

RURAL HAUSA
a village and a setting

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Cambridge
at the University Press
1972

Published by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press
Bentley House, 200 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB
American Branch: 32 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022

© Cambridge University Press 1972

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 75-161287

ISBN: 0 521 08242 0

Printed in Great Britain
at the Aberdeen University Press

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We are grateful to Methuen and Co. Ltd for permission to reproduce the map from p. 357 of W. B. Morgan and J. C. Pugh's *West Africa* (Fig. 1); and to the editor of *Man* and the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland for permission to reproduce the graph from *Man*, vol. 4, p. 397 (Fig. 10).

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

As most publications relating to Hausaland have long historical introductions, there is good reason not to follow suit. So this book, on socio-economic life in a Hausa village, opens with no more than a few general observations on historical, administrative, ethnic, linguistic and other background matters, the general reader being referred to a number of specialist studies, such as those from which citations have been drawn, where far more detail may be found.

The Hausa people are settled mainly between $10\frac{1}{2}$ and $13\frac{1}{2}$ degrees North and 4 to 10 degrees East (see Fig. 1) in a huge area, mainly in the north of Nigeria but also in the south of the Niger Republic, which essentially consists of the basin of the Sokoto river and its tributaries to the west, and of a great plateau to the east.

The Hausa enjoy a high degree of cultural, linguistic and religious uniformity; the differing patterns of social and economic organization relate rather to the contrast between rural and urban life than to ethnic differentiation. Politically, Hausaland has for long comprised a number of emirates owing a common allegiance to the Caliph (Sultan) of Sokoto. Each emirate was centred upon a capital town (*birni*) in which the Emir (*sarki*) resided. The ruling-class was predominantly Fulani in origin. The high degree of cultural assimilation of this ruling-class with the culture of Hausa commoners has, however, mitigated against the continuance of ethnic exclusivity.

The Fulani assumed a position of political dominance in the aftermath of the *jihād* (q.v.) called by 'Uthman dan Fodio in 1804. The extraordinarily complex nature of the movement that culminated in *jihād* makes any brief description impossible. Suffice it to note that the movement, in the later eighteenth century, drew much of its strength from the discontented rural population – whether sedentary Hausa farmers or nomadic Fulani pastoralists: Hausa rulers had become increasingly oppressive over such matters as taxation and compulsory labour (military and otherwise), with a resultant fall in the standard of living of the free peasantry. In the course of the *jihād*, however, the movement appears to have passed under the control partly of Fulani clan leaders and partly of certain scholars who were particularly closely associated with 'Uthman. It was the members of these élites who created the structure of the emirates which has survived to the present time – see Last (1970, pp. 346–7).

Almost a hundred years after the *jihād*, the caliphate (with its component emirates) was incorporated into the British Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, under Sir Frederick Lugard as High Commissioner. In 1900, when Lugard first assumed this office, there was, as Perham has noted, nowhere in sub-Saharan Africa to compare with –

the political and cultural sophistication of these ancient Hausa states, with their walled red cities, crowded mosques, literate mullahs, large markets, numerous crafts in metal and leather, far-ranging traders, and skilled production of a wide variety of crops. Served by cattle, camels, horses and donkeys, and by slaves whom early travellers to Kano reckoned as half the population, not only the ruling class but the more prosperous of the Hausa had some of the luxury of leisure coupled with a standard of living very rare in tropical Africa.

Perham (1960, pp. 33–4)

The policy of the colonial administration was based upon the conservation of the older political structure. As J. A. Burdon, the first Resident of Sokoto, argued:

What is the attitude of the British Administration towards these states? Briefly, it is construction, not destruction. Our aim is to rule through existing chiefs. . . to enlist them on our side in the work of progress and good government. We cannot do without them. To rule directly would require an army of British magistrates. . . My hope is that we may make of these born rulers a high type of British official, working for the good of their subjects in accordance with the ideals of the British Empire, but carrying on all that is best in the constitution they have evolved for themselves, the one understood by, and therefore best suited to the people.

(Burdon, (1904), cited by Crowder (1966, pp. 212–13))

As a result of this attempt to create continuity, Hodgkin has observed that

The two major empire-building movements which marked the beginning and end of the [nineteenth] century – Fulani and British – had more in common than is sometimes realised. Both succeeded in imposing, by a combination of diplomacy and military force, the authority of a single government over a large, politically heterogeneous, region. Both derived their dynamic from a missionary impulse – the idea of the construction of an Islamic state, on the model of the early Caliphate, in the one case; of the spread of Christian civilization, European commerce, and British justice, in the other. For both this sense of mission was accompanied by a certain contempt for the institutions of the supposedly ‘backward peoples’, whose moral and social standards it was the conquerors’ duty to raise.

Hodgkin (1960, p. 51)

In 1914 the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated, Lugard being appointed Governor-General – see Kirk-Greene (1968). In 1954 Nigeria became a full federation of three regions (North, East and West), with a federal capital at Lagos. In 1960 Nigeria became an independent country, and 1967 saw the creation of twelve separate Nigerian states, six of them in the former Northern region, three of them (Kano, North Central and North Western) being the homeland of most Nigerian Hausa. (See Fig. 2.)

In a typical emirate the Fulani ruling-classes and their Hausa subjects continued to owe common allegiance to the Sokoto Caliphate. M. G. Smith has drawn attention to the extent to which Islam provided an ideology which

minimized tension, especially at a societal level, between the Fulani ruling-class and their Hausa subjects: 'As Muslims, both groups... belong to the Malikite school or rite. Both emphasize agnatic kinship in descent and domestic life, both practise polygyny with easy divorce, both hold common judicial and administrative institutions, and, formerly a common system of slavery' – Smith (1965, p. 231).

'Hausa' is a linguistic not an ethnic term, and refers to those who speak the Hausa language by birth: many groups whose sole language is Hausa have little or nothing in common ethnically. But the Fulani ruling-class (Hausa-speaking though it is) constitutes a separate group, as is emphasized by their use of the name 'Habe' (singular 'Kado') to denote an 'indigene'. The Hausa proper are, also, often differentiated from the pagan Hausa-speakers, the Maguzawa (q.v.), who are scattered throughout the centre of Hausaland. It may be that there are some 15 million Hausa-speakers in the northern states today: certainly there is no other 'linguistic group' in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa with as many 'members' (see Hausa).

The fact is that ethnic classifications 'remain fluid according to the social context' – Smith (1955, p. 3). Even the settled Fulani (*Filanin gida*), from whom the ruling-class is drawn, are apt to describe themselves as 'Hausawa' to the outsider, but –

although they have lost most of their independent culture, all their language but the greetings, most of their cattle and, through intermarriage and concubinage, some of the Fulani physical traits, among themselves they draw sharp distinctions not only between the dominant Fulani and subject Hausa, but between Fulani members of ruling families and other settled Fulani. (*ibid.*, p. 3)

But despite the complexity of its ethnic structure, the society and the economy of Hausaland (and of the kingdom of Bornu to the east) have an 'underlying uniformity':

Here the local rural community, despite its self-sufficiency in food and in most other commodities, has long formed part of a wider administrative and economic framework. Tax-collectors and traders have for centuries been transporting the rural surpluses to the political capitals and the tradition of surplus production for distant centres of consumption, through trading, taxation and levies is deeply implanted. Forde (1946, p. 119)

While Hausa has long been a literary language, most Hausa works have been religious, poetical, or historical in content; or have been renderings of traditional folk tales, animal fables, proverbs and so forth. There are few sources which touch on the day to day economic affairs of ordinary people – on craftwork, rural slavery, trade, markets and so forth. Literary-minded British administrators (such as E. J. Arnett, J. A. Burdon, F. Edgar, H. R. Palmer, R. S. Rattray, A. J. N. Tremearne and others) compiled many documents on history and customs, languages and folk lore, their contribution, according to M. G. Smith (1969, p. viii), being outstanding in its 'depth, quality, variety and volume'.

Since those times, history, politics and administration have continued to be the subjects on which books have been written. Apart from M. G. Smith's *The Economy of Hausa Communities of Zaria* (1955) and the fascinating autobiography of Baba of Karo recorded by Mary Smith (1954), no books have been written about rural Hausaland, though Forde's section of a book edited by Perham (1946) is a most useful compendium of archival material. The results of such fieldwork as has been done in rural areas since the last war now mainly rest in inaccessible, or out-of-print, articles and officially published pamphlets. It is this extraordinary neglect of socio-economic affairs over the centuries which has prompted the gathering together of so much reference material in the Commentary of this book. The opportunity has also been taken of emphasizing our ignorance on many matters, such as rural slavery, craftwork, or the cloth trade, on which somehow there is always assumed to be a wide corpus of knowledge. Often it seems that the great traveller Henry Barth, who was in West Africa 120 years ago, is the most modern of all observers of the rural scene.

Although the chapters of this book mainly relate to certain aspects of socio-economic life in a single Hausa village (Batagarawa in Katsina Emirate), and although the single theme of economic inequality dominates the whole analysis, these chapters, together with the accompanying Commentary, partly represent a tentative demonstration of the possibilities of arguing from the particular to the general in this enormous, sociologically unexplored, region. Put in general terms the idea is that the analysis of the detailed findings in a single village, set against the background of similar work elsewhere, enables the formulation of hypotheses, or the presentation of mere ideas, relating to the identity of some of the salient socio-economic variables associated with the posited 'uniformity' in Hausaland – hypotheses and ideas which may then be tested elsewhere.

The adoption of such a procedure does not involve the idea that there is anything especially 'representative' or 'typical' about the chosen Hausa village – although it is necessary to insist, for reasons given below, that Batagarawa is the centre of a considerable area of dispersed settlement and not a mere suburb of nearby Katsina city. In a part of the world where rural population densities vary enormously (and where high proportions of the population live respectively in very densely and very sparsely populated localities), and where hosts of other ecological or geographical factors also show immense variation – examples being the depth of the water-table, soil fertility, the proportion of marshland (*fadama*), accessibility to markets, availability of firewood, extent of good grazing land, incidence of trypanosomiasis – the very notion of a representative village is obviously absurd. Different though ten Hausa villages in as many widely-flung areas might happen to be, there is no need to decide which of them is the most representative when analysing why they have 'more in common' than (say) any pair of villages one of which is Tiv, the other Hausa.

This book is also an attempt to demonstrate that when studying the structure of socio-economic life in a small West African rural community, there are places and circumstances in which an approach based on isolating economic factors within a sociological framework may be even more illuminating than one of wider and more sociological scope. Low though the standard of living in Batagarawa is, it may yet be the kind of place where economic factors have more influence than kinship on the choice of marriage partners.

But any method of fieldwork which leans so heavily on the study of the economic behaviour of individual farmers (*qua* individuals) must be based on a theme (or set of themes) relating the individuals to one another, differentiating their functions, enabling one to observe the workings of the economy as a whole and so forth. It was by sheer accident that the theme of economic inequality first emerged towards the end of the present writer's six-month stay in Batagarawa in 1967 when grain was very scarce, and it was only gradually, as analysis of the detailed material proceeded, and as additional information came in from M. S. Nuhu, that it began to appear that a single-theme approach, based on the classification of farmers into four 'economic-groups' in accordance with their living standards, provided a workable framework.

While this framework proved much more useful than had been expected, its artificiality, as a mere device on which to hang the detailed findings, must be strongly emphasized. It is true that a man's general economic standard is closely related to his success as a farmer and that some farmers are generally regarded as notable successes and others as dismal failures; yet the ordinary man-in-the-street does not look at society in this mechanistic kind of way. In a society where neither land nor labour are scarce factors, the present writer is not in the least obsessed by the topic of economic inequality as such, but has rather experimented with the use of a tool which is seldom used in such an environment. It is quite likely that some other approach would have proved more relevant to the primary aim of tentative generalization.

But this approach is certainly a forceful demonstration of the dangers of regarding any farming community as composed of a group of 'average farmers' – together with (as one must always nowadays assume) a few 'progressive farmers'. It is not merely that a few farmers operate on a much larger scale than others, but that there are many richer farmers who have entirely different economic aims from many poorer farmers. As for the 'failed farmers', those who in our terminology are 'too poor to farm', they do not deviate from the 'norms' set by more successful men, 'but live in a looking-glass world of contrariety' (p. 160).

The Hausa people are much less urbanized than the members of many of the other important West African 'ethnic groups' (such as the Yoruba or the Ashanti), it being likely that at least four-fifths of those in the homeland are largely dependent on farming for their livelihood (see p. 297) – though many

who travel abroad to Ghana, southern Nigeria and elsewhere, congregate in cities. Yet nearly all administrators and research workers (except for a few missionaries and others who have studied the pagan Maguzawa) have been based on cities and large towns, like the fief-holders in the nineteenth century. A mass of valuable village assessment reports and similar material, compiled by young and enthusiastic District Officers, who travelled around the countryside 'on tour', must still lie unexplored in the National Archives. But most publications suffer from severe 'urban bias' – hallowed conventional notions about the 'mass of the peasantry' (*talakawa*) passing from one respectable author to another. A few pertinent citations are presented here without comment; many similar citations from more recent sources are criticized elsewhere in this book.

First there was (and is) the idea that where land is plentiful 'there could be no natural supply of wage-labourers' – Perham (1960, p. 41), so that 'to obtain workers it was necessary to resort to force' – Meek (1925, p. 287); tied up with this was the belief in the 'rudimentariness' of rural economic systems. 'There was only a rudimentary monetary and exchange system and the ruling class, or men of exceptional enterprise, could hardly obtain the labourers their activities required except by compulsion' – Perham (1960, p. 41). Lugard's policy of abolishing the *legal status* of slavery, while permitting owners to retain the slaves they already owned, was readily justified, as follows: '...thus slavery was built into the Hausa economic system which would have been completely disrupted by wholesale manumission, and hordes of unemployed people who had lost their lands and their tribes would have been thrown out to starve or to thief' (*ibid.*).

Secondly, there was (and is) the presumption that given 'freedom from fear', benign evolutionary processes automatically come into play in the countryside:

Freedom from want, as far as ever it entered colonial plans, was thought of as something that followed in due though slow course from the freedom from fear that the Pax Britannica provided; unharassed by tribal wars and slave raids, and by fiscal extortion, the people could be left to develop their natural resources in their own way. Mahood (1964, p. 7)

Thirdly, there was (and is – see p. 136) the belief that farmers lacked foresight or the incentive 'to work more than the low standards of well-being demand' – Perham (1960, p. 41). In reference to the early years of British administration Heussler (1968, p. 150) recently asserted that 'everyone knew that the peasant was in the habit of planting just enough to see him through from one harvest to the next'. Hastings, who first arrived in Northern Nigeria as a Political Officer in 1906, readily confirms this viewpoint:

Nigerian farmers are not provident, they never take thought about the morrow, or keep a reserve in hand for times of scarcity. The average man just sows and reaps for present needs. He has to feed himself and his wife and children for a year and keep enough grain for next year's seed, for paying his tax and a bit for charity and hospitality. That is all the great

majority bother about. In an abundant year they will have an extra surplus, but it is by God's will, not their own effort, that they gain it. At first sight it is difficult to understand why they do not guard against the rainy, or in Nigeria the non-rainy day, but they have their reasons, and one can suppose they know best what suits them. Constitutionally they are lazy, and will not work more than they need, though while they are at it they work hard. Another thing they know is that rain shortage is rare on the whole, and they trust to luck and Allah.

Hastings (1925, pp. 112-13)

In reference to the (then) new policy of 'mixed farming' (see **Ploughing**), another colonial official, asked: 'What is the use of increasing his [the farmer's] productivity eight-fold? What can he do with the crops? He already has as much food as he wants, and sells such surplus as he has with difficulty' – Crocker (1936, p. 132).

Fourthly, most writers are burdened by the presumption that 'ordinary farmers' compose the great bulk of the population – a belief which, as already mentioned, it is our particular purpose to demolish. This idea is so deep-seated that it is seldom made explicit, except in relation to 'mixed farming': thus 'the ordinary farmer normally cultivates only about 3 or 4 acres' – Faulkner and Mackie (1936, p. 94).

Given the persistence of beliefs of this kind, and of important misconceptions about more specific matters such as the cultivation of manured farmland and farm-selling, it is no wonder that the reports of most outside experts who have been asked to advise on methods of increasing agricultural output are informed by profound pessimism. The experts are in a cleft stick. On the one hand, Hausa rural economies are assumed to be in such stable (natural) equilibrium that no outside intervention could make any significant impression on them; on the other hand, this equilibrium is presumed to be so fragile that any reform which happens to help some farmers more than others is bound to lead to immediate disaster – particularly to the emergence of a 'landless class'. The author would like to think that her findings will assist the adoption of some stance intermediate between these two extremes.

The concept of a typical Hausa village is necessarily absurd. Yet certain villages may be regarded as notably atypical if it is certain that only a small proportion of the total Hausa population lives in similar environments. Thus, a village situated on a river bank which is so suitable for onion-growing that most farmers cultivate this crop, might be considered atypical for this reason alone. Again, it is arguable that villages in the Kano and Sokoto Close-Settled Zones, where population densities are so great that bush-farms have been entirely eliminated from the agricultural landscape, are notably atypical – although the realization that there are many localities where farmers *choose* to cultivate most of their farms every year despite the availability of nearby bush-land, has somewhat reduced the strength of this case. However this may be, it is necessary

to avoid misconceptions by insisting that Batagarawa is not notably atypical owing to its proximity to the famous city of Katsina.

Owing to the small scale of most population-density maps, it is often assumed that Katsina city is entirely encircled by a densely-populated zone, but the large-scale published dot-map compiled by R. M. Prothero on the basis of the 1952 census shows that this zone is a mere segment running from north-east, through east, to south-east, densities elsewhere being quite low, though variable. As Fig. 3 and Plate 33 show, a forest reserve lies between Batagarawa and Katsina city; and early travellers (see *Batagarawa*) commented on the wild state of the country to the south of the city. The Batagarawa Hamlet (*unguwa*) extends some miles to the west, north-west and south of the village and includes much uncultivated, though cultivable, bush.

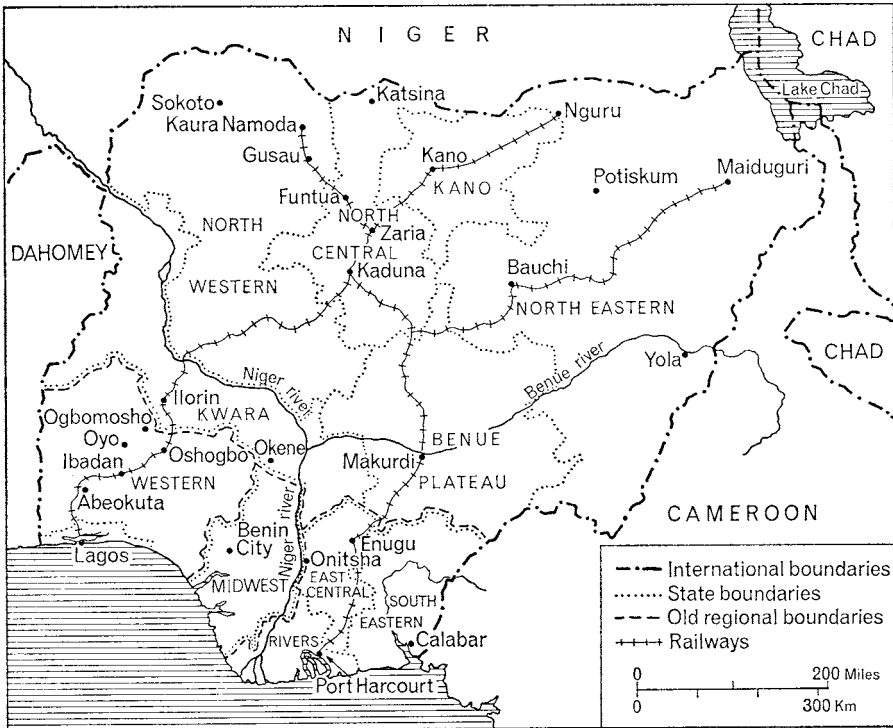


Fig. 2. Map of Nigeria, showing state boundaries

The farmers of Batagarawa have a preference for growing most of their crops on permanently cultivated manured farmland, although many of them also own some bush-farms; but unlike many farmers in the Kano Close-Settled Zone – see Mortimore and Wilson (1965) – they obtain no manure, in the form of compound sweepings, from the nearby city.

This physical separation is reflected in an absence of close sociological ties between the indigenous inhabitants and the city – only the members of the ruling-class and one other man having their origins there. Only 7 out of 303 farmers' wives in Batagarawa are of Katsina city origin (Table VII.1, p. 96). Nor is there much outward migration by men to the city, as Chapter VII makes clear.

Batagarawa is the capital of Mallamawa District which, as its name suggests, may formerly have been renowned for its Malams; however, the town was in Yandaka District until 1928 and, as local people nowadays insist, is not a notable centre for religious studies.

The great proportion of present-day inhabitants of Batagarawa count themselves as 'indigenes', tracing their descent back through several generations of local farmers. Although historical enquiries would doubtless reveal the population to be very mixed ethnically (including many of slave origin), there are few people who normally care to denote themselves as Kanuri, or members of other northern ethnic groups, apart from a very small number of men in dispersed farmhouses in a part of Batagarawa Hamlet known as Kauyen Yamma, whose fathers or grandfathers were Fulani pastoralists who migrated to the area to take up farming. (The settled Fulani pastoralists who nowadays provide the town with milk, live outside Batagarawa Hamlet.) So Batagarawa cannot be regarded as notably unrepresentative for reasons connected with the ethnic origin of the population (see *Mallamawa District*).

Batagarawa is, of course, most unrepresentative in being the seat of a District Head, the highest level of chief under an Emir. However, as most of the farms cultivated by members of the ruling-class are situated in other Mallamawa Hamlets, the ruler's presence has no significant effect on such economic matters as the distribution of Batagarawa farmland.