

In Fulfilment of the *Janji*: Some Social Merits of the Tausug *Pagkaja*

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In this modern era, ancestral practices are still permeating in the ethos of many cultures worldwide. In the southern Philippines, some traditional societies have been seen to portray the existence of these ancestral rites amidst the influence of major religions such as Islam and Christianity. This study explores the nature, practice and persistence of the *pagkaja* among the Tausug practitioners in the southern Philippines. The study concluded that the *pagkaja* is viewed by practitioners as a rite of homage, as this is seen as a way of showing deference, respect and homage to their ancestors rather than *pagsumba* (worship). The findings of this study also indicated that the persistence of the ritual of the *pagkaja* is attributed to the social benefits derived, such as the removal of social maladies embedded in the state of *sukut* (demand for reparation of ancestral debt).

Key words: *Janji, pagkaja, pagpudji ha kamaasan, sukut, pangkatan.*

Introduction

Showing deference, respect and homage towards ancestors and the performance of rituals associated with these virtues is not only observed in traditional societies, but persists in modern times. Contemporary society has seen the persistence of these traditional ancestral practices in African as well as Asian communities. This persistence is best understood from the perspective of the adherents. Some of the common attributes of these practices include: fulfilment of an agreement between the ancestors and the living that has been seen handed from past generations to the present; reparation of ancestral debt; maintaining a kinship relationship with the deceased; maintaining family and filial cohesion; showing respect and deference toward ancestors; asking for protection from illness and against the vagaries of nature; removal of misfortunes; placation of ancestors' ire; fear of ancestors' wrath; and healing. Many scholars equate these ancestral practices with worship, but according to Lim (2015: 109–15), this nomenclature is a misnomer, as these societies do not construe their ancestors as deities in their belief system. Rather, these are seen as ways by which the living show respect, deference and homage in order to maintain the kinship link between the living descendants and the departed ancestors.



In the practice of the Sama Dilaut *pagomboh*, the adherents do not elevate their ancestors as deities or gods, but rather as their protectors from illness and the vagaries of nature worthy of *paglaggu*. This is construed as emulating, honouring and respecting the ancestors, thereby linking the living with the deceased. In the same vein, African ancestral practices from an insider's view are not about worshipping the living dead but as rites intended to honor the departed (Mulambuzi, 1997). Mulambuzi further argues that ancestors are not worshipped because they are not God and the ancestral practices in Baganda are acts of propitiation, which he construes as appeasement of the ancestors. In other words, these practices may be referred to as veneration or homage but they are not worship. While the term 'veneration' is used interchangeably with 'worship', Patricia McAnany (2002: 360–77) argues that, based on archaeological evidence of these practices among the Maya, veneration is not really about the dead but rather how the living make use of the deceased to chart a course for the future and to maintain continuity between generations.

In the southern Philippines, an ancestral ritual called *pagkaja* has been practised continuously until the present day by some members of Tausug society amidst their attachment to Islam, which is construed by some scholars as superstition. The rite of the *pagkaja* is an act of *pagpudji* construed as giving honour to the *kaapuhapuan* (ancestors). It is also a rite carried out in fulfilment of the traditional pact or *janji*. This rite, in the emic of the practitioners, is not worship but instead a mode of showing deference and respect towards the ancestors; hence, it is a misnomer to consider this ancestral worship. The adherents of this study practise the Islamic faith and they have a vivid understanding of the Creator. While the *pagkaja* and the other ancestral practices fall under *palipalihan* or superstitions (Jundam, 2006: 10–11), these practices have persisted until the present day in the syncretic form of folk-Islam (Tan, 2010: 89–90). The blending of ancestral practices with a formidable religion was attributed to the tolerant form of Islam that was introduced into the Philippines, leaving room for the persistence of pre-Islamic practices (Tan, 2010: 89–90). Bruno (1973: 178–82) also demonstrated the persistence of these *palipalihan* in his study on the social organisation of the Tausug, categorising this as folk-Islam. Among the Tausug folk-Islamic rituals that are practised until the present day, although deemed taboo by the Ulama (learned in Islamic doctrines) are: *Duwa-a Ashura* (Communal Prayer in Remembrance of the Prophets of God Ritual); *Panulak Bala'* (Communal Cleansing) Ritual; *Paygu' Lahu'* (Pregnancy Lunar Eclipse) Ritual; *Paggunting* (Haircutting) Ritual; *Pagtimbang* (Weighing) Ritual; *Tudju Rikul* (Graveyard Lighting) Ritual; *Pagtabwat Ritual* (To Seek for Forgiveness); *Bulan Julhadji* (Muslim Month for Pilgrimage); and, *Pagkurban* (Animal Sacrifice) Ritual (Jundam 2006, 20-27).

Methodology

In December 2013, the author conducted an ocular observation in Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte, Philippines for his fieldwork in relation to his PhD dissertation. A research protocol was established in January 2014 that eventually led to the following research procedures: key informant interviews (KII), field observation and focus group discussions (FGD). This was also done in the second research locale for my study, Zamboanga City, Philippines. Time spent for data gathering (which occurred intermittently) covered the period of 2014–16. KII was also done with some of my informants from Jolo, Sulu, Philippines. A total of 25 participants were interviewed, five of whom were imams or shamans of the rite of the *pagkaja*. Interviews were recorded using a MP3 recorder and translated into English. From the interviews, *in vivo* coding became the initial phase of his ethnographic thematic analysis, followed by selective coding. From the selected codes, several sub-categories and finally categories surfaced. With the categories to hand, some sub-themes emerged and finally two themes became salient: the medical benefits and the socio-spiritual benefits of the Tausug *pagkaja*. Participant observation was also done, such as being present in *duwaa* and tomb visitations as an adherent of the rite. Photographs were taken that became vital to the documentation of the study.

Results

The Origin, Nature and Legitimacy of the Pagkaja Ritual

The etymology of the word *kaja* remains obscure, as this has been vague in historicity and existed only in the oral tradition of the Tausug. Another term for this is *duwaa kaja*, which is differentiated to some extent from *duwaa pataas*, a form of thanksgiving prayer. Conjectures have been raised regarding its derivatives, such as the Sumatran *kerja*, which refers to the ritual of the rice, and the Indonesian *kerja*, which means ‘work’.

Duwaa kaja or *pagkaja* has been mentioned in the *Legend of the First People of Sulu* (Damsani, Alawi & Rixhon, 1972: 244–55). Tausug oral history speaks of the time when Tuwan Mahadum left Sulu for Mecca, where he instructed that, should his offspring be a girl, no bride price would be demanded for her marriage. Instead, the offering of a single goat or 11 chickens, 11 sugar cane stalks and the other ingredients for the sacrifice would be demanded from the bridegroom. Thus the beginning of the ritual of the *kaja* began as Tuan Mahadum’s wife (a native) gave birth to a girl. Mahadum, the legend says, never returned to Tapul, Sulu. Tausug oral history also speaks of Tuwan Alawi Balpaki, the second Arab missionary to arrive in Jolo, who is believed to have converted the inhabitants to Islam to some extent. According to the legend, he also demanded the practice of the *kaja* ritual and *duwaa pataas* from the newly converted inhabitants before he left the place, as these were means of protection against evil and preservation of religious heritage, thereby giving the

practitioners peace of soul. Conversion to Islam by Tuwan Balpaki is signified by circumcision, thus in the Tausug mores, *pagislam* (circumcision) became the rite of passage initiating a Tausug to the Islamic world (Damsani, Alawi & Rixhon, 1972: 244–55).

The term *kaja* could have been adopted from the derivative *kaja*, which is a spatial orientation in Balinese religion and architecture. The *kaja/kelod* (mountainward/seaward) axes are intrinsic in Balinese culture (Howe, 2005). A sleeping position that orients the head towards *subangan* (east) and sometimes towards *uttara* (north), but never towards *sadlupan* (west) or *satan* (south), has been observed by my kin group ever since I can remember in Bud Taran, Indanan Sulu. Similarly, this is observed in Bali according to a study regarding the significance of sacred space in Bali, Indonesia (Howe, 2005). According to Hauser-Schaubin (2004: 283–14), when a Balinese person goes to sleep, they will carefully adjust the positioning of the head, avoiding the *kelod* orientation, and will reorient their head towards *kaja* (mountainward or northward orientation). Furthermore, Howe (2005) posits that sleeping position among the Balinese requires one's head to always be oriented towards *kaja*. Also, houses and villages in the mountains are considered purer than those in the lowlands, as waters upstream are considered pure and those downstream are believed to be polluted and impure. In addition, graveyards found up the mountains or upstream are where people of higher status are found.

In political assemblies or in a social gathering, the *kaja/kelod* orientation is adopted such that persons of higher ranks are arranged towards the *kaja* while the *kelod* position is for those with lower position; hence, the standard question raised in establishing the social rank of a person is 'Where are you seated?' (Hauser-Schaubin, 2004: 283–314). Further, the host is entrusted with carefully arranging the seating positions of those present according to their social rank and status, and in a communal prayer or ritual worship the *kaja* orientation is the most contested (Hauser-Schaubin, 2004: 283–314). In the same manner, the *pagkaja* rituals are associated with climbing the slopes of Mount Tapul, Mount Kaha, Mount Tumangtangis, Mount Bongao, Mount Siasi, Mount Pata and many others, where the graves of those construed by the practitioners as holy persons or *tampat* are located (Figure 1). Perhaps, at some time during the introduction of Islam into the southern Philippines, some traces of old Javanese or Balinese immaterial traits such as terminologies may have become loanwords in the Tausug lexicon, and one of these loans is the word *kaja*. It appears that adherence to the *kaja* spatial orientation becomes a determinant not only in the behavioural aspect such as sleeping position and arrangement of houses in architectural aspect of the Balinese preference in the selection of space, but as a mode of establishing identity, rank and status.



Figure 1. Tampat (The Sacred Space)

Similarly, the Tausug *kaja* where the practitioners claimed to be descendants of *salip* of the ancient may be construed as a mode of asserting kinship. Perhaps the sacredness of the tombs of the *salip* or holy persons and the power of these sacred tombs in the Tausug *pagkaja* practitioners' belief system – whether in animism or syncretism as far as the *pagkaja* in the mountains is concerned – may parallel the belief in Bali religion that the Hindu gods of Mt Agung, and the mountain itself, have powers that permeate the daily lives of Balinese people. The belief in the *barakat* (charismatic power) of holy persons when they were alive has been construed as forever powerful, even when they are already dead. Hence these *tampat* are construed to possess *barakat*, and in the ethos of the practitioners, *barakat* is manifested in ways that are unexplainable or even superstitious, such as the power to stop the rain when the ancestor is mentioned, or even the ability to stop storms and other vagaries of the sea. This *barakat* has been considered to exist in the practitioners' worldview (Kiefer, 1972: 19–64).

While not all members of Tausug society are practitioners, four sets of adherents were revealed in my study: the first set of practitioners comprises those who claim genealogy to Tuwan Mahadum or *parkata/npangkatan*; the second set of practitioners consists of the *kadatuan* or royalty; the third set of practitioners is made up of those who became practitioners by virtue of affinity to either of the *parkatan* and *kadatuan*; and the fourth set of practitioners consists of those individuals who, by circumstance, partook of the ritual food, thus converting them into the status of practitioner because of the construct that the *pagkaja* is a contagion. The first category included those practitioners who claimed ancestry to the lineage of the *shariefs* or *salip* who, according to the 'Kissa sin Tau Nakauna', first preached in Sulu and who introduced the rite of the *pagkaja*. They claimed that they belonged to the *kasalipan/parkatan*, which in those days was regarded a status. The second category comprised those who claimed lineage to royalty under the sultanates of Sulu. They belonged to the *kadatuan*. The third category included those individuals who, by virtue of marriage to a practitioner, automatically transformed themselves into practitioners. The fourth category

consisted of those individuals who witnessed a *pagkaja* ritual and had partaken of the ritual food. By partaking of the food, the individual instantaneously became a practitioner. Henceforth, that person is now a recipient of *sukut* if he does not follow the mandate (Cavico, et al. 2018).

Tuan Malik of Taluksangay, Zamboanga City, and the shaman of Mampang, Zamboanga City disclosed that the *pagkaja* ritual is the primordial ritual of the *magkakaja* or practitioners of *pagkaja*. It is the predecessor of all rituals of supplication. Although this ritual preceded all other rituals, as it is the first requisite and is done in the conduct of marriage, it is equally important as the *duwaa pataas*, the *duwaa* founded by the second missionary who came to the Sulu Archipelago, mentioned in the ‘Kissa sin Tau Nakauna’. All other *duwaas* do have their functions but can be performed at any time the practitioners wish, or if the situation warrants their performances. The *duwaa* is inherent in spiritual healing as it provides satisfaction and connection to the ancestors (Khan & Sajid, 2011: 66–77). Divulged in a conversation with an informant from Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte is the necessity of the performance of the rite as it is the first *janji* (pact) between Mahadum and his wife and his descendants. Failure or neglect for whatever reason shall in the future result in the dreaded state of *sukut*. He also stressed that this performance, although considered to be *palipalihan* (superstition), would not disappear as the bearers of the tradition would hand this practice to generations in the future as their ancestors handed the prayers of supplications to them.

Kaja as a Requisite in Marriage

Coined as *hinubuan/panagnaan* (construed as the first rite), the newlywed couple is required to present themselves to the ancestors in a ritualised process dictated by custom. The word *hinubuan* is literally the state or process of taking off one’s garment. Symbolically, this event is construed as a mark of shedding the old ways of being single. Revealed by Salip Tuan Imam Karon of Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte, the adorning of a new set of apparel is construed as a symbolic way of embracing a new life – both the married life and a family life ahead with a transformation of the two people as individuals into a couple. Couples change their garments in a temporary makeshift hut made for the sole purpose of the first rite. This is draped with cloths or blankets that are then given away as *sarakka* (gifts/donation) to the female attendants who aid in the conduct of the first rite, especially in the preparation of a ritual food offering (Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Paglalabutan/pagjajamuhan* (ritual food)

Kaja for the First Born

The *kaja* is required for the first-born child of the couple. All the informants from Sulu, Zamboanga City and Zamboanga Del Norte posited that this is mandated by the *awliya* (first missionaries). It is imperative that all first-born children of the practitioners should be presented to the ancestors at the ancestors' tombs. In the case of Daya, she brought her first child all the way from Zamboanga Del Norte to Indanan, Sulu, a place called Karawan. These shrines are the homes of the several *salip* in which she believed her genealogy was rooted, and she had to present her first child to the ancestors. Accordingly, she and her husband Hajan spent several years saving for the realisation of *kaja* ritual as they must perform the *pagpabayhuh* construed as presentation of their child at the ancestors' graves. The *kaja* of the firstborn is also an outcome of a failure to perform the *kaja* as requisite marriage for reasons of economics.

Kaja for Subsequent Marriages

Marriage in Tausug society is characterised by polygamy, with a man permitted to take as many as four wives. In most instances, however, monogamy is the common practice born out of economic necessity. In cases of polygamous marriages, a man is required to perform a *kaja* ritual for each of the contracted subsequent marriages. This is predicated on requirement of the *kaja* as a requisite of marriage. Moreover, a widower is also required to perform another *pagkaja* ritual should he remarry. It is construed that the *kaja* ritual performed during the previous marriage was meant for that marriage alone, hence the performance of a second ritual.

Kaja as a Remedy for Sukut

The *duwaa kaja* has always been viewed as an obligation to be fulfilled, as it is a social pact between the ancestors and the living descendants in a web of kinship ties. This is not construed as a religious pact, but rather more of a mandatory fulfilment of a familial agreement or a contract between the spirits of the forefathers and the living descendants. Fulfilment of this contract is thereby construed as obedience to the will of the ancestors and such obedience is rewarded by the absence of social, economic and medical maladies in life. Disobedience or breach of this contract will result in what the practitioners always feared: *sukut*. *Sukut* cannot be translated in a simple manner, as it is something conceived and felt in the practitioner's psyche, depicting a state of fear of the wrath of the ancestors.

The legitimacy of the pagkaja as perceived by the practitioners is basically anchored in oral tradition. According to this *kissa*, the practice of the *duwaa kaja* and other *duwaa* had been handed down from the first seven preachers: Tuwan Mahadum, who gave the mandate of the *duwaa kaja*; Tuwan Alawi Balpaki, who first converted the natives of Sulu and gave the mandate of circumcision; Shariful Hashim, who gave titles to the people on Bud Datu; Datu Masukud, who also gave the mandate to the practice of the *duwaa kaja*; Datu Aliyuran, who mandated the *duwaa paanggil*; Datu Ali Hasan, who gave the mandate of the *duwaa ha lawn patung*; and Datu Kagayulan, who professed medicine (Damsani, Alawi & Rixhon, 1972). The legitimacy of the rite is also rendered by way of the *sulat gulalan* or certificate of appointment by the sultan (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Sulat Gulalan (Certificate Of Appointment)

The Practice of the *Pagkaja*

The first phase of the rendering of the *pagkaja* begins with the prognosis of the shaman. Methods vary from one shaman to another, and the study revealed the *pangannal* method, *lambungan* method, *timbalun* method, *liguh* method and *tadjul muluk* method.

Pangannal Method

In Mampang, Zamboanga City, the shaman uses the *pangannal*, which allows him to detect the illness of a practitioner or the cause of social malady. I asked the shaman, ‘What is your method of prognosis?’ He replied, ‘*pangannal*’ (mind). He also claimed that every individual is accompanied by an ancestral spirit. *Pangannal* in the Tausug language is referred to as the mind. This method by the shaman of Mampang could therefore be construed as mind reading. As he further elaborated this, it became clear that it was beyond mind reading, and relates to an ancestral spirit who accompanies the person to be treated being the source of information. It is the ancestral spirit who is the bearer of information relative to the illness or social malady. The process of this diagnosis appears to be derived from the ancestral spirit and the healer is the recipient of the message.

Akin to this method, it was related to me by a female professor that this can be qualified as spirit possession. The medium in spirit possession is called the *jin/jinnan*. The *pangannal* method appeared to me to be a rare method of diagnosing illnesses, involving sensing the presence of an ancestral spirit and understanding the message delivered relative to the situation of the victim of *sukut*. Through his mind, he can see the ancestral spirit accompanying the sick person and thereby communicate with this ancestral spirit. Through this, the cause of the ailment or social misfortune – that is, whether or not it is caused by the ancestors – is revealed. If it is the ancestor’s doing, then the need for the *pagkaja* ritual and other prayers of supplication or *duwaa* becomes imminent.

Timbalun Method

During my high school days in Sulu, I was subjected to the care of a shaman. The method employed was the *timbalun*, using a fresh egg and a white saucer. The egg was rubbed over my body many times. The imam split the egg and read the content in a strange way using a small stick as to isolate the dirt found in the egg white and yolk. I wondered how a fresh egg could be contaminated with a foreign material. This was repeated for three sessions and the outcome was always the same. Out of this, the prognosis of *sukut* was rendered.

The Liguh Method (Ritual Bath)

Almost all rituals of healing and removal of misfortune begin with *pagliguh* (bathing). This is common in Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte and Sulu. Here the afflicted is made to wear a *tadjung* (the Tausug version of the *malong*) and is bathed with water blessed by the shaman. The process begins with the blessing of the water, which is poured on the person while a prayer is chanted by the shaman. This method is both prognosis and healing. When a person suffering from misfortune or bodily ailment is subjected to ritual bathing, the shaman normally requires three bathing sessions to remove some supernatural cause of the misery. In cases where the ritual bathing fails to heal the individual, the shaman may render the judgement of *sukut* or modern medical conditions beyond his capacity to heal.

The Lambungan Method

This method was revealed to the author by the female village shaman of Sitio Panubigan, Barangay Balagunan, Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte. At times, the *mangugubat* (shaman) who is being endowed with the knowledge of the behaviour of *sukut* can detect whether a person belongs to the *kasalipan* or is simply a practitioner of the ritual, and by just being in the presence of the sick person can proclaim the state of *sukut*. This skill is termed *lambungan*, which in mystical parlance can be construed as aura reading. Although *lambung* in the Tausug vernacular is referred to as shadow, it appeared that this female shaman did not read shadows; rather, she simply looked at the sick person as if she were discerning their aura.

Taadjul Muluk Method

In Taluksangay, Zamboanga City, the shaman revealed that his method was derived from the *taadjul muluk* when he showed me his booklet of prognosis (see Plate 4). *Taadjul Muluk* is a derivative of *tajul muluk*, a book that contained the Malay system of geomancy that was traditionally practised by shamans and covered a number of topics like herbal medicine, astrology and dream interpretation (Wikipedia). This contained the *ilmu tajul* and the earliest account of this art came from the book *Taj-al-Mulk*, meaning the ‘Royal Crown of Jewels’ in Arabic, which was written for Achenese royalty. It was dismissed as superstition and topics written in this book are banned in Malaysia today (Wikipedia). According to Tuwan Malik of Zamboanga City, his booklet which he called *taadjul muluk* (Figure 4) aided him in the interpretations of the ailments of the practitioners.



Figure 4. Tuwan Malik's Book of Prognosis

Category of Performances

The *pagkaja* ritual in is categorised by three modes: (1) group performance; (2) performance by delegation or performance by proxy; and (3) individual performance. The first category is the group performance, where as many as 10 petitions are rendered as one. This is a reinvention of the traditional individual performance. This is brought about by economic necessity. According to the all shamans interviewed in this study, not everyone can afford the individual performance, as many who seek relief through the performance of the *kaja* for relief of bodily ailments have exhausted their money on doctors and modern medicine.

The second category is performance by proxy, where the ailing practitioner's presence is substituted by that of a family member; this generally occurs when petitions are made by persons outside the country. The third category is individual performance, and it is petitioned for by well-to-do individuals or couples who are financially solvent. In this arrangement, an individual or a couple petitions for the performance of the rite. Individual performances are usually done in the sacred shrines of their ancestors, mostly found in Sulu.

The Rendition of the Rite

After the rendering of the prognosis of *sukut*, the shaman assigns the day for the conduct of the ritual. This is the initial phase of the *kaja*. The *kaja* rite is performed only on a Saturday and a Tuesday. The *duwaa* is recited from six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the afternoon. In the case of the group performance, the tentative day for the rendition of the rite is realised when there are already as many petitions as can ensure the financial expenditure needed for the ritual. A minimal amount of 3,000 pesos is normally asked per petition. As there are as much as 10 petitions per rendition of the rite, the amount of 30,000 pesos is

enough to cover the total expenses of the rendition of the rite. In cases of individual performance and where the adherents prefer to have their *pagkaja* rite performed in Sulu, where the shrines of their ancestors are located, total expenditure could reach as much as 20,000 pesos to include travel expenses.

The second phase of the *pagkaja* begins with the preparation of the ritual food. Traditionally, the *panggung* (ritual cookhouse) and the *pagiintusan* (device for extracting sugar from sugarcane stalks) are required. Today, some reinventions have been made. For example, sugar is used instead of sugarcane. The need for the *pagiintusan* has therefore been reinvented. The number of chickens to be slaughtered for the *pyanggang manuk*, a saltless chicken dish – traditionally 11 – is multiplied in the case of group performance to accommodate the number of individuals who will eat the dish. Another reinvention in the ritual ingredient is seen in the coconut milk. Instead of extracting coconut milk, which is vital in the preparation of the *pyanggang manuk*, this ingredient is now available at the local market. The preparation of the ritual food is done by women who are in the menopausal stage and assisted by young girls who have not yet undergone their menarche. According to Saratul, personnel of WMSU and a resident of Mampang, as many as 10 female *magaadjal* and several young girls helped in the food preparation, especially in group performance. The third and the final phase is the recital of the *duwaa kaja* by the shaman in the presence of those who are being petitioned for, or those who have been delegated as a proxy. After the recital of the *duwaa kaja*, those present are given their share of the ritual food. Still another reinvention is observed relative to the ritual food: instead of the traditional *tambusa* or the basket woven out of coconut leaves (Figure 5) that shall contain the ritual food, plastic bags are used in some cases. This modification, according to a shaman, is for practical reasons.



Plate 5. Tambusa

The Social Merits and the Persistence of the *Pagkaja*

At the outset, the adherence to the *pagkaja* is peculiar to those belonging to the *pangkatan* or genealogy of nobility, as not all members of Tausug society are practitioners. The persistence of the rite is attributed to the adherence of the practitioners to the rite itself, which is illuminated mainly in the constructs on the nature of the *kaja*: as pledge to the ancestors, as contagion, as an element of the bride price, as homage to the ancestors, and the social benefits or merits derived from the practice of the *kaja*.

Adherence to the Practice of the Pagkaja

Born out of a pact between the ancestors and the living descendants in ancient times, the *kaja* ritual has persisted since the beginning of the practice of the rite until the present. Predicated on a mutual agreement, the *pagkaja* adherents feel that the performance of the rite should not be ignored by the living. This pact is construed by the practitioners as solemn, and as essential to fulfil. Because it is a primordial pact, the practitioners honour this agreement and fear the consequences of breaching this pact. Breaking this agreement is tantamount to disobedience, which is believed to result in both bodily ailments and social maladies. Similarly, in the worldview of the Shona of Zimbabwe, ancestors are angered when neglected by their living descendants (Masaka, 2009: 189–98). All ancestors, when angered, are assumed to have the capacity to make the lives of their living descendants miserable (Telle, 2007: 121–48). In each performance of the rite, such as the *kaja* in marriage, the rite for the first born and the rite to quell the consequences of *sukut*, the *janji* is occasionally renewed, paving the way for a novel commitment to adhere to the performance of the practice and hence its continuance.

In kaja makalamin (the *kaja* is contagious) is one of the common responses that the author learned from the field. Its persistence can be found in the construct of the contagious character of the ritual process, particularly in the ritual dining. The law of contagion posits that anything that has come into contact with another stays in contact and the influence derived from such contact shall continue to influence the other (Rozin et al., 1989: 367–70). In Tonga, for instance, touching an object that belongs to the sacred chief is believed to have some unfavourable effect on the other person or can even result in death (Frazer, 1914). There are two ways by which the contagious character of the *pagkaja* is construed. One is through the consumption of ritual food and the other is by the marriage of a non-practitioner to an adherent. In the rite of the *pagkaja*, the consumption of the ritual food is only prescribed for those for whom the ritual intent is meant, but this does not preclude non-practitioners from partaking of the ritual offering. If, by circumstance, a non-practitioner happens to partake of the ritual food, then the contagiousness of the *pagkaja* rite sets in. For instance, where a non-practitioner visiting a sick friend for whom a *kaja* ritual had just been performed

ate the ritual food that was brought to the household, it is construed that this individual is now *nalamin* or has been affected by the contagious nature of the rite. This means that his partaking of the ritual food automatically transforms him into a practitioner and hence he must be an adherent to the rite. However, this does not mean that he is now part of the *pangkat*; rather, he is now obligated to practise the ritual – otherwise, he will suffer the consequence of *sukut*. In the same manner, passers-by who happen to witness a ritual and have partaken of the ritual food are obligated to perform the ritual, as they are automatically converted into practitioners. The other instance by which the contagious character of the *pagkaja* is construed is through the marriage of a non-practitioner to an adherent. Saada, of the Western Mindanao State University, affirmed that she became a practitioner because she had married a practitioner. In the same manner, the marriage of a female professor in the same university revealed that her practice of the *pagkaja* was born out of the genealogy of her husband. In a few generations to come, there will be more adherents to the rite and the persistence of the practice is thus seen to be ensured, unless these practitioners decide to cease the performance. But then the fear of *sukut* has already been instilled in their minds and eventually felt as real.

Social Merits of the Pagkaja

The first Merit

Marriage in many traditional and simple societies is a mechanism for the propagation of the family and eventually the society as a whole. Among the Tausug *pagkaja* practitioners, marriage served as the vehicle for the propagation of the *pangkat* (genealogy), as in the past it was a cultural ideal that a *pangkatan* must marry another *pangkatan*. But this does not mean a man is precluded from marrying a non-practitioner. This is manifested in the *hinubuan* mentioned earlier. In the same vein, among the Hakka of Sarawak, Malaysia, the legitimacy of the union in marriage is acknowledged after the blessing by the ancestors (Chai, 2013: 35–47). A female informant Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte explained that marriage is not complete if not followed by the *pagkaja* ritual, implying that the *kaja* must be performed for the marriage to be complete, accepted and thereby legitimated by the *kaapuhapuan* (ancestors). The non-performance of the ritual therefore makes the marital union of descendants unacceptable, as it is not complete and transgresses the will of the ancestors. As the *pagkaja* is the first requisite of the ancestors in the conduct of marriage, its absence will render the marriage displeasing to the ancestors. The performance of the first *kaja* rite, however, entails obedience, and is considered by many as ideal and worthy of emulation by the generations to come. Having a marriage solemnised by an imam in *kawin* and blessed by the ancestors through the *kaja* rite makes the marriage ideal for the adherents, hence the persistence of the rite is ensured.

The Second Merit

Status legitimisation through rituals has been observed in the rituals of traditional Japan (Morioka, 1984: 201–13). This type of legitimisation emanates from the living descendants through rituals for the purpose of ensuring the dead a place in their succession to the ancestral plane. In other words, it is the living who confirm the legitimisation of status. Similarly, among the Sama Dilaut practitioners, *pagomboh* is a mechanism by which the status of the dead is legitimised as *omboh* through periodic performances of the rite by the living (Bottignolo, 1995). On the contrary, the construct of legitimisation among the *kaja* practitioners emanates from the dead and is intended for the living. Relative to this are the constructs of legitimisation of marriage by ancestral spirits and legitimisation of descendants by the ancestors in order to entail the legitimacy of their offspring as descendants of the *kasalipan*, *kadatuan* and *buburanun*. It is also tradition that mandated the presentation of the child by some practitioners. Similarly, among the Tabidu of Sarawak, Malaysia, blessings for future descendants are also sought from the ancestors in ancestor rituals (Chai, 2013: 35–47). Although the *pagpabayhuh* is not a common practice among all *pagkaja* practitioners, Maymuna, an informant from Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte, asserted that the presentation of the child at the tombs of the ancestors will protect them from future ancestors' ire as the child is now presented to and recognised by the ancestors as their descendant, thereby exempting them from future medical and social maladies in life. Recognition of the child is construed as preclusion from ancestral wrath. Having the guarantee that offspring will be precluded from ancestors' ire and illnesses generates emotional satisfaction among the practitioners, creating a pattern for the next generation. Hence we see the persistence of the *pagkaja* ritual.

The Third Merit

Fulfilling the primordial pact is translated as obedience of descendants toward ancestors. Disobedience to this mandate may result in diseases and social maladies. This is stressed by Tuwan Malik, a shaman of Zamboanga City, who said his is what the ancestors wanted and it should not be breached. If you do not want to suffer the consequence of *sukut*, you should adhere to the agreement: like the father commanding the son, the son must obey. In other words, it is taboo not to follow the ancestral mandate. As with any taboo, this may substantiate obedience and offerings: if you do not obey the task expected of you, it is as if you are challenging the ancestors and that is why there are descendants who have been cursed. The fulfilment of the *janji* (pact) removes dissent caused by failing to fulfil the mandate, and therefore is construed as removing the disapproval of the ancestors, thus giving the practitioner a sense of wellbeing, as through the ritual they have now placated the ancestors' ire. Having placated the ancestors, an emotional feeling of satisfaction is felt throughout life as a practitioner.

The Fourth Merit

The ritual of the *pagkaja* is a manner of *pagpudji* (homage) of the ancestors by the living descendants. It is also a vehicle for strengthening the link with the dead. In the words of many of my informants, particularly Imam Assidin, we should give glory and manifest homage to our ancestors because without them, we would not be here. These words are indicative of the biological link between the ancestors and the practitioners, which can be translated as kinship affiliation. This is akin to Japanese ancestor worship, one of the functions of which is the unification of kin (Morioka, 1984: 201–13). The offering of food to the ancestors is construed as giving what is due to the ancestors, as they once fed the living: we should reciprocate what the ancestors have done for us when they were still alive, according to Imam Assidin. Feeding them in a ritualised manner is construed as repaying their good deeds and, in sociological parlance, a mode of reciprocation. Feeding of ancestors may be seen not only as a mode of reciprocation, but in other ways that are revealed by Sparkes (2007: 223–31) in her analysis of food offering – particularly rice – in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, through the feeding of rice to one's ancestors, the transmission of life force or blessings such as fertility, health and worldly good fortune shall be ensured (Sparkes, 2007: 223–31). In other words, the ancestors are construed as the source of these blessings. This is mirrored by the construct of *lidjikh*, or ancestral blessing. In this context, the performance of the *kaja* rite not only strengthens the link between the living and the dead, but also provides the practitioner with hope that their quest for *lidjikh* shall be realised.

The Fifth Merit

One of the social maladies related to me by my informants in Siocon, Zamboanga Del Norte is *way sukud ha pagusaha* (absence of luck in trade), which in context can be translated as economic insolvency. *Way sukud* (absence of luck) is one of the social maladies that is commonly addressed by both the rich and the poor. Among the well-to-do, maintaining and augmenting *sukud* (luck) through the ritual has become the motivation for the performance of the ritual. In many interviews with both non-academic and academic members of the Western Mindanao State University, it was revealed that the construct of *way sukud* is born out of the dissatisfaction caused by the living toward the ancestors and can be remedied by the performance of the *kaja* ritual when the prognosis of the shaman is *sukut*. *Sukud* is not only confined within the boundary of the economic sphere. It is also evident in the social sphere as when mothers lamented *way sukud ku mga anak ku ini* (I have no luck among my children) in cases of misconduct, mischief, drug dependency and other social deviances exhibited by their offspring. Among the economically insolvent practitioners, the construct of *sukud* is equated with economic solvency. In a community where dire became a shared predicament, it is understandable that their construct of *sukud* is a little uplifting from poverty. The eradication

of bad luck is the practitioners' shared aspiration and in the conduct of the ritual; their shared prayer.

The Sixth Merit

Di subay lupahun in kaapuhapuan (the ancestors should not be forgotten) was one of the common themes revealed to me by many informants in relation to their adherence to the practice of the rite. It is human nature, when confronted with a misfortune, to seek remedies through familiar methods provided by culture and society. For instance, when a child encounters a mishap, it is his nature to seek solace by calling on his parents, and as parents, humans provide immediate solace to the suffering child. This calling, when performed periodically, creates a process of remembering among practitioners (Geaña, 2005: 349–61). The periodic conduct of the *kaja* ritual, the enshrining of ancestors' tombs, is a manifestation of memorialising those who are entombed, effectively remembering the ancestor for generations to come.

Conclusions

The ritual of the *pagkaja* is best described by the informants as a mode of *pagpudji* (rendering homage) to the ancestors, not *pagsumba* (worship). In the ethos of the Tausug *pagkaja* practitioners, *pagsumba* (worship) is only rendered to the *nagpapanjari* or the Creator. From the interviews with the informants in the *pagkaja*, there was indication of *pagsumba* (worship) of their ancestors. The construct of the *pagsumba* denotes deep devotion, which is only directed to the *nagpapanjari*, the Creator, not towards the *kaapuhapuan*. *Pagsumba*, or worship, also denotes the deification of an entity, which is not characterised in the ritual processes of the *pagkaja*. The calling of the ancestors in the ritual prayers in the *pagkaja* ritual is just a mode of communicating with them in fulfilment of the *janji*, thereby manifesting obedience and emulation of the ancestors that cannot be construed as worship, as there is another entity worthy of *pagsumba* or worship, which is the *nagpapanjari* or Creator. In the ritual intent, what are conceived and felt by the practitioners are the intentions and the constructs of *pagpudji* (homage) and *paglagguh* (rendering importance), remembering the ancestors, fulfilling the *janji* (ancestral pact) and removing bodily ailments and social maladies believed to be caused by the ancestors. Hence, what is revealed in this study is a mode of paying homage to the ancestors. The other rituals such as those stipulated in the *kasulatan gulalan* are not construed as rituals of worship or *pagsumba*, but again as modes of showing obedience, rendering importance to the ancestors and emulation of the ancestors; *pagpudji* or ancestral homage. These rituals of ancestral homage among the practitioners of the *pagkaja* illuminate the actuality of the presence and the role of ancestors among the living. The reality of *sukut*, although dreaded by the living, serves as a reminder that, as living descendants, they are obliged to manifest obedience and walk in the



footsteps of the ancestors. Amidst its dismissal as superstition, the persistence of the *pagkaja* performance reinforced a phenomenon understood and felt as real in the ethos of the practitioners. Most scholars agree that such a reality can be understood in the light of syncretism, or folk-Islam.



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