



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KIBERE AMONG THE RUKUBA PEOPLE AND ITS SYMBOLIC IMPLICATIONS IN CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract

This paper examines the cultural significance of the Kibere, a sacred ritual drum among the Bace (Rukuba) people of Kiceland, and considers its possible place in Christian worship. It describes the drum's traditional construction, consecration, custodianship and use in initiation ceremonies, festivals, marriages and hunting celebrations. These practices express cultural identity, communal unity, ancestral continuity and spiritual meaning. At the same time, the sacrifices and ritual offerings associated with the Kibere raise ethical and theological concerns for Christians. Drawing on the historical transformation of the cross from an instrument of execution into a Christian symbol, the paper argues that an object's meaning can change through its use and interpretation. It situates this argument within the Church's wider practice of inculturation: communicating the Christian faith through local languages, customs and symbols while retaining its central beliefs. The paper proposes that the Kibere's artistry and musical function can be distinguished from ritual practices that conflict with Christian teaching. A drum made without those rites could therefore be adapted for Christian worship as an expression of Bace heritage and praise of God. The paper recommends theological dialogue among ministers, catechesis on inculturation, cooperation with traditional rulers, and the construction of Kibere drums for church use while preserving others for traditional contexts. It concludes that thoughtful adaptation can help Bace Christians unite cultural identity with Christian faith, enrich local worship and contribute an indigenous expression to the wider Christian tradition.

Keywords: Kibere, Rukuba People, Plateau State, Christianity, Symbol

Introduction

Human beings, driven by their aesthetic nature and creative ingenuity, make various forms of art, including poetry, music, paintings, sculptures, and symbols. Among the rich tapestry of arts in Kiceland, the Kibere stands out as a significant symbol. It holds a special place among the Bace people, serving as a key element of their cultural identity and unity.

The Kibere is a ritual drum used in initiation ceremonies and carries the weight of tradition and spiritual connections for the Bace people. However, its role in ancestral worship raises questions. Why has the Kibere become the focal point among Kiceland's objects of art? What intricacies surround its traditional construction, and what moral implications does it carry? Can the Kibere find a place within Christian symbolism, despite conflicting ethical principles? Is there a scarcity of art in Christianity that necessitated the inclusion of Kibere? This article embarks on a journey to unveil the captivating story of Kibere. It seeks to bridge the gap between Rukuba culture and the Christian faith, highlighting the transformative potential of cultural inclusivity in the realm of religious symbolism. Join us as we delve into the narrative of Kibere, showcasing its cultural richness and its ability to forge new connections in an ever-evolving cultural landscape.



The Nitty-Gritty Surrounding Kibere

Kibere, like many African traditional objects of worship, has a rich history, intricate rituals, and profound significance in the Bace culture. It is crafted with meticulous care and holds sacred value, passed down through generations. The Kibere represents the echo of countless generations, shaped by timeless craftsmanship and rituals.

In the historical book titled "The Fall of the Ritual Drum and the Triumph of the Cross," it was observed:

The Kibere is specifically designed and constructed using the wood of the male dead palm tree, known as "*ikuninshiinau*." Able youths from designated clans, known as "*ingmyi-ace*," are commissioned to construct the ritual drum when the old one becomes unfit for use. There is no fixed timetable for rehabilitation or replacement. The selection and consecration of youth from these clans occur when the need for a new Kibere arises. They venture into the forest (*kutuk*) in search of the suitable tree. After finding one, a special ritual prayer is offered using the blood of a red cock (*angbak-ashen*) around the tree before it is cut to the size of the drum, with no specific measurement (45).

Other materials used in the sacred construction of the ritual drum include,

Mahogany oil (*bangyi-inchit*), kitchen soot (*imbiri*), kaolin (*untup*), a red cock (*angbak-ashen*), castrated male goat (*kibok*), cowhide (*kukpainang*), special weaving grass (*batuso*), two crosses from (*ikunibandi*), honey (*kuntung*), local gum (*kikruh*, *kunta*, or *banka*), stones, and a watchman from the house of *kutabintung*. An "*Idup inching*" is usually placed inside it to protect against rats entering the hollow of the drum. This entire ritual of constructing Kibere is conducted in the forest to keep it away from women, children, and uninitiated men to prevent desecration. The drum comprises three legs: one white, symbolizing the local chief, one red, representing the chief priest, and one left natural, typically representing the *ati-na-kabo* chief hunter (46).

After construction, one of the skilled youths from the designated clan (*igmyi-ace*) carves it with local carving instruments. Crafting a traditional artifact like Kibere is a dance of patience and precision, where each step and stroke of the chisel, and each brush of paint, becomes a silent and sacred ritual that breathes life into the Kibere and preserves the essence of culture. Following the construction, the Kibere is carried by the same youth, with one person placing it on their back and holding the cross sticks, while the second handles it from the bottom. It is crucial not to use the Kibere to cross a river because every clan has its own.

The Kibere is usually kept in a shrine (*kutaraichi*), and the custodian, usually the chief priest, a position exclusive to the *igmyi-ace* clan, has the responsibility of offering periodic sacrifices to the Kibere, including a red cock (*angbak-ashen*), an uncastrated male goat (*ihit*), and mahogany oil (*bangyi-inchit*).

The traditional use of Kibere is deeply rooted in the Bace culture. It serves as a cultural treasure and plays a vital role in summoning people to epoch-making celebrations, especially during initiation ceremonies and other significant events. The honor of bringing out and beating the drum is reserved exclusively for *ingmyi-ace* (*utundat* and *katat*). In certain circumstances, drummers from other communities may be allowed to play the drum. Kibere is brought out and used during various occasions, including the special feast of "*andu*," marking the transition of children aged (7-10) from childhood to adulthood, and during the "*Aso*" festival, which occurs every two years in some communities. It is also used during royalist marriage ceremonies and hunting festivals, particularly when a significant animal is killed.



Kibere, a sacred traditional drum among the Bace people, holds profound cultural significance and craftsmanship that transcends its mere existence as an instrument. However, when examined through the lens of Christian ethics, the construction and utilization of Kibere give rise to ethical concerns within the context of Christian faith, morals, and theology. While it is undeniably a significant cultural symbol within the Bace tradition, it embodies practices and rituals that fundamentally conflict with Christian beliefs such as blood offerings (Hebrews 9:12), libations (Leviticus 19:4), and pagan and idolatrous tendencies (Exodus 20:4-5, Ephesians 2:8-9), practices that are at odds with the core tenets of the Christian faith. These rituals associated with its construction can be done away with, since the rituals do not contribute to the sound of the drum. Before we explore its implications for Christianity, let us look at the famous Christian symbol, the Cross.

The Cross, From Its Notion Of Evil To A Christian Symbol Of Redemption

The cross has become one of Christianity's most recognized symbols. Its significance evolved dramatically from pre-Christian times when it represented evil, punishment and a pagan object of torture to its transformation into a Christian symbol of redemption, largely influenced by Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena.

Traditionally, the cross was associated with disgrace and cruelty. In Roman society, it was a means of executing criminals. Horace, a Roman poet (65-8BC), asserted that only criminals' bodies were nailed to this shameful and most degrading cross. Jesus himself was crucified on the cross by Roman authorities, emphasizing its negative connotations. For the Romans, the cross symbolized shame, mockery, betrayal, and disgrace, and no one wanted to be associated with it. Even today, for Jews, the cross remains a symbol of centuries of oppression and suffering. Crucifixion was so degrading that the Romans reserved it for foreigners rather than their own citizens. In essence, the cross had a pagan origin with no positive connotations before the time of Jesus. However, when Jesus was crucified on the cross for a crime they considered treasonable, everything changed. His crucifixion marked the beginning of a new era, transforming the cross from a symbol of death into a cornerstone of Christian identity, victory and salvation. The Paschal event, encompassing Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, forever altered the meaning of the cross.

Emperor Constantine played a crucial role in elevating the cross's status. He famously had a vision of a cross in the sky with the words "*in hoc signo vinces*" ("in this sign you conquer") before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD. This vision led him to order his soldiers to adorn their shields with the Christian Chi-Rho symbol "XP." After his victory, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, granting religious tolerance to Christians and allowing them to openly practice their faith. Constantine's mother, Helena, is believed to have discovered the true cross on which Jesus was crucified during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem around 326-327 AD. This discovery further solidified the cross's significance in Christian history.

The cross's transformation from a symbol of shame to a Christian symbol of redemption is a testament to the profound impact of Jesus' crucifixion and the actions of Emperor Constantine and Helena. This symbol, once associated with disgrace, now stands as a powerful emblem of faith and salvation.

When Christianity expanded to include Gentiles, it adapted by incorporating new structures, categories, and symbols to resonate with the people in their diverse socio-cultural environments. Notably, Greek philosophy heavily influenced the early Christians, making it natural for them to embrace the concept of the *Logos* becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. Additionally, the Romans' celebration of their sun god's birthday, known as *dies natalis solis invicti*" (birthday of the



unconquered sun), was repurposed by Christianity to commemorate the birth of Jesus (Christmas) as the "Son of God." This appropriation of symbols and categories endowed them with new meanings that transcended their original significance, thanks to the innovative beliefs of the Christian faith.

Kibere: Implications For Inculturation

The missionary's journey is one deeply intertwined with the cultural and traditional tapestry of the people they seek to enlighten. Just as Jesus embraced Jewish customs during His earthly ministry and borrowed from the rich Jewish cultural elements and symbols, today's missionaries and Christians must navigate diverse cultures and traditions as they spread the Christian message. A glance through the scriptures reveals that Jesus observed some of the Jewish traditions, paying tax to Caesar, a Roman emperor (Mathew17:24); observed the Passover (Mark14:12); attended a traditional wedding of the Jews and even provided wine for wedding guests (John2:1-11); Jesus entered a synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke4:16-21), Circumcised according to the Mosaic law on the 8th day (Luke2:21), just to mention but a few. It is essential to remember that while Jesus embraced certain aspects of Jewish culture, He also challenged and critiqued elements that failed to prioritize humanity and divinity.

"The mission of the Church has always been traced back to Jesus' mandate to his disciples, when He gave them power to go out to the entire world and proclaim the good news of salvation to all nations (Mark16:15; Matt28:19-20; Luke24:46-47; John20:19-29; Acts1:9-11). The mission of the church entailed crossing all human boundaries and meeting people of all cultures, which means that this young church obviously was going to encounter various difficulties that had to do with local problems and different mentalities" (Uchu10).

This universal mission demands an understanding of and respect for local customs and mentalities. Ignoring the cultural nuances of the mission field can render Christianity foreign and superficial. To truly connect with the natives, missionaries must embrace the local culture, language, signs, and symbols.

Pope Paul VI wisely cautioned against overlooking the importance of adapting to the cultural context:

"Evangelization will lose much of its power and efficacy if it does not take into consideration the people to whom it is addressed, if it does not make use of their language, their signs, and their symbols, if it does not answer to the questions which are relevant to them, if, in a word, it does not reach and influence their way of life" (742).

Unless the modern missionary in Kiceland is open to the rich cultural heritage and indices contained in the land, Christianity will for ages remain foreign and superficial to the natives. The Unace (Rukuba man), like most Africans, understands it better when he is taught in his own language, using his signs and symbols. Although he may seem converted, in his heart he is notoriously traditional and cultural. To effectively reach the hearts of people in Kiceland, missionaries must communicate in their language and resonate with their signs and symbols. Conversion, on the surface, may occur, but true transformation comes when faith aligns with culture and tradition.

Throughout history, both St. Paul (Galatians 2:1-6, 11, 14), and various Popes through the centuries have advised missionaries to respect and embrace indigenous cultures rather than imposing their own. Pope Alexander VII, in 1658, to the Vicar Apostolic of Tonkin and Coch in China through the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of Faith, wisely instructed missionaries to preserve local customs and rites, provided they did not contradict religion and morality. This approach ensures that faith transcends culture, enriching both.

"Do not in any attempt, and do not in any pretext persuade these people to change their rites, habits and customs, unless they are openly opposed to religion and good morals. For what could be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any European country over to



China? It is not your country but the faith you bring...which does not reject or belittle the rites or customs, so any nation, as long as these rites are not evil, but rather desires that they be preserved in their integrity and fostered. It is as it were, written in the name of all men and the customs of their country itself should be esteemed, loved and respected above anything else in the world"(42-43).

Kibere, a musical instrument with cultural and moral constraints conflicting with Christian ideals, can be an opportunity for such enrichment. It is a testament to the creativity of the Bace people, utilizing materials created by God. The animal sacrifice associated with it signifies blessing rather than evil. Uchu succinctly captured these thoughts better,

"Looking at the construction, one cannot but wonder at the skillful genius and creativity of the Bace works of art that are brought to bear in this instrument of music. The skins, dead palm, grasses and the implements that are used are all creations of God, which were redeemed by the suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ. It is an instrument for the praise of the almighty *Kuru* for the *Bace* people. The slaughtering of animals is only a sign of blessing, just as we bless people and objects. The animal was the highest thing that the *Bace* person thought they could give to God and be happy with (89).

Just as the Church baptized Roman pagan symbols like the cross into Christianity, Kibere can be consecrated as a Christian symbol suitable for worship.

The Church through the centuries has adopted various cultural and pagan elements, such as clerical attire, pots, and musical instruments, without compromising its core values. Similarly, Kibere can be embraced as an instrument for Christian worship. The moral character of an object lies in its use, not its origin and make. Modern musical instruments from diverse cultures have found a place in Christian worship, despite pagan roots.

"At a time in history, they (modern musical instruments) were not allowed to be played at worship because their origins were used to be pagan gods. Now we all adore these musical instruments, and we dance to their music daily and yet we detest the ones that God has blessed us with. Yet they have nothing to do with immorality that God detests. These new musical instruments and their beats are immoral in nature, yet we have embraced them" (64).

The drum, having once been used in ancestral worship, can also serve as an instrument of Christian worship. The ritual process surrounding the construction and preservation of the kibere are but the way our ancestors understood God (*kuru*) and worshipped Him with what they had.

The mission of the Church necessitates embracing cultural diversity and respecting indigenous customs. Just as Jesus integrated into Jewish culture, missionaries should connect with the cultures they encounter. Come to think of it, how different is the ritual drum from the other musical instruments in our Churches (*agangak*, *potsinting*, and *flutes*) that were and are still used in pagan worship? Kibere, like other elements before it, can be sanctified for Christian worship, demonstrating that it is humanity that worships, not the instruments themselves. By doing so, the Church can bridge cultural divides and carry the message of Christ to every corner of the world.

Conclusion

At the incarnation, when the Word became flesh (John 1:14), it renewed all of creation. Through Christ's resurrection, all creation was blessed and redeemed. There is nothing that cannot be used for the glorification of God. Christ's coming into the Jewish culture was meant to Christianize all cultures, not abolish them (Matt 5:17). Our purpose should be to unite all of creation in praising God. If we



view the drum in this light, the Kibere ritual drum and its expressions could be one of the gifts of Bace culture to Christianity.

As Bace Christians, our journey is a call to unite our heritage with our faith. These recommendations provide a path towards inculturation, preserving our culture while embracing Christianity. By doing so, we enrich our worship, honor our traditions, and contribute to the global tapestry of Christian expression.

Recommendations

In our journey as Bace people in Kiceland and beyond, it is crucial that we preserve our rich culture and tradition even as we embrace Christianity. Christianity, often arriving with Western symbols and influences, should not lead us to discard our heritage. Instead, it calls us to find ways to blend our culture and faith harmoniously. Therefore, we propose the following recommendations:

- a. **Ministerial Engagement:** Base ministers in Kiceland should actively engage in theological discussions. We should organize seminars and symposiums, perhaps as yearly events, to delve into how the Church has successfully integrated symbols and appreciated our cultural tapestry. These discussions will open doors to further inculturation avenues in Kiceland.
- b. **Kibere in the Church:** While some Kibere should remain reserved in traditional rituals (*kutaraichi*), there should also be an effort to construct Kibere without the associated rituals. Skilled individuals should make these accessible, similar to small drums (*agangak*), for use in Christian worship. This preserves our cultural identity and allows us to worship God in our unique way.
- c. **Proper Catechesis on Inculturation:** Base ministers, as custodians of the Christian faith in Kiceland, must focus on educating and forming our youth. We should ensure that our children don't perceive our traditions as evil but as our ancestral ways of connecting with God, open to future harmonization with Christianity.
- d. **Cooperation of Traditional Rulers:** Traditional rulers can play a vital role in promoting inculturation. They can help convey that this mission doesn't diminish Bace traditions but elevates them on the world stage. Just as the Romans have the Cross and clerical attire, and the Igbo culture contributes musical instruments, it's time for the Bace to share Kibere with the world.

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