

# From Communal Reciprocity to Social Fragmentation: The Erosion of Traditional Hausa Social Cohesion in Northern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the transformation of Hausa social cohesion from its traditional foundations to its current state of decline. Historically, Hausa society was characterized by strong communal bonds epitomized in the concept of *cude-ni-in-cude-ka* (reciprocal support), where collective welfare took precedence over individualism. Through ethnographic analysis and literary review, the study identifies key traditional values (including mutual aid, kinship solidarity, and communal responsibility) that once defined Hausa interpersonal relations. The paper then analyzes contemporary factors contributing to social fragmentation, including modernization influences (particularly through media and technology), economic pressures, and erosion of traditional value systems. Qualitative data from recent sociological studies in Northern Nigeria is incorporated to demonstrate measurable declines in community trust indicators. Finally, the study proposes culturally-grounded strategies for social revitalization, emphasizing the roles of religious institutions, educational systems, and community leadership in value transmission. The findings suggest that while Hausa social structures face significant challenges, intentional preservation efforts focusing on intergenerational dialogue and institutional reinforcement may mitigate further decline.

**Keywords:** Hausa Social Organization, Communal Reciprocity (*Cude-Ni-In-Cude-Ka*), Cultural Erosion, Modernization Impacts, Traditional Value Systems, Sociocultural Change.

## Research Paper

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion in any society is a vital foundation; however, today, it can be said that deliberate efforts threaten its stability and hinder its flourishing. Indeed, the Hausa people have historically maintained strong social bonds among themselves and other communities they interact with. Truthfulness, trustworthiness, patience, and mutual assistance were deeply ingrained in their way of life. Respect for elders and compassion toward the less privileged by leaders were as natural as the night and day. Yet, this harmonious coexistence is now at risk of erosion in modern times.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to highlight the traditional social structure of the Hausa people in the past and how this social cohesion is gradually deteriorating today. This decline is linked to dishonesty, betrayal of trust, and the imitation of foreign cultures, particularly through the influence of films (Al-kanawy, 2000; Ali, 2004; Kiyawa, 2013). Today, mutual

aid, respect for elders, leaders' empathy for the underprivileged, and patience among individuals are becoming mere history. These values are increasingly fading from the daily lives of the Hausa people, especially those living in cities.

## 1.1 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study employs a qualitative approach that synthesizes library research with direct community observation to analyze the transformation of Hausa social values. The research builds upon existing scholarship that documents how modernity has impacted traditional Hausa cultural ethics, particularly through influences like Nollywood films, social media platforms, and changing economic structures (Shehu & Rambo, 2019; Sani & Bakura, 2023).

The documentary research component examined both primary sources including historical

Hausa literature and proverbs, as well as secondary sources that analyze cultural change. Particularly relevant were studies by Sani (2022) and Sulaiman (2013) that established frameworks for understanding media's role in cultural transformation, along with the work of Mwani and Kankara (2013) that specifically addressed the erosion of communal values through modern entertainment platforms.

Field observations conducted in Hausa communities provided contemporary data to compare with these scholarly findings. The observational methodology drew inspiration from Gobir and Sani's (2017) approach to documenting generational value shifts, while Iyan-Tama (2004) and Kiyawa (2013) researches on the intersection of Islamic ethics and modern media helped frame the analysis of observed behavioral changes. This dual approach allowed for verification of academic theories against current community practices, particularly regarding changing patterns of social interaction, conflict resolution, and communal support systems.

## 2.0 The Nature of Hausa Social Cohesion in the Past

Historical evidence shows that societies often form through agreements among groups of people who unite to protect themselves from fear-inducing threats, enemy attacks, wild animals, or to ease worldly hardships (Mar, cited in Shehu & Sani 2018). Such cooperative living fosters genuine solidarity, mutual acceptance, and communal support. It was through this kind of collective agreement that people from diverse ethnic backgrounds came together, unified their strengths, and established the Hausa society - a community bound by a common language (Hausa) and harmonized customs, moral values, environmental adaptations, and shared socioeconomic activities as emphasized by Gusau, (1999).

From the beginning, the Hausa people were known for mutual aid, brotherly love, politeness, obedience, truthfulness, trustworthiness, discipline, respect for leadership, neighborliness, kinship bonds, compassion, propriety, and various other virtuous deeds. They were also exceptionally hospitable and quick to welcome strangers. Their cheerful and open-hearted demeanor was said to be "more expansive than a mat spread wide," hence the Hausa saying "*Shimfidar fuska ta fi shimfidar tabarma*" (A kind word is better than a fat meal). Bunza (2012) and Maikadara (2012) emphasize that the Hausas historically fostered robust social relations, characterized by both strong intra-community bonds and harmonious interactions with external visitors.

We recognize that even in the early days of Hausa society, there were instances of negative behavior and unethical practices, as the Hausa proverb says: "*Mutum duka dan tara ne, bai cika goma ba*," meaning that no one is perfect. Nevertheless, Hausa social

cohesion can be examined through the following key aspects:

### 2.1 Social Relations Among Neighbors

Gusau (1999) explains that neighborliness refers to living in close proximity to someone, whether due to shared occupation or residential location. Undoubtedly, there existed a strong bond of mutual affection and harmonious coexistence among Hausa neighbors. If a neighbor experienced a joyous occasion, such as a wedding or naming ceremony, they would inform their neighbors so they could gather and celebrate together. Similarly, in times of grief, they would console one another. Neighbors also assisted each other in times of need, ensuring mutual confidentiality.

To a Hausa person, a neighbor is like a sibling - they share in their neighbor's joys and sorrows. Beyond this, social interaction did not end there. Often, after nightfall when husbands returned home, neighbors would bring out their evening meals to eat together while discussing worldly affairs. Visiting the sick (*dubiyar marar lafiya*), offering condolences (*jaje ko ta'aziyya*), and sending congratulatory messages (*taya murna*) were all customary practices among the Hausa people, whether the neighbors were related by blood, residence, or occupation - all rooted in patience (*hakuri*), compassion, and shared happiness. If a dispute arose between neighbors, they would convene to mediate and reconcile for the sake of peace.

This exemplary social cohesion, as described above, gave rise to numerous Hausa proverbs that emphasize communal harmony as seen in the works of Danyaya (2007), Koko (2011), and Malumfashi & Nahude (2014). These include:

- a. *Mahakurci mawadaci* – A patient person is truly wealthy.
- b. *Hakuri shi ne ribar rayuwa* – Patience is the profit of life.
- c. *Idan da hali muni kyawo ne* – Good character outshines beauty.
- d. *Alheri danko ne, ba ya faduwa kasa banza* – One good turn deserves another and no act of kindness is ever wasted.
- e. *Maci amana yana tare da kunya* – Betrayal of trust brings shame.
- f. *Da na kowa ne* – A child belongs to everyone.
- g. *Zaman duniya cude-ni-in-cude-ka* – Life is reciprocal; treat others well.
- h. *Zaman duniya kamar rumbu ne, miko man in miko maka* – The world is like a storage pit - give, and you shall receive.

### 2.2 Social Relations Among Siblings

Social cohesion among siblings is as strong as that among neighbors. There is no discrimination between brothers and sisters. Mothers or co-wives (*kishiyoyi*) do not show favoritism among their children.

In some cases, a child might not even recognize their biological mother until they grow older.

Siblings frequently strengthen their bonds by visiting one another from time to time [1]. Like neighbors, they gather to celebrate joyous occasions such as weddings. They make every effort to ensure that no sibling is humiliated or left in need. There is no deceit or betrayal of trust between siblings.

As Gumel (1999) indicates, when parents pass away, siblings take responsibility for one another, caring for younger brothers and sisters as if they were their own children, ensuring their well-being and proper upbringing. Maikada (2012) mentions that if a sibling falls ill, there is no shame - close and distant relatives alike contribute their support to ensure full recovery.

### 2.3 Social Relations Between Rulers and the Common People

Historically, there existed a strong bond of mutual understanding between Hausa rulers (or traditional leaders) and their subjects. From time immemorial, Hausa leadership has been characterized by a ruler's unwavering commitment to upholding the dignity of his authority by treating his people with fairness and guiding them toward a righteous path that benefits their lives (Bakura & Sani, 2023).

A true Hausa leader ensures that oppression, betrayal, dishonesty, and deceit have no place among his people. He safeguards their dignity against anything that could disrupt their peace. Leaders also keep watch over strangers entering the community to prevent disorder.

On their part, as indicated by Kurawa & Sani (2025) however, the common people demonstrate respect, courtesy, and obedience toward their leaders. They actively contribute to maintaining lasting peace and fostering prosperity within the land. Additionally, rulers frequently consult their subjects on various matters to ensure justice for all. This reciprocal relationship fostered stability, trust, and collective progress in traditional Hausa society.

### 2.4 Social Relations Between Teachers and Students

In every society, teachers play a pivotal role in educating the populace (men and women, young and old) on righteous ways of life, instilling virtuous character, and warning against immoral behavior to steer them away from corruption. They impart both religious and contemporary knowledge, equipping individuals for worldly life and the hereafter.

A teacher is responsible for instilling in children the values of respect and reverence for their parents,

obedience, and proper conduct in interactions with others. In turn, students hold their teachers in the highest esteem, demonstrating unwavering obedience and avoiding anything that could disrupt their relationship. They maintain sincere goodwill toward their teachers, never disrespecting or acting insolently in their presence.

This exemplary bond between teachers and students remains unshaken, even with the advent of Western education in Hausaland. Despite the emergence of modern schools with local teachers and students, the traditional teacher-student dynamic has endured. Gumel (1999) and Bunza (2012) note that, in the past, teachers treated their students as their own children, while students respected their teachers as deeply as their biological parents. Mutual reverence and the preservation of each other's dignity defined this relationship.

### 2.5 Social Relations Between the Wealthy and the Less Privileged

It is often said that every person is part of humanity, hence the Hausa proverb "*Kare ma da ranarsa*" (Every dog has its day). The social relationship between the wealthy and the less privileged in Hausaland is one of remarkable interdependence. The affluent do not belittle the poor; instead, they involve them in economic activities so they may also benefit from prosperity. At times, the wealthy provide capital to the less privileged to start businesses, ensuring mutual benefit. This is evident in various classical Hausa prose and drama works, with notable examples including *Nagari Na Kowa* by Abdullahi (1977), *Jatau Na Kyallu* by Maƙarfi (1980), *Shaihu Umar* by Sir Tafawa Balewa (1991), and *Jiki Magayi* by Zaria (1999).

When a less privileged person faces difficulties (such as marriage expenses, naming ceremonies, or similar challenges), they seek help from the wealthy, who assist them to the best of their ability. In return, the less privileged remain obedient, loyal, honest, and trustworthy in handling any resources entrusted to them.

If a wealthy person has a joyous occasion, the less privileged gather at their doorstep to celebrate. Conversely, in times of sorrow, they come together to offer condolences and comfort. Such was the harmonious relationship between the wealthy and the less privileged in Hausa society, though minor conflicts occasionally arose. As the Hausa saying goes, "*Harshe da hakori ma sukan saba*" (literally "Even the tongue and the teeth sometimes clash" to mean "Even the best of friends fall out sometimes") to denote that minor misunderstandings are a natural part of life.

<sup>1</sup> Bunza (2024) and Gambo *et al.*, (2025) document the persistence of *barkwancin taubasantaka* (playful teasing among kin) within extended Hausa families, including

intergenerational exchanges between grandparents and grandchildren, as well as among nieces, nephews, and other relatives.

## 2.6 Social Relations Between Spouses (*Ma'aurata*)

In Hausa society, there exists a harmonious relationship between husband and wife. The husband strives to fulfill his responsibilities toward his wife, ensuring her rights are protected. He provides for her food, health, and daily needs according to his means and avoids any form of abuse or culturally unacceptable behavior. Additionally, he actively participates in raising their children, guiding them with good morals and social values.

The wife, in turn, upholds her husband's rights and remains obedient and respectful within the boundaries of their marriage (Bugaje, 2013). She manages household affairs, ensures cleanliness, and raises the children with proper upbringing. A Hausa woman exercises patience and compassion toward her husband in matters of livelihood (CCF, 2009; Sani & Abdullahi, 2016).

When conflicts arise, they approach them with wisdom, avoiding rash decisions. This mutual understanding and restraint contribute to the rarity of divorce in traditional Hausa society. Patience and mutual counsel form the foundation of marital relations, helping couples navigate life's challenges (Gada, 2014). Some scholars argue that, historically, divorce was not uncommon among the Hausa people, suggesting that marital stability varied across different contexts.

## 2.7 Social Relations Between Parents and Children

In Hausa society, parents (especially mothers) strive to raise their children with good character and moral values. They teach them obedience, respect, discipline, and adherence to righteous conduct, ensuring personal success and societal benefit. Parents enroll their children in both Islamic and modern schools, emphasizing the importance of honesty and trustworthiness while warning against deceit and betrayal.

As Bunza (2012) indicates, parents also instill the value of kinship and friendship by encouraging frequent visits to relatives and close friends. They teach children to respect not just their own parents but all people, fostering a culture of honor and dignity. As a result, children grow up obedient and devoted to their parents from childhood into adulthood.

The social cohesion of the Hausa people in the past was characterized by noble values upheld by tradition and religion, including:

- a. Truthfulness and trustworthiness
- b. Kinship and visiting relatives
- c. Respecting neighbors' rights
- d. Mutual assistance and compassion

- e. Respect and obedience to leaders
- f. Honoring elders
- g. Leaders' fairness toward the common people
- h. The common people upholding leaders' rights
- i. Patience and forgiveness

Although these positive customs still exist among the Hausa today, they are no longer as strong as they once were.

## 3.0 The Decline of Hausa Social Cohesion Today

It is widely recognized that Hausa social relations have deteriorated significantly in contemporary times. The once-harmonious social structure of the past has now taken a backward turn, with nearly every aspect of traditional Hausa social cohesion experiencing decline. Bunza (2025) identifies five primary factors contributing to the erosion of traditional Hausa cultural norms:

- a. *Mulkin mallaka* (colonial administration)
- b. *Ilimin boko* (Western education system)
- c. *Kungiyoyin siyasa* (political party structures)
- d. *Finafinan da, da na yanzu* (films)
- e. *Kafafin yada labarai na baka da rubutattu* (oral and written mass media)

Decline of Hausa social cohesion today can be discussed under the following subheadings:

### 3.1 Erosion of Neighborly Bonds

The strong neighborly relations that once existed have weakened. It is now common for neighbors to live in isolation, with little to no interaction. The tradition of neighbors sharing meals and engaging in communal discussions has become a thing of the past. Each household now keeps to itself, what the Hausa people describe as "*Ramin kura, daga ke sai 'ya'yanki*" literally translated as "The hyena's den - after you, only your children" referring to the ideology of "Self before service." In many cases, neighbors go weeks without even greeting one another, let alone offering mutual support. Even children, who once played together in the evenings [2], are now kept indoors, further deepening the divide. Neighbors no longer know each other's struggles or joys, and conflicts over property boundaries often escalate to legal disputes. The situation has become so dire that only divine intervention seems capable of restoring these broken ties.

### 3.2 Breakdown of Sibling Solidarity

The bond between siblings has also suffered greatly. Mutual support and trust among brothers and sisters have faded, replaced by individualism and self-interest. Today, if parents pass away, siblings often neglect their orphaned relatives, leaving them without proper upbringing, education, or guidance. If you are financially struggling, even your closest siblings may

<sup>2</sup> Traditional Hausa communities maintained the practice of *wasannin dandali* (street games), where children gathered for evening games under moonlight, as

documented in Ibrahim (2000), Dembo (2007), and Sani and Gobir (2021).



distance themselves, offering neither material nor emotional support. Meanwhile, wealthier siblings isolate themselves, avoiding visits from relatives for fear of being burdened with requests for help.

### 3.3 Deterioration of Ruler-Subject Relations

The relationship between leaders and the common people has also transformed for the worse. Instead of protecting the rights and dignity of their subjects, leaders now exploit and oppress them. They fail to uphold justice, betraying their trust and even threatening their livelihoods [3]. Leaders no longer engage with the people to understand their struggles, and in response, the people have lost respect for authority. The oppressed now resort to cursing their leaders due to the injustices they endure. Social cohesion has eroded to the point where justice is often denied, and harmony is nearly impossible to restore.

Contemporary Hausa youth frequently venerate figures from the region's freedom movements, notably Dr. Bello Galadanci (popularly known as Dan Bello) [4], who gained prominence as an advocate for the underprivileged. This admiration exists within a context where many citizens exercise caution regarding freedom of expression, due to concerns about government reprisals or political intimidation tactics.

The Hausa society that once thrived on mutual respect, trust, and communal support is now plagued by individualism, distrust, and social fragmentation. While traces of these noble traditions still exist, they are but a shadow of what they once were. Without a collective effort to revive these values, the continued decline of Hausa social cohesion seems inevitable.

### 4.0 Causes of the Decline in Hausa Social Cohesion Today

As previously discussed, the strong social cohesion among the Hausa people in the past was rooted in values and traditions upheld by religion and culture - such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, kinship, patience, mutual assistance, and similar virtues. When a society abandons or weakens these values, its social fabric inevitably deteriorates. Below are key factors contributing to the erosion of Hausa social cohesion today:

#### 4.1 Widespread Injustice

Unlike in the past, many Hausa people today prioritize material gain, whether obtained lawfully or

unlawfully. The wealthy have reduced their support for the less privileged, while leaders exploit their authority to suppress the rights of the common people. Especially with political governments, modern leaders no longer represent the interests of their subjects; instead, their primary goal is personal enrichment, often embezzling public funds without accountability. Consequently, deep-seated resentment now exists between leaders and their people, with mutual suspicion becoming the norm.

Even within households, if a resource meant for collective benefit enters the hands of one individual, they often hoard it rather than sharing. Selfishness has replaced communal responsibility.

#### 4.2 Lack of Patience and Tolerance

Impatience and intolerance have significantly impacted Hausa society. Marital conflicts have increased, with constant arguments requiring frequent mediation. Evidence of this can be seen in the rising number of divorce cases filed daily in Sharia courts as observed by Gusau (1991). Domestic disputes have become widespread, with many neighborhoods experiencing frequent separations, largely due to a decline in patience and endurance. Mansur (2024) presents how the recent reports from the *Hisbah Commission* in Kano highlight the alarming rate of divorces [5].

#### 4.3 Modernization (Internet and Films)

Scholars and researchers have debated the pros and cons of Hausa and foreign films, with some arguing that they have contributed to cultural erosion. While Ali (2004) asserts that Hausa films have significantly boosted the economy over the past two decades, critics like Iyan-Tama (2004) and Alkanawy (2000) argue that they have negatively influenced Hausa traditions - particularly social cohesion.

Films have led many Hausa people to imitate foreign lifestyles (Western and Indian) rather than preserving their own cultural values of mutual support and communal living (Chamo, 2004; Dangambo, 2013; Guibi & Bakori, 2013). Kiyawa (2013) notes that many films contradict Islamic teachings and undermine marital and communal harmony. Several other researchers with this view, including Mwani & KanKara (2013), Mai'aduwa (2013), Sulaiman (2013), Dan Maigoro (2013), Gwammaja (2013), Abdullahi & Maidabino (2013), and Inuwa (2013), share this view.

<sup>3</sup> The erosion of public trust in governance stems from systemic corruption within modern political systems. Yusuf and Bunza (2025) analyze this phenomenon in Northern Nigeria, tracing its depiction in contemporary Hausa literature to expose how political parties perpetuate corrupt practices.

<sup>4</sup> He has over 2.1 million followers on TikTok (see <https://www.tiktok.com/@bello.galadanchi?lang=en>)

and around 1 million followers on Facebook (see [https://web.facebook.com/p/Dan-Bello-61557177893479/?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr#](https://web.facebook.com/p/Dan-Bello-61557177893479/?_rdc=1&_rdr#)).

<sup>5</sup> According to a report from the News Agency of Nigeria (2024), the Hisbah Commission in Katsina State adjudicated approximately 2,500 marital dispute cases within its first two years of its operation.

Additionally, the internet has distracted many Hausa youth, exposing them to foreign cultures - particularly Western influences. Other negative effects include the spread of propaganda, gossip, time-wasting, and exposure to indecent content ('Yartsakuwa, 2017).

#### 4.4 Decline in Truthfulness and Trust

Many traders have abandoned honesty, resorting to deceit, fraud, and hoarding goods to inflate prices. Today, if a wealthy person assists a less privileged individual, the latter may respond with dishonesty or betrayal. Similarly, if someone entrusts another with money or goods to deliver or safeguard, the trustee may embezzle it without hesitation.

Maikadara (2012) highlights some of the dishonest behaviors prevalent today. While it is not our intention to claim that all positive social values have disappeared among the Hausa, this analysis serves as a wake-up call to address these issues before they worsen irreversibly.

#### 5.0 Strategies for Reviving Hausa Social Cohesion

It is undeniable that the current decline in Hausa social cohesion is severe, but not irreversible. With sincere commitment, solutions can be implemented to restore (at least some of) these broken bonds.

##### a. Parental Responsibility

Parents must take proactive steps to instill strong moral values in their children - truthfulness, trustworthiness, respect, obedience to elders, and patience (the cornerstone of societal harmony). Proper upbringing will ensure future generations contribute positively to society.

##### b. Role of Educators & Religious Leaders

Teachers and Islamic scholars must intensify efforts in religious and cultural education, warning against the injustices and moral decay prevalent today. They should clearly explain the consequences of immoral behavior while promoting virtuous conduct.

##### c. Government Intervention

The government must ensure justice prevails by reforming the judicial system to deliver fair rulings and punish wrongdoing without bias. Strengthening accountability will rebuild public trust.

##### d. Individual Reformation

Every individual must purify their heart and conduct, realigning with the noble traditions inherited from our ancestors. Personal reform is essential for collective revival.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Social cohesion is fundamental to human existence. When it thrives, society prospers; when it deteriorates, societal collapse follows. Historically, the Hausa people maintained an exemplary system of social

relations marked by mutual respect, trust, and communal solidarity. However, today, this cherished heritage faces unprecedented threats due to greed, materialism, dishonesty, betrayal, and impatience. While the situation is dire, hope remains. As the proverb goes, "*Ruwa na kasa sai ga wanda bai tona ba*" (Where there's a will, there's a way). By implementing the solutions outlined above, Hausa society can rebuild and return to its former glory.

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