



## Hausa Concepts of Masculinity and the 'Yan Daudu

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*The Hausa category of 'yan daudu offers a challenge to the simple dichotomy of male-female gender identities. These men are categorized as neither male nor female but as an ambiguous middle category. As such they challenge the rigid divisions of Hausa ideal culture between males and females. Examination offers insight into the categories of male-female and provides incentive for further research.*

There has long been an argument between advocates of nature and nurture regarding the function each has shaping human behavior. Recently, sociobiologists like Napoleon Chagnon (1997, 1988), Edward O. Wilson (1975), and Robin Fox (1997) have had particular influence in shaping the argument regarding the inherent, or biological nature of masculinity. The significance of the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity and of gender roles in general has been relatively neglected in the elevation of biological theories in the social sciences and their employment to explain cultural issues. I am not denying the importance of biology, simply stressing the manner in which culture gives meaning to it in its social landscape. (For relevant works on sociobiology see Jerome H. Barkow, et. al., 1992 and Robert Boyd & Peter Richerson, 1994.)

Specifically, this article examines the manner in which the Hausa people of Nigeria define ideal masculinity. That definition has a role to play within the complex ethnic sociocultural framework of West Africa in which the Hausa operate. Much of what it is to be a Hausa, and, therefore the shape of Hausa interaction with their neighbors is inextricably bound within the Hausa concept of masculinity. Challenges to that concept, and reinforcements of it, come from men and "men who talk like women," the 'yan daudu.

Ideal masculine behavior and challenges to that behavior flow from a cultural definition of masculinity shaped to permit the Hausa to gain success as rulers and traders within their cultural landscape. Maintenance of ethnic identity toward other groups is essential in structuring daily interaction in the West African landscape. This maintenance of ethnic identity is particularly crucial at the borders of the area, where groups can and do switch ethnic identities to gain favorable positions. Therefore, although the Hausa are concerned with guarding their concept of masculinity throughout their territory, they are exceptionally careful in safeguarding their concept of the ideal masculine role at the borders, where new recruits to the Hausa identity are made.

### *The Hausa in the Context of West Africa*

There are about 50 million Hausa speakers in West Africa, primarily in Northern Nigeria and Southern Niger. A common language masks immense variation from community to community, a variation made greater by the process of "becoming Hausa" in which minority groups change their ethnic identities to gain various privileges reserved to the ruling class.

The "Hausa" consist of the Hausa-speaking population of Northern Nigeria and those areas of Niger in which Hausa is spoken, plus those Hausa who have emigrated for trade or other purposes to other countries of West Africa, such as Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso. Additionally, in West Africa, people apply the label 'Hausa' to any stranger who speaks Hausa and practices Islam. This is a departure from the original use of the name to denote the Habe people's language. The Habe established seven independent but related states in the area: Biram, Daura, Kano, Katsina, Gobir, Rano, and Zazzau or Zaria.

The Fulani conquered these states in the early 19th century, waging a jihad against them for not being Muslim enough. Under Shehu Usman dan Fodio they established the Sokoto Caliphate, incorporating 15 states headed by Fulani Emirs. The Habe set up states at Abuja and Maradi, successors to those of Zaria and Katsina. They also established a new state at Argunga. These states have preserved Habe customs, largely independent of Fulani ones.

At the same time the Fulani rulers of the conquered Hausa states increasingly incorporated the Habe customs of their conquered people, blending them with the Islamic Fulani customs they had brought with them. Inter-marriage further complicated the picture, mixing peoples and customs. Thus "Hausa" now refers to the original Habe population and the mixed Hausa-Fulani population of rulers. Moreover, it is often extended to other people like the Kanuri, Taureg and other West African people who have assumed Hausa language and culture to gain some kind of political or economic advantage in their interactions with members of other ethnic groups.

The term Hausa is applied to pagan Hausa speakers scattered in the middle of the Hausa area. People in Nigeria call them Maguzawa (magicians) but also consider them to be part of the Hausa ethnic group. Many of the '*yan daudu*' and shamanic practices that challenge Islamic hegemony and Hausa masculine concepts are rooted in Maguzawa religious practices.

The coming of British colonialism offered a further set of challenges to the ever-evolving mix of gender and political concepts. The relative gender equality of the Maguzawa and Habe was challenged by the more rigid male dominance of the Fulani and their eventual partners, the British. Christianity and Islam agreed on the appropriateness of male dominance, for the good of the weak female. Men had to shelter and protect women, while women tempted men from their duties. No matter what the orthodoxy, the older virtues kept emerging from the margins of society in the form of the alliance of women and '*yan daudu*' with parishioners of the older religion, one more in tune with gender equality and options.

### *Hausa within the Context of West African History: Ethnicity and Gender*

Gender relationships and concepts of masculinity must be understood within the context of Hausa history and ethnic relationships. The Hausa have been in the process of expansion for many centuries. Much of that expansion has been peaceful, based on their skill at statecraft and commerce, a great deal of which is built upon family relationships and negotiations. Patrilineal family ties are the strands that tie the web of relationships together.

Business is conducted with handshakes and one's word. The system of markets, traders, and families binds together the various parts of the state and subsequently the state itself is bound to outside units. For example, village markets in rural areas meet periodically, on three- or four-day cycles. These markets are tied to those in larger settlements that have daily markets. In turn, the larger markets are bound to a still larger central market in the regional capital. Officials tied similarly to the central authority govern each of these markets.

Similarly, all Muslim Hausa social organization is stratified. Occupation, wealth, and patron-client relationships play a part in the system, but birth is at its root. Family is a key factor in the hierarchical ladder. Sons are expected to follow their father's occupation and his wishes. Society, in theory, is held together by filial loyalty. The patron-client relationship is patterned on the father-son relationship and loyalty to the Sultan and emirs, indeed to all officials, is that of family members to one's father.

Although less complex in social organization than Muslim Hausa, the Maguzawa are also organized along patrilineal lines. Their villages are composed of exogamous patrilineal kin. Both Muslim and "pagan" Hausa form their organizations around male figures. The Maguzawa, however, retain greater privileges for women who are freer to go out in public, usually exposing their breasts with no reproach. The Maguzawa do not hold to wife-seclusion in any circumstance. For the Muslim Hausa wife-seclusion is an ideal and put into practice by those who can afford it. It helps distinguish them from their neighbors and serves as an ethnic boundary marker. Moreover, patrilineal kinship provides the fulcrum on which marriage alliances are formed, with men generally seeking marriage with their patrilineal parallel cousins, further emphasizing the male tie.

Men serve as household heads and are responsible for agriculture, collecting activities, marketing, sewing, laundry, building repairs, and transportation. Women are responsible for cooking, house cleaning, childcare, and also follow craft specialties and carry on trade, often through young daughters. Women are expected to be modest and to stay within the household unless accompanied by male family members or older post-menopausal women.

Historically, the Hausa and Hausa-Fulani ruled over local tribes, appointing village heads. These local communities were held as fiefs to feudal lords. Again, this system emphasized male rule and a particular image of masculinity in which calmness and male solidarity were essential. The subject tribes often were not Muslim and their women were allowed greater freedoms. Therefore, control of Hausa women was essential in structuring ethnic relations and maintaining ethnic boundaries. Position within the social structure and the cultural landscape determined gender relationships and cultural definitions.

British colonial rule, beginning in the early 20th century, changed the system. In general, however, the British system of indirect rule simply strengthened the central authority while pretending to rule through local rulers. The British relied heavily on their Hausa-Fulani allies to maintain control of Northern Nigeria. In Niger, the French made no pretext of indirect rule and simply centralized the system openly. The result was a greater emphasis on male rule as personified in the dual mandate of colonial and native authorities.

Finally, the Hausa became more identified with Islam under colonial rule. The British found it necessary to strengthen Muslim leaders who were their allies against “pagans” who sought to resist the imposition of colonial rule or Hausa hegemony. The British perpetrated the fiction that Northern Nigeria was mainly Islamic. The truth was different in 1900. Allegiance to the West African Fulani Islamic ethos of male dominance helped unite Hausa and distinguish them from surrounding “pagan” peoples such as the Gungawa, Kamberi, and others (Michael Smith, 1955; Salamone, 1998).

### *Hausa Islamic Practices*

Given the landscape in which the Hausa exist, the Islam of many Hausa groups is syncretic. Ralph Faulkingham (1975) notes that the Muslim and “pagan” Hausa in the southern Niger village he studied believed in the same spirits and in the same origin myth for these spirits as well. According to the myth, Allah called Adama (“the woman”) and Adamu (“the man”) to Him and bade them to bring all their children. They hid some of their children. Allah asked them where their children were. They said that they had brought all their children to Him. He then told them that the hidden children would belong to the spirit world.

The Hausa, therefore, share in the common Nigerian practice of maintaining systems of belief with ancient roots in the area alongside the universal religions of Islam or Christianity. These beliefs combine family spirits with relations to the primordial spirits of a particular site, providing supernatural sanction to the relationship between claims on resources. Indigenous theology links dead ancestors to the spirits of place in a union that protects claims and relationships to the land. Spirits of place include trees, rock outcroppings, a river, snakes, and other animals and objects. Rituals and prayers dedicated to the spirits of family and place reinforce loyalty to communal virtues and the authority of the elders in defending ancient beliefs and practices. In return, the spirits offer protection from misfortune, adjudication, and divination through seers, or shamans. Evil is appropriately punished, for shamans or diviners work with the spirits to ensure good and counteract evil.

The continuation of traditional religious rituals and beliefs among the Hausa is not incompatible with counting oneself as a Muslim, for among the Hausa, individual participation in Islam varies according to a number of variables, including wealth and power. The more wealth and power one has, the greater the strict adherence to Islam. Furthermore, traditional Hausa religion, which the Maguzawa (“pagan” or “traditional Hausa,” who are considered “people of magic”) continue to practice, attracts a number of Muslim Hausa at one time or another.

This religion is spirit-centered. Following Islamic Hausa hierarchical principles, the spirits form hierarchies of good and evil. Sacrificial offerings and spirit possession are

prominent characteristics of the worship. This family-centered religion has a number of diviners who serve as curers. Moreover, the majority of Muslim Hausa, who participate in the spirit possession cult, or Bori cult, are women and members of the lower classes.

Jacqueline Monfouga-Nicolas (1967) states that most members of the spirit possession cult are women and prostitutes. In other words, they are socially marginal people. Michael Onwuejeogwu (1969) argues that Bori cults have a homogeneity of organization and meaning throughout Hausaland. Moreover, they are, in his opinion, vestiges of Habe religion. Faulkingham (1975) disagrees with these findings, noting that there is more diversity in Hausaland than Monfouga-Nicolas and Onwuejeogwu grant. Muslims and *arna* (pagan) believe in the same spirits, but Muslims claim that they do not need to perform rituals to these spirits. However, many do perform them, depending on the occasion, and additionally they consult the Bori doctor for aid.

One finds the '*yan daudu* in these marginal areas of religion. In this system, men who are more or less exclusive homosexuals (not always, but often transvestite or at least effeminate males) have sexual relationships with men not culturally distinguished from other men. These "men who talk like women" form a link between the old non-Muslim Hausa and the Muslim Hausa, indicating where stress lines still exist between the old and new Hausa identities, for the coming of Islam to West African societies necessitated a rethinking of numerous cultural and social arrangements, not least of which were the relationship between men and women and the organization of family life.

Muslim Hausa social organization is highly stratified. Not only is stratification based on occupation, wealth, birth, and patron-client ties, it is also based on seniority and gender, even within the family. The system is one also marked by patronage. Wealth and power confer great prestige on men, who form patron-client ties. The stress on power and dominance permeates society, except in its marginal area. One's status is also determined by the status of one's family, and within the family, males, at least theoretically, are dominant.

Both traditional and Muslim Hausa form patrilineal ties. The Muslim Hausa build their ties on a patrilocal extended family that occupies a compound. The head is a male who directs cooperative activities, and compound members cooperate in agriculture and share in its products. Occupational specialties are pursued on a more individual basis. There is a great deal of formal respect and prescribed avoidance behavior among Hausa. The *mai gida* (compound head) expects great deference. Women generally are secluded whenever finances allow.

The participation of women in the Bori cult among the Muslim Hausa, however, is not necessarily a sign of their lack of power. Zainab Kabir (1985) states that the status of women in early Hausa society was high. In his words, they were "not confined." They interacted freely with men, marrying at a later age than is now common among the Muslim Hausa. They were able to own their own farms. They were also important members of the Bori cult. Furthermore, they had a significant role in domestic and clan religious rituals. Interestingly, some Hausa groups had matrilineal inheritance, and it was not uncommon for elite women to be queens or titleholders. The famous warrior queen Amina was but one of many famous Hausa queens. The Hausa even had a title for women in charge of the Bori, *Bori Magadjiya*.

Diviners, or shamans, foretell the future and deal with personal problems. They fit into the scheme of religious specialists, one that includes priests and magicians. The boundary among the categories is a shifting one at best. Diviners continue to play an important part in determining the causes of luck, both good and bad fortune. This includes the nature and cause of disease. Among the Hausa it is necessary to point out that many of the Muslim holy men are themselves types of diviners who make amulets, which include decoctions of the ink in which pious texts have been written. They also manipulate sand patterns or use the stars to tell the future.

Significantly, there is some discussion of males who attend Bori rituals as being homosexuals. The Bori rituals among the Hausa appear to be rituals of inversion, and among the Hausa homosexuality is considered an inversion of appropriate male heterosexuality. The Bori cult is widely understood as being a refuge from the strongly patriarchal ideal of Hausa Islam. Thus both women and effeminate males find some respite there. Although ranked low in official Hausa hierarchies, Hausa males are not only strongly attached to their mothers and sisters, they also have a fear of the mysterious power of women, a fear found in many male-dominated societies.

Although the Bori cult may be a "survival" from pre-Islamic Hausa religion, it differs among the Muslim Hausa from that practiced among related peoples, such as the Gungawa, or among non-Muslim Hausa, such as the Maguzawa. It has a different meaning for these Hausa. Thus, when Fremont E. Besmer (1983) states that the spirit rides the possessed and that this is somehow a symbol of homosexuality, it does not mean that it has the same meaning for the Maguzawa, Gungawa, or other non-Muslim groups who have the Bori cult. Among the Muslim Hausa homosexual transvestites, or '*yan daudu*', play a prominent role. *Daudu*, a praise name for any Malidoma, or ranked title, here specifically refers to the Prince, a Bori spirit who is a handsome young man.

These '*yan daudu*' sell various foods at ceremonies, mainly luxury foods such as fried chicken, and serve as pimps for prostitutes. Women who attend Hausa Bori rituals are deemed to be prostitutes. Renée Pittin (1983) lists three activities for '*yan daudu*': procuring, cooking, and prostitution. She argues that there is a close tie between prostitutes and '*yan daudu*'. Moreover, in combining male and female roles, the '*yan daudu*' mediate between men and women, occupying an ambiguous category. Living among the prostitutes further provides a disguise for men seeking homosexual activity. Protection and discretion are provided through this arrangement. The Bori cult provides a niche for marginal people of all kinds, not simply women or homosexuals. Butchers, night-soil workers, musicians, and poor farmers are welcome there. Mentally disturbed people of all classes similarly seek refuge among the Bori devotees.

### ***Muslim Hausa Concepts of Masculinity and Gender Relations***

Muslim envoys, originally merchants and wandering teachers (*mallamai*), and later government sponsored and trained teachers, believe that Islam is the proper religion for men. Islam, they teach, is compatible with the nature of man. It does not ask the impossible of converts. Human nature needs guidance, but it is not depraved.

Man by nature is concupiscent. Instead of condemning this concupiscent, Islamic teachers among the Hausa have stressed the wisdom of allowing four wives and as many

concubines as one can afford. In Nigeria, wife seclusion is an Islamic ideal but one not found except among the wealthy Hausa. Its idealization, however, as a goal, is an indication of the sex role specificity that Hausa Muslims cherish.

There is a cultural ideal of masculine superiority in which the *maigida* (household head) is the complete master of his home. Reinforcing this ideal is the cultural emphasis on wife-seclusion. Any type of seclusion, even the milder forms practiced among most Muslim Hausa, conflict with pre-Islamic custom and practice. Therefore, Barkow (1971, p. 60) argues that Hausa Muslim women frequently turn to courtesanship to escape the confines of married life, seeking to return to the more carefree period of their adolescence.

Hausa Muslim men look with disdain on the practice of other ethnic groups, which permit the relatively free mixing of men and women in public. They do not like to have women near men even when women have withdrawn to a nearby area to carry on their own activities. There is a great fear of being polluted by the too-close presence of women. Moreover, there is a fear that women will betray their husbands, given the opportunity. Since Hausa men expect to betray their wives, it is not difficult to see the origin of their concerns.

Hausa Muslim men have a strong double standard regarding non-marital sexual intercourse. It is legally impossible for a married man to commit adultery with an unmarried woman. If his wife catches him, he expects her to condemn and attack him, but she cannot divorce him. Indeed, she cannot divorce him if he has sexual relations with a married woman. On the other hand, a woman may have sexual relations only with her husband, but if she is still nursing a baby, she may not even have sexual relations with him.

A married man has the obligation to treat each of his wives equally. That restriction requires that he have sex with each of his wives in turn and in providing them with children. Only when a woman has a child is she fully an adult, and only when she has a grown son is she fully secure and protected. Thus, the pressure on men to perform sexually is great. It becomes even greater when one realizes that only wealthy men can have four wives and that wealth generally comes to a select few who tend to be advanced in years. These men tend to fear that their wives are liable to commit adultery if they do not satisfy them sexually and also provide a child, preferably a son, to them.

Thus, there is tremendous pressure on Hausa males to play a difficult masculine role, one that puts a great deal of pressure on them to provide quiet, calm, leadership while proving their sexual prowess daily. Their failures are "taken to the public" by their wives who harangue them in the loudest possible manner, throwing their sexual shortcoming in their faces for public amusement. Similarly, failure to provide a wife with a child can lead to further insults and public humiliation. It is a pressure from which many Hausa males seek escape in various ways.

### **Conclusion**

Ayesha Iman (1994) has written that there is no single Islamic view of sexuality. She offers a cross-cultural view of Muslim practices over place and time. She writes that the "honor-shame" complex is rare in sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, in Hausaland 'honor' killings

are unknown, even as a bad joke. Men marry prostitutes eagerly and women may be known to be prostitutes by their families. It is not a favored profession, but women are not killed for it either, much less for suspicions of non- or extra-marital affairs (Imam, 1994).

She also notes that cliterodectomy is not found in all Islamic countries. It varies according to the customs of the area and the interpretation of Islam given in the region. Thus, although found in a number of areas, female genital mutilation in other countries with Muslim communities (e.g. Algeria, Tunisia, Pakistan, Singapore) is unknown or (as in Northern Nigeria) not common among Muslims and considered to be a pagan practice (Esther Dorkenoo & S. Ellsworth, 1992). By contrast, in Northern Nigeria a baby girl may be made to undergo hymenectomy to ensure she can be easily penetrated, although this is apparently a disappearing practice (Mairo Mandara, 1995).

Muslim discourses of sexuality vary not only by community, but also over time. For example, Northern Nigeria has been dominantly Muslim at least since the 18th century, some argue the 14th century. But, even in the last 60 or 70 years there have been changes in the discourse of sexuality such that *tsarance* (institutionalized premarital lovemaking or sexual play that stops short of actual penetration), which used to be a common and unremarkable practice up to the 1940s and 1950s (Mary F. Smith, 1981), is now considered to be un-Islamic and “rural.” At the other extreme, girls are frequently now not being allowed even to dance at the *kalangu* (drumming and dancing held each market day – Imam, 1994).

There is thus some legitimate dispute about what constitutes legitimate Islamic practice as opposed to local Muslim interpretation. Even in Nigeria among the Hausa Muslims there is a continual change in response to colonialism, outside fundamentalist pressure, and modernization. The pressures of Muslim Hausa masculinity, therefore, are increased by the confusion that change generates. There is a marginal area of doubt and old traditions. The *‘yan daudu* occupy that marginal zone between old and new definitions of Hausa and male and female relations. They form a liminal category that subverts general views of Hausa masculinity and gender relationships. As Rudolf Gaudio (1994; 1995) notes, study of the *‘yan daudu* sheds light on the manner in which masculine and feminine identity are constructed in Hausa society, and the ways people use language both to reproduce and to challenge those constructions. Susan O’ Brien’s “Pilgrimage, Power, and Identity: The Role of the Hajj in the Lives of Nigerian Hausa Bori Adepts” (1999) suggests the position the *‘yan daudu* inhabit is a category betwixt and between and therefore sacred. She notes “host populations have consistently attributed to them otherworldly powers that have marked them as different from the local Muslim populace” (p. 1). Bori practitioners, including the *‘yan daudu*, have played a great part in promoting these otherworldly powers, emphasizing their sacred and dangerous position on the margins of Hausa society.

Given the Hausa position as a category on the margins, and since it unites so many disparate peoples and ideologies, it is to be expected that those in power seek to control its meaning. New recruits to the Hausa must prove their adherence to the identity. Within the landscape of West Africa in which the Hausa operate, the Hausa occupy a unique niche. Males must be able to predict what other males will do. Family determines

position, and men provide the means for identifying with family. Gender behavior is rigidly defined for the Hausa Muslim. Women and men who act like women, the 'yan daudu, threaten the operation of the system and provide a source for instability.

The presence of the 'yan daudu, neither men nor women, offers glimpses into possibilities of alternate realities, as anomalous categories are meant to do. Moreover, the 'yan daudu have sexual relations not only with homosexuals but also with otherwise heterosexual men, offering a possibility for at least a temporary escape from the rigid demands of Hausa Muslim masculinity. Their presence, protected by traditional religion, offers a comment on the arbitrary nature of cultural definitions and the mutability of even rigid definitions.

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