

GST 113

NIGERIA PEOPLES & CULTURE

Sarah AJIYA
Cordelia CLAYTON
Tobi JOHNSON
Dinatu B. TANKO
Felix ODOFIN
Cynthia M. SAIDU

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LESSON 14

THE CULTURE AREA OF THE SUDAN SAVANNA REGION OF NIGERIA

The People of the Sudan Savanna Region of Nigeria

Just like in the Rain Forest and Guinea Savanna Regions, the Sudan Savanna Region of Nigeria is also made up of some tiny little cultures. Besides, there are the Kanuri and Hausa which constitute the major cultural groups of the Sudan Savanna. You should also remember that Hausa is Nigeria's largest cultural group. According to history, Daura is the original home of the Hausa people. History also tells us that the seven original Hausa states of Daura, Kano, Zaria [Zazzau], Kakaina, Rano, Biram and Gobir were founded by the children of a certain Bawo, son of a certain migrant Prince of Baghdad, variously called Abuyezid or Abuyazidu or Bayajidda. It is recorded that Daura, the mother of Bayajidda, was the youngest of five grand-daughters of a fugitive Canaanite, named Najb. So, the Bayajidda myth represents the mirror of a historical period in which the formation of states began in Hausaland. Today, the Hausa people of Nigeria are mostly concentrated in Kano, Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara states.

Most Hausa communities have also settled in the neighboring Niger Republic. Besides, Hausa people are widespread over a large area of the central Sudan. This is mostly due to religious, political and economic activities. The Hausa language is also widespread. It is recorded that not only is Hausa language classified under the Chadic subgroup of the Afro-Asiatic or Hamito-Semitic family, it is also spoken over a very wide area by so many nationalities. The Hausa Language is the *lingua franca* of the whole of the so called former Northern Region of Nigeria. Amazingly, it is recorded that seventy-five per cent of Hausa speakers are non-Hausa. The language is spoken in the whole of Sudan Savanna area.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE SUDAN SAVANNA REGION

As stated earlier, Hausa people are the most representative of the people of the Sudan Savanna region. This is the reason why in these sections we will always refer to them. The social and political organization of the Hausa people is founded on strict status differentiation. We have the Sarakuna [the chiefs] and the Masu Sarauta. The Sarakuna are at the top of the hierarchy, while the Masu Sarauta are holders of offices. Those who hold hereditary offices constitute the sub class of Masu Saruata Na Asali while those who hold offices of allegiance form the Masu Sarauta Na Cafka, and they constitute the middle class. There is the third class called **Talakawa**. It is made up of farmers, petty civil servants, craftsmen, traders, etc.

Almost every Hausa territory is organized into city-states with fairly large capitals and several village communities.

The Five levels of administration of a Hausa state:

- i. Jama'a
- ii. Kaukya
- iii. Unguwoyi
- iv. Gidajoi or Gundumomi
- v. Birni.

The Jama'a represents the smallest operative political unit while Birni constitutes the largest.

The patron-client network is what we usually find in Hausaland. Their socio-political process is organized in such a way that the focus of action is on some defined central figure to whom many others are attached as subordinates or clients, and whose interest he represents and protects. The so-called clients are seen as being socially and politically immature or minor, and are therefore unable to deal directly with the next higher authority. It is recorded that active sense of hierarchy and authority is reflected, not only among the migrant Hausa colonies all over the Central Sudan, but also among the professional organizations. You should always remember that every Hausa migrant community has the equivalent of the patron leader called Sarkin Hausawa, just as we have among the professional guilds Sarkin Makera of the black smiths, the Sarkin Mukada or simply Makada of the drummers, the Sankira of the praise singers, the Sarkin Alaru of the head porters, the Imam of the mallams, etc. (Adamu, 1978).

THE ECONOMY OF THE SUDAN SAVANNA PEOPLE

Farming, industry and commerce constitute the three major components of Hausa economy. Guinea corn, millet, maize and beans are the main agricultural crops you easily find in Hausaland. Hausa agriculture has always been at the forefront of Nigerian economy. For instance, in the year 1970, the Sudan Savanna area accounted for some ninety-two per cent of the total guinea corn output in Nigeria. It is also recorded that it is among the Hausa that we have found a culture of irrigation before the era of the river basins in Nigeria.

With regard to industry, Hausa people are known for the making of craft products such as leather works, blacksmithing, sculpture, perfumes and several textile wares. They are also famous in commerce. It is recorded that up till date, the Hausa remain one of Africa's foremost merchants. Some even argue that it was commerce of the Trans Saharan trade that mostly accounted for the rise of the great Habe kingdoms of Kano, Katsina, Zaria and Gobir. The Hausa also hold the monopoly of the kolanut trade, especially in the Yoruba area of the Rain Forest region and those parts of the Sudan and Sahel. They also champion the distribution of a wide range of food items, household goods, as well as repairs of broken metal ware over almost the whole of Nigeria.

Following the client-patron pattern in Hausa politics, the bulk of economic production is in the hands of the Talakawa. But the Sarakuna and Musa Sarauta have a number of Talakawa they entrust with economic production on their behalf. You should also remember that division of labour in Hausaland is gendered. For instance, the sector of petty production, such as the preparation of meals and snacks, retail sales of grains, spinning, etc., is considered a female domain while production of crafts such, as blacksmithing as well as long distance trade, is mostly male affair.

You should always note that the gendered division of labour in Hausaland has, nevertheless, given some unusual power to their women. Hausa women, more than in any other ethnic group, enjoy enormous economic freedom. They are free to run their private business and enjoy absolute control over their income. History tells us that Hausa culture provides that a wife is justified to claim a fee for labour rendered to a husband in the process of economic production. It is even recorded that some Hausa women are far richer than their husbands.

Who are the Fulani?

Beside the Hausa, the Fulani are one of the major ethnic groups in the Sudan Savanna region of Nigeria. The Fulani call themselves Fulbe and they speak Ffulfulde. However, Wolof people call them “Peul” and the Bambara address them as “Fula”. In the Chad Basin they are called “Felaata” while in Nigeria they are known as “Fulani”. Their language is mixed with various dialects among the communities of Senegal, Futa Jalon, the upper and middle Niger region, Northern and North-Western Nigeria, the Adamawa Highlands and Bagimiri. The Fulani have no distinct territory. Although not the largest ethnic group in Africa, they are best known as the most widely distributed group in the whole of the African continent. Most of the time, they constitute a numerical minority among the peoples with whom they dwell. This is especially the case in Hausaland. Today, Fulani communities are found in Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, etc., but Senegal is believed to be the original home of the Fulani in the Western Sudan. In Nigeria, Fulani are mostly settled among the Hausa of Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Bornu, Bauchi as well as in the Jos Plateau and Adamawa Highlands. Thus, the name “Hausa Fulani,” is the result of the symbiotic relations between Hausa and Fulani.

You should also remember that there are two broad categories of the Fulani: the ***Pastoral or cattle Fulani*** and the ***settled or Fulani Gidan***.

The pastoral or cattle Fulani have no permanent settlements. They are best known as the greatest nomads of Africa. They are found mostly in the hilly regions of the Savanna belt. They own large herds of cows and that is what counts most to them. As for the settled or Fulani Gidan, they are mostly located around Hausa capitals. They cannot do without cows as well. You should know that the main occupation of the Fulani, be it the pastoral or the settled, is cattle rearing. Islam is the religion of the Fulani, but the pastoral Fulani combine Islam with the Pre-Islamic religious practices of their ancestors.