



## A Preliminary Survey of the State and Society in Hausa Land on the eve of the Sokoto Jihad, Nigeria

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**Abstract.** This study presents a preliminary survey of the state and society in Hausaland on the eve of the Sokoto Jihad. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the political, social, and cultural landscape of the Hausa people during this critical period. Using primary and secondary sources, the study delves into the state of governance, societal structures, and religious practices in Hausa land. Through this analysis, we hope to shed light on the factors that led to the emergence of the Sokoto Caliphate and its impact on the Hausa society. This study is significant as it adds to the existing body of knowledge on pre-colonial Hausa society and provides a foundation for further research on the subject matter. By examining the state and society in Hausaland on the eve of the Sokoto Jihad, this study aims to deepen our understanding of this pivotal period in Hausa history. We have availed ourselves of the works of our predecessors, and other scholars, concerning this study that is both primary and secondary resources, the works have been of considerable assistance. We are indeed greatly indebted to the authors. There is perhaps, no better indication and acknowledgment of the great debt that we owe the authors of these works than our bibliography and notes.

**Keywords:** State, Hausa Land, Sokoto Jihad, Nigeria.

### 1. Introduction

The term Hausa land appears to be the geographical area inhabited by the Hausa-speaking people. It is more of a geographical than a political term because Hausaland existed for centuries, not under an old embracing political system. There were many states in Hausaland more or less independent of one another. Before the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, various Hausa States competed politically and economically for dominance. And in the remote past, Hausaland fell under the influence of first Songhai and second Borno.

In this paper, an attempt is made to examine the State and society in Hausaland on the eve of the 1804 Sokoto Jihad. In undertaking this work, one is not making any spectacular breakthrough but by gleaning through some of the major sources dealing with the subject matter, it is expected that an Insight into pre-jihad Hausa society be presented. Issues on the political, social, racial and religious conditions in the area be raised and attempts be made to provide answers to them. Finally, the conclusion will attempt to draw some observations on the issues raised albeit in a tentative and fragmentary form.

### Political Conditions in Hausaland on the Eve of the 1804 Jihad

First and foremost, we must address the issue of the nature of polities obtained In the Hausa States. In other words, we shall concern ourselves with the various states formed in the area, and their relative strength and to find out which one of them was leading in so far as military power is concerned.

One of the major themes in the History of Hausaland in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries according to R.A. Adeleye, was the process of State formation and State building, a theme which was not limited to Hausaland in particular but indeed a dominant theme in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. The task of State formation among the various Hausa States naturally forced them to compete with each other for political dominance in the area; consequently, inter-state relations among the States were characterized by a series of incessant conflicts and wars perhaps arising over the control of boundaries, the desire to control trade and trade routes and over the possession and Usage of superior weapons on neighbours, etc.

The major Hausa States included Kebbi, Zamfara and Gobir located in North Western Hausaland also referred to as States on the Rima River System and the traditional Hausa States; Kano, Katsina, Zazzau,

Daura, Rano and Biram located on the plains and open Savannah of Hausaland of the States in the Rima River System, Kebbi, Zamfara and Gobir were the most prominent one's worthy of note.

Sources at our disposal indicate that during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and indeed up to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the dominant state in the area was Kebbi. The emergence of Kebbi to central position of power followed the decline of Songhai which hitherto threatened the Hausa States and brought them under her sway. Although the pre-eminence of Kebbi among the leading Hausa states in the period is widely acknowledged yet sources did indicate that Kebbi did not succeed in evolving an administrative machinery for a thorough integration of its dependences with its metropolitan provinces. What was obtained was that the Vassal States acknowledged the Kebbi's overlordship and accordingly paid tribute to the Kant, Kebbi, in essence, did not achieve a high degree of centralisation as perhaps obtained in Songhai under the Askias. During this period, Zaria and Nupe came under Kebbi, but with the death of Kafita, these southern dependents (Zaria and Nupe) and others regained their independence. A powerful Empire is supposed to have spread its dominance to all directions but from all indications, it seems, that Kebbi's imperialism was directed towards one direction to the South where Zaria and Nupe were tangentially incorporated into Its sphere of influence. This perhaps explains Kebbi's Imprecise degree of political control in the North though her influences were to an extent noticeable down to the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Kebbi lost political dominance to Zamfara. Zamfara, by this time, became the leading state on the Rima River system. While Kebbi's imperialism in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was limited, Zamfara's political dominance in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was short-lived as she was overthrown by the Gobirawa who had been pushing southwards from the North under Tuareg pressure from Ahir.

Zamfara's tenure as a leading power in Western Hausaland was uneasy and precarious. She raided Kano and Katsina without any tangible result. However, Gobir came under Zamfara during this period we can with some measure of confidence assert that Zamfara's effort in state-building did not result in the foundation of an Empire but in the end, it proved transient. Zamfara itself was soon to be eclipsed by the rising power of Gobir In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Gobir sacked Birni Zamfara and established its capital at Alkalawa some 25 miles downstream from Birni Zamfara. Gobir raided Zaberma, Gurma and Katsina. Babar the ruler, raided Kano and Shira in Bomb territory. The weight of Gobir was felt by

neighbouring Zamfara and Katsina. Bawa Dan Gwarzo and Yakubu Dan Bawa attacked Katsina and its ally Zamfara By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, Gobir itself had grown weak and under Natata (1796-1802) there was disaster. Zamfara was in revolt, Katsina was attacking and Kebbi's allegiance had become uncertain.<sup>10</sup> It is reported that Gobir's expansionism into Katsina territory was more difficult as Katsina inflicted defeat on Gobir and carried away its iron gates which resulted in the move of the capital from Goron Rami Birnin Nay. Gobir's Wars launched in the 1750s on Katsina were unsuccessful.<sup>i</sup> As for Kano, Katsina and Zazzau, we are informed that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Kano recorded a victory over Katsina and Zaria but this was short-lived. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Katsina ascertained her superiority over Kano as she launched an offensive on Kano up to the gates of the city. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Kano was under severe Katsina pressure. By the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Katsina had won the long struggle for control of the caravan routes from Hausaland to North Africa and for the rest of the century, she was to remain the leading commercial and cultural center of the western Sudan.

Katsina rose to its peak of political dominance in the 18<sup>th</sup> century despite attacks from Kebbi, Zamfara and Gobir. Zazzau is located to the South of Katsina and Kano and Its hegemony over territories to the South persisted to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Zazzau districts such as Katab, Morwa, Kajuro, Kaura, Karigi, Kaye and Kagoro came under the overlordship of Zazzau as they paid tributes, and taxes to Sarkin Zazzau at Zaria. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Hausaland, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara and Gobir had emerged as the dominant States.<sup>13</sup> Daura, Rano and Birum were late developers among the traditional seven were of necessity out of the context. Thus, they remained in the backwaters of political and economic development.

As for Zazzau, as indicated earlier, her expansionism was limited to the South and she was relatively isolated from the rivalry of its sister States. Moreover, Zazzau as the gateway to the rich countries of the south was immune from the antagonism of Its northern neighbours.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, It seems, Gobir was superficially the most powerful State In Hausaland but on a general note R.A. Adeleye asserted that:

*"None of the connecting Hausa States ever possessed the power to impose its hegemony effectively over others"*

This is as a result of the fact that:

*"AS the technology of warfare was not advanced and the difference between the power of one State and*

*another was one of degree rather than absolute superiority in sophisticated weapons and military strategy, total defeat essential for the observation of one State by another was out of the question”.*

That is why Adeleye Says:

*“The recurrent theme of the history of Hausaland was frequent wars leading either to a stalemate or very transient dominance of one State over another”*

He observed that victory in war by one State over another often resulted in the acquisition of war booties and minor adjustment of boundaries. This partly explains why despite the defeat of Kebbi by Zamfara and the defeat of Zamfara by Gobir, Kano by Katsina, etc, all of these States survived not only to the 19<sup>th</sup> century but beyond.

One major fundamental reason explaining the failure of the States to turn their victories into permanent gains is as a result of the fact that these States were militarily incapable of holding firmly and continuously on the conquered States and also the fact, they did not have the resources either human or economic to do Same. It is in this context that one can appreciate the inability of either Zamfara or even more notably Gobir to subdue Kano and Katsina in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Katsina as a whole had the upper hand in its resistance to Gobir's onslaughts. Gobir's expansion in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was already in decline and the jihadists seized the weak position of the State and successfully launched their jihad in 1804. In a strictly military sense, we can say that Gobir had a dominant military posture in Hausaland. Its domination in the area is however transient as indicated earlier at the beginning of this paper.

### **Social and Racial Condition in Hausaland on the Eve of the 1804 Jihad**

To assess the social conditions in Hausa land on the eve of the 1804 jihad, it is perhaps necessary to start by discussing the social stratification in Hausa society. Ethnically, people in Hausa land were divided into two groups; Fulani and Hausa. The Fulani were nomads and settlers while the Hausa were predominantly found in settled communities.

Hausa society was divided between free persons and States. Free persons include the Sarakuna ruling classes and Talakawa commoners. The Talakawa were again subdivided into several social cadres according to achievement, wealth or occupation. The main inferior members of society were slaves.

### **Sarakuna / Sarauta System in Hausaland**

The ruling class was the first major stratum made up of Masu Sarauta titleholders and their kin, children and

relatives. The second major social stratum was the commoners such as farmers, educated elements (Ulama), traders, cloth weavers and dyers, silversmiths, and Fulani cattle owners. At the bottom of the occupational Class were butchers, drummers, hunters, tanners, mat weavers and menial workers.

It is important to point out the level of interaction between these groups of society. For Instance, the Interests of the settled Hausa communities who were mainly peasants or farmers were fundamentally different from those of the nomads, while for the most part, relations between the two groups were peaceful, there was always a possibility of a dispute over grazing end Water. The Fulani and the Tuareg were the nomads found In Hausa land while the Hausa formed the farming class.

The Fulani and Tuareg nomads of Hausaland by our period were outside the peasant society and both groups despised it. In strict racial terms, the Fulani and Tuaregs felt themselves of a different and superior race rather than the Hausa. On this contempt of racial superiority, the Fulani and Tuareg agreed, and nomads shared a similar pattern of life. Though there was bound to be some competition over water, the grazing areas of both were generally Separated and this reduced tension between the two groups to the barest minimum.

Both the Hausa peasants and other settled communities as well as the Fulani and Tuareg nomads came under the oppression of the Sarakuna. Heavy taxation was imposed on all categories of workers, farmers and nomads. We can observe that the Fulani were aliens in the Hausa and other States in which they had lived for three or more centuries before the jihad. With a few exceptions, they had remained aliens, denied effective and direct participation in the government of their adopted homes.

As far as integration of the Fulani into the host community is concerned, the Fulani were outside the corridor of power as mentioned above. This, according to R.A. Adeleye was not a deliberate antagonism but a result of the difficulty of fitting into a system already solidified and conservative. Such a situation could nevertheless provide a fertile ground for fostering Fulani solidarity and separate identity.

More important than this factor was the outlook and way of life of the Fulani the bulk of whom were nomads and this preoccupation differentiated them from their host peoples who were mostly peasants and townsmen.

The basic animosity between nomads and townsmen completed the Fulani isolation and partly explained the tension between them and the indigenous people under whose rules they lived.

The learned among the Fulani (Ulama) did serve in the government of the Sarakuna of many if not all the States, sometimes in very high offices but not in their right as representatives of Fulani groups but on individual merits usually related to scholarship. However, being the most highly Islamised and learned group in these States they naturally assumed leadership of the cause of Islam.

The isolation of the Fulani as a group had, moreover, created cohesion among them which seems to have contributed to the widespread following which Usman Dan Fodio enjoyed and which in the end ensured the success of the jihad over a wide area. The learned Fulani opted for the art of government, scholarship and religion and Hausa in agriculture, industry and trade. The Fulani pastoralists on the other hand remained distinct from the Hausa agriculturalists at almost all levels of existence; language, ethnicity, cult, internal government stratification, ecology and kinship.

#### **The Religious Conditions of Hausaland on the Eve of the 1804 Jihad**

Hausaland accepted Islam in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The religion was introduced by the Wangaruwa traders from Mali. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was a religion of the court and by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it became the religion of the masses.

But the type of Islam practised by the Sarakuna In the various courts In Hausa land was, to borrow a leaf from R.A. Adeyeye, 's "official Islam" which emerged as a syncretic blending of the faith with traditional culture type. But the values of Islam are antithetical to the indigenous culture. In other words, pure Islam or an ideal Islamic society was not obtained in Hausa land before the jihad. The state of Islamization in Hausa land on the eve of the jihad Was a syncretic one as the Kings also accepted Islamic practice of the religion but did not make a basic departure from the traditional religions, and political and social structuring of their States In the direction of Islam. Therefore, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century i.e. on the eve of the jihad: "*They belonged to a world in which Islam was marginally conditioning traditional cultures*". Hausa Kings were in addition to the above practices, charged with (A.Shirk), that is polytheism, the most antithetical stand to Islam. We can cite several unIslamic practices of Hausa Kings. For instance, the Dirki, the Qur'an turned into a fetish to which

sacrifices of cattle were offered was not destroyed in Kano until the reign of Alwali (1781-1807). Again, a Katsina talisman similar to the sacred Mune of Borno in the belief attached to it as guardian of state security was reportedly opened only towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, to the anti-Islamic practices of the Hausa Kings, Hausa society had many deities such as Uwandowa, the goddess of hunting, and Uwargona, the goddess of agriculture. They also offered sacrifices to their gods. Certain Hausa communities also believed in a water spirit, Sarkin Rafi sacrifices which seems to have required a virgin girl. In the same vein, other Hausa communities had their totems, there was widespread belief in deviational conjuring and black magic. So, in terms of strict compliance or observance of Islam, the practice was not tenable in Hausaland and it is these circumstances that led to tension in society which ultimately precipitated the jihad.

#### **Centres of Islamic Learning in Hausaland on the Eve of the Sokoto Jihad**

As earlier indicated, Islam reached Hausaland by the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was the Wangarawa and other foreign savants and traders who were responsible for its introduction and spread in the land. One of the basic pillars for the introduction and spread of Islam in the area was the established centres of Islamic learning.

The geographical location of Hausaland which serves as a crossroads between North Africa to the North and Kanem-Borno to the West put it at a convenient point receptive to new ideas, trade and foreign influences from across the Sahara and the Middle East for quite a long time. Notable Islamic centres in the area were found in Katsina and Kano. In addition, there were numerous settlements and villages, which grew around famous Savants. These Mallam settlements became strong outposts of Islamic learning to which students from far and wide resorted and this is seen as a most crucial factor In the Islamization of Hausaland.

Bivar and Hiskett have drawn attention to several 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors of Northern Nigeria. Among these were the famous scholars from Katsina Muhammad Al-Kashinawl al-Sabbagh, better known to history as Dan Marina and his pupil Abu Abdullahi Muhammad B. Masanih who became a celebrity in his own right to both of them, 11 works on various subjects have been credited. Again, some six authors are mentioned to have lived in various Hausa States in the 1st century. Even before this period, we must point out the fact that the role of the Al-Maghili was the Islamization of the court. He is credited. to have written the first Islamic constitution for the Hausa Sarakuna of Katsina, Kano,

and Zazzau. The jihad leaders who came after him appreciated his work.

We may assume that there was frequent contact between the Ulama of Hausaland and other centres of Islamic learning in the Central Bilad al-Sudan and perhaps even beyond. R.A. Adeleye informs us that by the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Jama'a existed in the whole of Northern Nigeria and that regular contacts with the heartland of Islam Mecca and Medina and the Middle East generally through the annual pilgrimage and regular commercial connection across the Sahara provided scholars with access to books, new ideas and materials for writing.

In central Sudan, the leading local seats or centres of Islamic learning were Birnin Gazargamo, Agades, Katsina, and Kano. Kulumfardo, a renowned centre of Islamic learning located in Borno was regularly visited by scholars from Hausaland and beyond. Bala Usman, relying on R.A. Adeleye tells us that out of 21 renowned Mallams found in Hausaland in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, seven were Fulani and out of this number, Buba Yero, Modibbo, Adama and Goni Mukhtar were educated at Birnin Gazargamo and then returned to Gombe, Adamawa and Shira areas to proselytize. Palmer records that Mallam Umar leader of a Muslim community of Kulumfardo in Borno visited Nupe during the 1680s. Based on the above, we can suggest that there was regular contact and close interaction between the Ulama of Hausaland and other foreign centres of Islamic learning found in Borno, Mali, Agades and the Middle East.

Islam is not a new religion in Hausaland having been introduced in the 14th century. Hausaland served as a corridor for Muslim Mallam traders who brought new ideas and books with them for the consumption of the Ulama. Scholars of international fame visited and stayed in the various courts, taught the religion and caused its spread among the teeming masses. Hausa society, by the end of the 18th century, was practising an adulterated Islam. It was the need to purify Islam among the Ulama, which brought about the outbreak of the jihad and subsequent establishment of the caliphate in 19th century Hausaland.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that politically several Hausa States attempted to rule Hausaland but there was no Hausa Empire which ruled the land until the outbreak of the jihad and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. Gobir in terms of political dominance was the leading power in Hausaland on the eve of the Sokoto jihad. There had been oppression,

corruption, misrule, injustice, blatant economic exploitation, oppression of women, orphans, slaves, destitute and of course nomadic Fulbe and Tuaregs; meted out by the Sarkuna on the Talakawa. Despite the several centers of Islamic learning in Hausaland, Islam, was not strictly practiced as it was compromised with the customs of the land. Islam therefore did not become the governing basis of society. This situation naturally prompted the Ulama whose duty it was to reform Islam to take up arms against the Hausa (Habe) Kings, overthrow them and replace the former with the jihad leaders who ushered in a new society based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the Ijma and the Qiyas. The Ijma and the Qiyas are essentially opinions and consensus of the Muslim Umma which forms the basis of governing the Muslims in the Umma that is Community.

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