) and the other villages of the clan are *Atabak*, *Azaggom*, *Baiyirwap*, *Kafom*, *Duhogwai*, *Jei Ayazanom, Karyyi*, *Jei Bakut, Jei Aruguga*, *Jei Arimugu*, *Jei Ncwang,* and *Nhhwok* (Aboi 2018: 25).

**Bayintrung.** The people were known as the people who unloaded their headloads. The clan initially had members from other ethnic entities and were later accepted as part of the *Bajju* (Kato 1975: 52). Today, they are recognized initially as the sixth clan of the *Bajju* without any discrimination. They have a district in the *Bajju* chiefdom known as the Farman District (Aboi 2018: 26).

*Bajju* people define relationships in the household in terms of three social statuses. The first is the family head, the husband, the second is the wife, and the last

is the children. The specific role definitions for these statuses create the distinctive structure of *Bajju's* socio-cultural life. Ten of the respondents in my research study acknowledged family as one of the cultural and social structures of the *Bajju* from its inception.

**Head of the House (The Husband).** In *Bajju* culture, the man is the head of the family and is called *Antyok-karyi,* the house's owner. The head is expected to be in charge and in total control. When the head of the home exercises control, he is judged to be a real man, but when he shows weakness, people refer to him as a woman. Therefore, if a man wants to be respected as a man, he must remain in control and must not allow his wife to dominate him (Aboi 2018: 28–29).

As the head of the family, the man's responsibilities include providing for all family needs, holding power, and demanding respect from the family members. He has the responsibility of providing for his family's needs. The man can decide on the number of wives and children he wants. The number of children is not a subject of discussion. Instead, he aspires to get as many as humanly possible, especially male children (Aboi 2018: 29). It is also his responsibility to establish a good extended family network upon which his family members relate well to their extended family members. In modern homes, for example, on political matters, the head of the house is the one who decides what is most proper and advantageous for the family. He decides who the family should vote for in an election and what political party to support. While the family members serve his interests, he also serves their economic interests by supplying their daily and special needs. The head of the family is considered the spiritual leader of the family. He is responsible for organizing and offering sacrifices for the family during religious festivals. He provides corn for his wife or wives to brew local liquor. The children also obey and take his directives on spiritual matters (Aboi 2018: 29).

When the head of the family dies, he is buried by his brothers or immediate family members. The widows were expected to be careful in their conduct and walk on the ground not to disturb the husband's spirit in the world of the living dead or the ancestors underground (McKinney 2019: 451–52). The Bajju culture, under normal circumstances, expects death from the elderly. It is abnormal for senior members of the family to bury a junior member. The children and the mother have nothing to say concerning such a burial arrangement. His younger brother could take his widow in marriage, or the family decides to perpetuate his name. The widow is not allowed to have illicit extramarital affairs. In contrast, in the husband's house, she is allowed to be inherited by one male relative to keep the family together (McKinney 2019: 536–38, 1957–59). In a polygamous context, the son of

the eldest wife inherits the younger wife to remember his late father and keep the family's name (Aboi 2018: 30).

The husband is, however, free to maintain concubines and take more wives without the wife's consent. In childbirth, the will of the husband is the wife's will, and in most cases, it will continue as long as she can bear children. The more children a woman bears, the greater her influence on her husband or the favors she gets from him, especially male children (McKinney 2019: 2328). The culture considers a woman as an outsider in her household. The land, household, children, and products of her labor are owned by her husband. She is considered the property of her husband.

**The Wife.** The wife is the woman of the house, called *Anaa-karyyi* in the Jju language. It means "the mother or woman of the house" (Aboi 2018: 30). The wife's responsibility is to obey her husband and bear children. She is to cook, participate in farm work, entertain visitors, and be hospitable to extended family members (McKinney 2019: 2581). She must prepare some meals for ritual purposes, even though she will not partake. Bajju men see women as weak and dependent people. McKinney rightly states the perceived importance of multiple wives in the Bajju culture as enrichment for a man's household and social prestige (McKinney 2019: 2581).

Regarding physical maturity, women are considered a little more mature than children. Predominantly, the women's role is to handle domestic affairs, which are sometimes burdensome because of the impossibility of fulfilling roles outside the home. Her husband will trust and retain her if she is an effective and consistent good housewife. In social matters, she is to participate, cooperate, and see that the family works as a unit to the husband's glory. She must submit her economic interest to her husband. In political and religious matters, she is expected to support her husband (Aboi 2018: 30). In the context of multiple wives, the first wife is considered the senior among others. She controls the others and delegates responsibilities to them, and they often call her mama, which means mother (McKinney 2019: 2659).

**The Children (*Nawon*).** Bajju regards children as blessings and gifts from God—the more children a woman bears, the stronger the security in marriage with her husband. The responsibilities and expectations for the children vary based on sex. The culture is patrilinear, so children are viewed as their father's possession, not their mother's (McKinney 2019: 1955). The children can only be of the mother when a man has not given the bride price, which can only be of the mother. The man will lose legal rights over the wife and the children (Sanke 1976: 34–35). At the same time, the father, the head of the house, is the sole authority and expects

everyone to report to him. Male children report directly to their father but give indirect accounts to their mother. Male children bear distinctive responsibilities which harmonize the family structure as a single entity. The senior male child presides over a family meeting in the father's absence. Even when they marry and have a family, they are expected to live with or close to their parents. When old age cannot permit the parents to provide for themselves, in such situations, the parents are brought to live with them, or they move to live with their parents (Aboi 2018: 30–31). They are responsible for all their younger siblings until they are old enough to fend for themselves in their father's absence. They work hand in hand with their uncles to give out their sisters in marriage. Though they have the right to an inheritance, if they are underage when their father dies, the paternal relations assume the administration of the deceased farms until the children are of age to inherit it (Aboi 2018: 31).

Male children were traditionally expected to be responsible in different ways. They are accountable for perpetuating the family line, bearing as many children as possible to keep their father's name through generations. When the widowed mother desires to remarry someone who is not the deceased relative, she seeks the approval of the children, and she has to go back to her biological parents for such marriage arrangements (Aboi 2018: 31). They are expected to work on their father's farm until marriageable age. They must remain close to their father to observe, learn, and become familiar with their roles, rights, and responsibilities to other family members. They assist their father in social, political, and religious matters. They alone have the right of inheritance, which is patriarchal and patrilineal. Male children are the *dityin karyi*, the home's foundation (McKinney 2019: 2338, 2716, 2738).

The female children have limited responsibilities because they relinquish their role at marriage when they formally become part of their husband's family (Aboi 2018: 31). McKinney (2019: 2716) rightly asserts that female children are known as *nawon atasa*, that is, children from outside the family. In comparison, female children, yet unmarried, are required to help their mothers in discharging domestic activities. They must support the family, especially collaborating with their brothers for their father's good name. They have to refrain from pre-marital sexual activities for the sake of bringing honor and respect to their father's house. They have to be industrious and can cook delicious meals to avoid embarrassment to the mother when they are married (Aboi 2018, 31).

The relationship of the people affects their attitudes and actions towards one another. In societies where people place value on cooperative relationships, interaction, and integration, individualistic and nuclear societies do not exist. The nature

of the existing relationship affects their response to social changes (Aboi 2018, 68). From my emic perspective, Aboi rightly expresses the context of a typical village in *Kajju*. She says that the village is the center of human activities and has a paradigm that reflects the structure of the relationship and its nature. People tend to live together based on clan, lineage, and family line (Aboi 2018: 69). The importance of land and how it unifies different families and lineages within a clan system is crucial. Specific terminologies in the *Bajju* trado-social organization provide the framework for description and analysis in this section. The term *wap,* meaning nation; kankrang, meaning village, *kwai* meaning clan or relatives; kayat *karyyi,* meaning extended family; and *karyyi,* meaning family, describes the structure of the relationships in the *Bajju* trado-social context (Aboi 2018: 69).

**Nwap (Nation).** The term refers to a people group, nation, or members of the same language group (McKinney 2019: 4337). *Bajju* people speak the same language and have similar cultures. A typical *Bajju* man considers his tribal people his brothers; therefore, hospitality is extended. The *Bajju* concept of brotherly love is seen in the slogan *cat bayaan,* which means "love one another." Hospitality is extended to visitors or strangers to make them feel at home (Aboi 2018: 69).

**Kankrang (Village).** A typical village in *Kajju* contains clans. In a clan, several extended family members are members of the same pedigrees. From my emic perspective, I observed that different families live in their respective clans and occupy the portions allocated or inherited by their ancestors. Aboi asserts, "The main determining factor in the allocation of land portions in the family is where one's ancestors lived, worshipped, farmed and buried" (Aboi 2018: 70; McKinney 2019: 2962). Clans within a village are considered proximity to family, lineage, and clan. So, a village in *Kajju* simply reflects family ties and clan affiliation with a ruling elder known as *Gado kankrang.*

**Kwai (Clan).** A clan simply means a group of people with a common lineage. Members of a clan live in an ordinary village or occupy the same community, but sometimes, migration occurs because of hunting and farming. The people of a clan may not necessarily live together in one village or territory, but they maintain close ties as a clan. The *Bajju* clan is a group of patrilineal descent. The rule of agnatic descent recognizes a man's sister as one in his descent group, not her children. Although clan members have a common ancestor and may live together in the community, they do not have a common inheritance. They, however, cooperate in religious, political, and economic activities. Usually, relationships on the clan lines are more potent than those of tribal or village affinities. In a clan, there are many lineages and families, and the number of families in a lineage depends on the number of children of the founder of a particular lineage (Aboi 2018: 71–72).

Property rights are conferred in lineages, and these properties are primarily lands shared among different families on a patrilineal and senior basis. Private ownership is foreign, as most things are jointly owned. The land is inherited from one's past ancestors (McKinney 2019: 2962). The economic interest of inheritance is so great that it usually determines the loving care the deceased's family requires. The compelling economic interests of inheritance often threaten cooperation and the corporate identity of families and lineages.

**Kayat Karyyi (Extended Family).** They are considered members of the same family, first and second generation, because the *Bajju* live patrilocally with their extended family (McKinney 2019: 2958–59). It usually stems from the typical male; thus, one's parents, brothers, sisters, and children are considered extended family members. The village is the primary residential unit, and within villages, people relate to one another according to the distinctions of clan, lineage, or family identity (McKinney 2019: 510). It is the practice of the Bajju people to extend mutual support to extended family members and help them in times of need. Caring for the husband's family is upon the wife or wives, who are obligated from their business to fulfill their family responsibility. A man also must provide economic assistance to his parents-in-law and their families; if he fails, he is considered irresponsible. Extended family groups are significant in a financial corporation and are demonstrated in corporate farming and in the exchange of children to help in some economic activities. The extended family is also a factor in resolving disputes; elders of the various lineages meet to resolve a conflict. On the other hand, one faces opposition from his relatives when he violates the norms of the clan. This usually happens to a person or people who act foolishly and are a source of shame and disgrace to the whole clan (McKinney 2019: 72–73).

In the pattern of settlement, it was determined by blood and kinship relationships. The settlement patterns were based on two main determinants: economic and security. Nucleated and dispersed settlements can be viewed in Bajju communities. One of the reasons for adopting a nucleated settlement pattern was security. Most villages were secluded at the foothills or surrounded by chains of forest, also composed of clans containing fifty or more people. The two main settlement patterns are the Northern and Southern Bajju settlements (Aboi 2018: 75).

The security of the Bajju community has gone beyond their compounds. They had a united force that used a horn known as the *Ajjwa*, a West African hartebeest, to call men to war (McKinney 2019: 996). When men heard that horn, they ran to get their weapons and began to act like hunters by moving consciously, crawling, and hiding behind trees. The warriors drank local liquor and some quantity of traditional medicine for protection (McKinney 2019: 76–77). McKinney notes that

*dimyak* is the *Bajju* description for the strategy of warfare that applies to hunting (McKinney 2019: 999). If a *Bajju* warrior killed a non-*Bajju* in war, he was praised. And, whenever an enemy warrior was dead, the first to put his mouth inside the corpse's mouth took the glory by cutting off the head. It was taken to the gods, and from there, it was buried inside mud for about seven days, and jubilation and celebration continued for victory. Later, the skull was taken to the shrine of the gods (*Abvoi*) as an exhibit (McKinney 2019: 965).

In terms of offenders, they first went to a diviner to inquire from the gods whether they would succeed. He, therefore, determined whether or not to set out for the case. The father's room was the first in the compound as the family head, a symbol of authority, and an occupied security position. The wives were at the end for security reasons (Aboi 2018: 77). The culture considered social security a family obligation. Social security is upon family members concerning the following people: widows, orphans, aged parents, and physically or mentally disabled people (McKinney 2019: 3886; Aboi 2018: 78–79). The culture practices the levirate system in which the widow becomes the wife of a surviving male family member. If she refuses to marry one of the family members, she must not marry, and if she remarries, she must leave the deceased husband's house altogether. The orphans are the responsibility of the brother(s) of the deceased because the widow has no right over her children. If the orphans are mature, they remain in their father's house to care for the home, family members, and their mother.

Older people are well respected and provided for, and it is the responsibility of the children to take care of their aged parents. Usually, the last male child has to live in the same compound with the aged parents to take care of them and assume automatic responsibility and leadership as soon as the parents become inactive. The other male and female children are expected to assist their younger brothers in caring for their aged parents. In the case of a family where all children are female, they can arrange with their husbands to allow them to send one male child to live with their aged parents. It was a shameful thing for one to live with the son-in-law when there was a family to take care of the aged parent. Each family handles caring for people with disabilities (Aboi 2018: 79).

The obligation of the living to the dead was the extended families' responsibility. The deceased becomes part of the living and the dead. This means that the deceased's spirit continues to live (Mbiti 1970: 32). The deceased spirit is alive, watching the rites performed in his honor to help the deceased enter the afterlife. The living needed to worm the deceased's spirit through burning guinea corn or millet chaff to help the deceased enter the afterlife (Aboi 2018: 80–81).

## Bajju Trado-Religious Worldview

The Bajju believe in the existence of a "Supreme Being" (*Agwam Kaza*) that is transcendent and can only be reached through lesser gods (Mbiti 1970: 29–30). So, God in *Jju* is known as *Kaza*. *Bajju* believes that God is the Creator of the entire universe, but they don't have any creation story (McKinney 2019: 731–32). Instead of worshipping the Creator of the universe, they worshipped the god *Abvoi,* known also as *Dodo* (Onyeakagbu 2020). The god was kept in a shrine overseen by the custodian known as *Magaji Abvoi*. The lesser gods are believed to be intermediaries and envoys of the "Supreme Being" who interact with the priests and the initiates of the various cults on a ritually regulated basis. In my research study, ten respondents said the *Abvoi* system of the cult was harsh on women and children, and it was highly secretive to them. The custodians of the *Bajju* gods were perceived as powerful people who handled spiritual matters in the land. The respondents state that the system was eradicated with the advent of Christianity in *Kajju*.

The Bajju observed some certain rituals and rites. Ten of the sampled respondents in my research study affirmed that the *Bajju*, from inception, had rites and ceremonies such as rain rites, protection/medicine rites, farming rites, hoe rites, harvest rites, and miscellaneous rites. There is a unanimous agreement on these practices as Trado-Religious exercises in *Kajju*. In each of the *Bajju* rites, cleansing or purification occurred, and it was used to purify the individual, household, community, and ethnic group. For instance, *Kanak's* purification was meant to halt death from returning to strike another person. Many *Bajju* rites were sealed when the *priest, the Gado,* hid his office staff on the ground. As he did so, he prayed with authority that the gods should bring to pass the things that have been decided upon at a meeting, and the people, primarily men present, echoed, "Let it be so," same as "amen" (Aboi 2018: 82).

In a specific village, the rain rites were performed at sacred locations where elders would gather to carry out a prescribed ritual (Kunhiyop 1984: 17–18). In times of drought, the worldview is that evil spirits were responsible, leading the priest and rainmakers to conduct rituals at these sacred sites to appease the rain god and overcome the evil spirits' hold on the rain (McKinney 2019: 401–03). Following the completion of the ritual, the community would celebrate by enjoying a meal of cooked food and locally brewed beer in anticipation of the much-needed rain (McKinney 2019: 403).

One particular protection ritual, *yya dikan*, involved mixing around 150 local herbs into locally brewed alcohol and sacrificing a chicken to safeguard the people's well-being and protection (McKinney 2019: 997–99). This rite was utilized in warfare to render individuals invulnerable to their enemies' attacks. However, with the

widespread conversion of the Bajju people to Christianity, the majority now reject these traditional rituals and rites. All ten respondents in my research adamantly oppose the continuation of these practices and traditions that have been a part of Bajju culture since its inception.

The farming rite was a preparation for the farming season. Kato observed that the god *Abvoi* heralded in the morning as a daily routine. Ritual prayers were offered during the farming season to experience a bumper harvest at the end of the season (Kato 1975: 35–36). The priests of every village performed rituals to prepare the land for farming. At that time, no individual was allowed to leave the community, so the ritual would cover all to avoid diseases and grand a successful farm season. The idea is the same with harvest time, the ritual cleansing of the farm tools, and the first fruit given to the priest.

Specific sites were essential to the *Bajju* people. There was a sacred site on a rock called *Bayibyet*, which was revered by the people of a particular village called *Abet*. According to oral tradition, the rock was a means of defense to the people by blinding enemies that went to attack the community. Women who usually take food to the farm had to drop some to the rock; if not, they remained standing. Visitors were free because of their ignorance (Ayuba 2014). There was also the ritual cleansing of selected sites for the new house. It was done to know the right place to build and drive the evil spirits away from the site (Kato 1975: 22–24). The miscellaneous rites included sacred sites, selection of sites for new houses, and rites of passage. The Bajju trado-religious rite of passage consists of the third month, the sixth month, and the child naming ritual. The third and sixth months were times of breaking news to friends and a time of celebration with a pot of liquor (*nkwwa*) (Aboi 2018: 88).

There were several rules, regulations, and taboos. Many of which are related to witchcraft and the spirit world. Some rules were applied to men, some to women, and some to children. Children were not allowed to go out mid-day to eat eggs and meat given by members of other households to avoid wickedness from witches who were perceived to have resided close to the communities. Women were to abstain from some cooking and farm activities for 7 days after childbirth. They were not allowed to eat eggs and meat meant for men for fear of the attack of the witches (Aluwong 2019). The men were not permitted to share the ancestral cult secret with women, they were not allowed to have sex with nursing mothers, and were also not allowed to eat food cooked by a menstruating woman. Men were to put on traditional attire before going to the shrine. There were spiritual implications, fines, exiles, and penalties enforced by the priests and the gods, as well as disobedience to the rules and regulations by all groups. There was a legal sanction to incest,

adultery, theft, revealing secrets of the ancestral cult, abuse or beating of parents, pouring of locally brewed liquor on the ground, drunkenness that causes trouble, women doing the activities of men, and also maltreating her husband. Temple observed that the case of adultery can result in the death of those involved (Temple 1977: 195). Kunhiyop asserts that in the case of murder, adultery, and incest, the culprits were publicly disgraced after undergoing specific ritual cleansing (Kunhiyop 2010). The priests and elders of the clans handled the matters and imposed penalties based on the seriousness of the offense.

In Bajju society, every man is expected to marry to fulfill their obligation to continue the lineage. Failure to do so means that something was wrong with the individual, which also affects the production of descendants (Kunhiyop 1984). The marriage preparation has to do with both families making inquiries about the family background of the two spouses. When a wife is proposed, the family members seek information about the prospective spouse's background. Specifically, they want to know if the family has sufficient food, hardworking, maltreated wives, a history of a serious illness such as leprosy, epilepsy, sickle cell anemia, theft, and any undesirable social behavior. All these were avoided as much as possible during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. The Bajju marriage included monogamy and polygamy, and today, both monogamous and polygamous marriages are common (Aboi 2018: 119). Another way marriage was seen in the culture was primary and secondary marriage. Primary marriage refers to a woman's first marriage, while secondary marriage refers to subsequent marriages. Gunn observed that the bride price in the olden days was in the form of articles like hoe, goats, or chicken and cowry shekels until the British administrators introduced money, so the bride price changed to cash. The contact with Hausa Muslims also influenced changes and brought a legalized divorce, weakening the ancestral cult (Gunn 1956: 113).

In the culture, there was what is called wife capture. The whole idea involved a forceful capture of a woman without her consent, and it could occur when she was sent out on a journey for some reason or during warfare. This was common with beautiful women. Husbands experienced much anxiety, even the possibility of losing their wives, by being fully armed with bows and arrows to discourage other men from abducting their wives. The men used various means to induce their runaway wives to return to them. They used sympathetic magic medicine and charms. If a woman was barren, her husband could divorce her to receive a refund of the bride price. If a woman bore a child by one husband, even if she subsequently married another man, her former husband would not ask for a refund of the bride price. He lived with the hope that she would return to him (Aboi 2018: 120).

There was the practice of infant betrothal, which happened when a man visited

a household when a baby girl was born. He could give the girl's parent a ring, string, beat, or a gift to his son as a sign of the girl's betrothal (McKinney 2019: 2504). Another option was when a father of a son heard about the birth of a baby girl, "he could send two hens and a roaster through an intermediary to talk to the father of the infant to betroth her to his son" (McKinney 2019: 2506–08).

From my emic perspective, an adult betrothal occurred when a young woman reached puberty. The arrangements between the prospective families occurred through the intermediary. The goat for the would-be mother-in-law would be given through the intermediary. When the marriage date is due, the groom's father gives four chickens, indicating that he has completed the marital arrangements and set the date. The bride and groom might both be aware of this arrangement in advance. Sometimes, the groom might be involved in a mate selection while the parents make the selection for their children at other times.

Traditionally, the groom could be asked to perform the bride's service. This was practiced by the Jews, as exemplified by Jacob in the Bible. It is usually in the form of farming for the bride's family. He usually organizes his age mates to assist him in doing the work, either in agriculture or thatching his mother-in-law's roof. This bride service was mandatory. It is important to note that mutual understanding and agreement between the prospective spouses before the marital arrangement commenced through the intermediary. With the introduction of Western education, marriage is often postponed until individuals have completed their education (Aboi 2018: 133–34).

Traditionally, marriage occurred by capture if the families completed the marital arrangement and set a date for the capture of the bride. She would not be informed of the arrangement; she was usually captured by the groom's friends when she was sent on an errand, such as fetching water or firewood or in the marketplace (Aluwong 2019). There were scenarios in which the bride and any of her friends resisted and escaped from captors. Upon escape, she usually ran to other relatives of her parents or part of the middleman's house, where she spent four days. On the evening of the fourth day, she was taken to the groom's house by his friends, who stayed with them that evening and left the couple together for that night. The following day, the wife of the middleman brought cooked beans early in the morning to the groom's house; if the groom were still asleep, he would pay for a goat or a chicken. The bride worked closely with her mother-in-law for about two months, who set her cooking utensils. The day she finally became independent, she cooked the food and shared it with the compound members before moving to her husband's room.

Contemporary traditional marriage in Bajju culture has been altered because

of Christianity, Western education, and urbanization. In either factor, some futures like courtship, engagement, and consummation of marriage are entrenched. The first is the courtship, which is between the boy and the girl, and the second is the action of the groom's parents by going to inquire about the bride's price. The final stage is the bride price payment and the marriage or wedding date fixing. It is important to note that if the two partners intend to conduct a church wedding, there is usually a church representative from the groom's side. The marriage can be conducted in the church, court, or privately. Where church weddings are performed, the entire program of activities and addresses is a replica of the Western wedding. Western ways have never been challenged in this area, even though the wedding formalities have no direct relationship to the Bajju culture (Aboi 1996). Hausa-Fulani businesspeople and colonial administrators caused other changes. Still, the influence of Christianity introduced profound changes in the traditional rites and marriage institutions of the *Bajju* people group.

## The Contemporary Religious Context of Bajju

*Today, Kajju* is home to religions that have made their presence known and have received much attention from the people. The most prominent religions have gained extensive acceptance and adherence to Christianity. Islam seems to be the next, and African traditional religion is primarily the native religion that the people practice, and a few still practice it. To have an apparent assimilation of the contemporary religious context of the *Bajju*, it will suffice to treat the major religions in their right and stake (cf. Chia 2024: 1-6).

According to the ten respondents to my research study, Christianity in Kajju is about 90-95%. This indicates that Christianity is the dominant religion, followed by Islam, which is 5-10%. From its inception, the dominant African traditional religion (ATR) turned into the least religion because of the rapid spread of Christianity in *Kajju*. ATR is considered to have a 0–5% presence in the land of the *Bajju*. According to respondents, the reason for the massive shift from ATR to Christianity is the oppression of the *Abvoi* cult on women and children. There was a desperate need for freedom, which was only found in Christianity. In her ethnohistorical research, McKinney succinctly avers the change that occurred within 55 years (1929–1984) from no Christians to almost 100% Christianity (McKinney 2019: 180–82; cf. Luka and Chia 2025: 1-14).

All the survey participants confirmed that Christianity was introduced to the Bajju through the activities of the then Sudan Interior Missions (SIM), now known as Serving in Missions in neighboring villages. Later, other Christians from the Southern part of Nigeria were Railway workers. Respondents allude to oral history that mentioned the three sons of Bitiyong named Dogo, Mutum, and Bakut, who

were the first converts to Christianity in December 1929 from Ungwar Rimi *Bajju* (McKinney 2019: 206). Imagining people with a complex trado-religious context, I asked a question to investigate *Bajju's* adoption of Christianity. Respondents expressed the difficulty and persecution faced by the first three converts who indigenously spread the gospel of Christ through the extended family system. Supported by the SIM missionaries, they established mission stations and prayer houses for evangelism and discipleship. Responses from my interview suggest that it was the oppression of the *Abvoi* cult, the rules and regulations, and the demand on the people that served as a ripe ground for Christianity to thrive.

Today, most of the *Bajju* are Christians and committed ones with congregations in most villages. From my emic perspective, there are Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Roman Catholic churches in *Kajju*. Nine out of ten respondents said that Evangelical Christianity is the fastest growing through the work of evangelism and missions (Schools, Health centers, and Bible translation). One out of ten respondents said Roman Catholicism is the fastest because of numerical growth. The growth was said to be influenced by an open invitation to polygamists and alcoholics who were unable to stop their former lifestyles. I believe that some are nominal Christians, but many still have their "umbilical cords" tied to traditional religious beliefs and worldviews. The scenario of Christianity in the contemporary religious context of Bajju, as Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon would say, is that some look to their Christian faith for final salvation as well as look to pagan practices for present help (Grebe and Fon 2006: 25).

## Conclusion

The *Bajju* have a rich traditional religious and worldview heritage that has defined their engagement with the cosmos and the running of life. In the conventional *Bajju* religious belief and worldview construct, man is a subject of a world where the spiritual force fuses with and overwhelms the physical reality, spiritual beings pull the string of events, and man is left with no option but to source for supernatural, mystical powers to cope and control the cosmic elements. It was within the above religious context that Christianity made its way through the gracious work of God that broke the stronghold of *Abvoi* and its cult. The work of God is evident in the rapid spread of Christianity. To claim *Kajju* for Christ, the church must intensify the work of the gospel through biblically sound and theologically healthy viable missionary organization that will synergistically support the effort of indigenous churches in proper discipleship of Christians. The church needs to continuously evaluate the functions of ATR in society and develop a biblical substitute that is contextually appropriate to replace ATR practices (Grebe and Fon 2006: 49).

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