

## ADAPTING TRADITIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE FULBE KINSHIP STRUCTURE IN JIGAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study examined the dynamic evolution of Fulbe (Fulani) kinship structures within Jigawa State, Nigeria. Jigawa State, located in northern Nigeria, is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, in addition to the Fulbe. Some of these ethnic groups include Zarma (Zabarmawa), Hausa, Kanuri, Bade, Ngizim, Gungawa, and so on. Some typologies of Fulbe people in Jigawa State include Nomadic Fulbe, Sedentary Fulbe, Agro-pastoral Fulbe, Fulbe Traders, etc. The research employed qualitative methods by utilizing secondary sources such as documents and records, books, journals, and internet sources to collect data on the dynamic evolution of Fulbe kinship structures within Jigawa State. The investigation draws on the social structure theory to comprehend the traditional Fulbe kinship systems, elucidating their essential functions in maintaining stability and order within Jigawa State. The findings reveal that the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State is intricately linked to historical events such as colonialism, the spread of formal education, urbanization, economic transformations, and the assimilation of modern values. Consequently, Fulbe kinship structures in Hadejia Emirate, Ringim, Dutse, Kazaure, Birnin Kudu, and Buji, in Jigawa State, exhibit a synthesis of traditional and modern influences by adapting to the changing societal landscape. This adaptation involves a shift towards an increased emphasis on individual choice, smaller nuclear families, more flexible kinship networks, and a heightened focus on individual accomplishments. In light of these findings, the study advocates for collaborative efforts between the government and Fulbe communities in Jigawa State to formulate policies that are supportive of the distinctive kinship structures in the State.

**Keywords:** Cultural Adaptation, Fulbe Kinship, Kinship Structures; Kinship Networks; Social Structure.

## **Introduction**

Kinship holds great significance and serves as a fundamental aspect of Fulbe culture. The Fulbe community stands as the largest ethnic group of pastoralists spanning multiple countries on the African continent. Their traditional way of life revolves around a nomadic lifestyle, with cattle herding being their primary means of subsistence. This distinctive form of nomadism has had a profound impact on the configuration of their kinship structures (Curtin, 1955). The features of traditional Fulbe kinship structures encompass the prominence of patrilineal descent as the fundamental principle guiding the tracing of ancestry and lineage through the father's side. This unbroken line of descent instils a sense of continuity and provides a solid foundation for their identity and affiliations.

These kinship structures are further strengthened by the concept of extended families, which play a crucial role in Fulbe society. These extended families are marked by their expansive nature, encompassing multiple generations residing close to one another. This physical closeness ensures a sense of communal cohesion and nurtures a profound feeling of kinship and solidarity among the members. Clans and lineage groups provide a sense of belonging, fostering a collective identity and shared values among their members. Moreover, the practice of arranged marriages is often orchestrated by community elders, who aim to strengthen social ties and alliances between families. Through arranging marriages, the elders strive to consolidate familial bonds and enhance social cohesion within the broader kinship network (Sarkin Fulani, 2022).

The existence of rigid gender roles within traditional Fulbe kinship structures is a defining characteristic. Men and women are assigned distinct responsibilities and roles within the family unit. These roles are deeply ingrained in the social fabric of Fulbe society, with men typically assuming leadership positions, and being responsible for the protection and provision of the family, while women play crucial role in nurturing and raising children, as well as managing the household.

The Fulbe community in Jigawa State, Nigeria, adheres to the characteristics of the traditional Fulbe kinship system, thus placing significant importance on its practices. This intricate web of familial relationships profoundly influences various aspects of their societal organization and cultivates a strong sense of collective identity. In the light of this context, this investigation explores the transformation of kinship among the Fulbe people in Jigawa State. By delving into the complexities of their kinship structures and scrutinizing the diverse factors that have influenced their development, the study intends to contribute to a more profound comprehension of the cultural heritage of the Fulbe community in Jigawa State. Additionally, the insights derived from this research have the potential to inform future policies and practices aimed at safeguarding and perpetuating the essential aspect of kinship within the Fulbe community.

This study possesses the potential, not only to enhance the knowledge of the Fulbe in Jigawa State people, but also make a valuable contribution to the broader field of cultural anthropology and heritage preservation

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Fulbe Kinship**

Kinship systems differ significantly across various cultures and societies, exerting a profound influence on social organization, inheritance patterns, and the distribution of roles and responsibilities within communities. Kinship refers to a complex system of social relationships, encompassing a diverse range of ties that connect individuals into family units. These connections can be based on blood relations, marriage, or even adoption. Within this intricate web of familial

connections, there exists a multitude of rights and obligations that shape and define the nature of these relationships (Crossman, 2019).

Carsten (2023) defines kinship as a social organization system that is predicated on both actual and perceived family ties. This definition underscores the fundamental role that kinship plays in shaping social structures and individual identities in many societies. Moreover, kinship extends far beyond the confines of the nuclear family, encompassing extended family members and creating a complex network of relationships that form the bedrock of support, cooperation, and social organization. As a result, kinship systems are imbued with a unique set of terminologies, rules of descent, and marriage customs that contribute to the intricate dynamics of each culture's kinship system (Alber, 2010).

Kinship is described by Levy (1966) as any organization, membership of which is importantly oriented to questions of real or assumed biological descent or sexual intercourse. Young (1957) defines kinship as a system of patrilineal descent that is reckoned through the father line only. Kinship among the Arabs term means a share in the common blood which is taken to flow in the veins of every member of a tribe (Smith, 1903). Arabic kinship was once reckoned not in the male but in the female line. Wali (1990) states that in Hausa kinship, the paternal side of the family is oftentimes stronger and more important than the maternal side. In most cases, one finds that, when the husband dies, his relations, rather than the relations of the wife take over the upbringing of his children, or when parents get divorced; their children remain with the father rather than live with the mother.

Kinship is reckoned in several ways around the globe, resulting in a variety of types of descent patterns and kin groups. Anthropologists and sociologists view that most early societies are matrilineal. Typical examples are Arabian societies before the advent of Islam. In African society, the Ashanti Kingdom of Central Ghana kinship had been preceded by women only. This is also found among the Ohafia people of Abia State where the social system of Ohafia is markedly matrilineal or mother-oriented (Egbe, 2017). Based on the definitions given above, kinship can be defined as the recognition of a relationship between individuals based on blood relations or marriage. Fulbe (Lenyol) kinship refers to a relationship between individuals either by blood (consanguineal) or by marriage (affinal).

Kinship among the Fulbe is sometimes beyond blood relations (consanguineal) and marriage (affinal). Fulbe society is both patrilineal and virilocal. An individual belongs to the kin group of his/her father. Patrilineality is among other things, reflected in the naming system. The name of a Pullo person consists of his/her first name plus his/her father's first name; for disambiguation, the grandfather's name can be added, for example: Kabiru Sale Hamza. In the above example, 'Kabir' stands for the ego's surname and Hamza stands for the ego's grandfather's name (Sarkin Fulani, 2022).

The historical development of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State can be traced back to the nomadic traditions of the Fulbe people, whose existence has been deeply intertwined with the practice of nomadic pastoralism, which has been a fundamental aspect of their livelihood. This has been influenced by several factors such as socioeconomic transformations. For instance, changes in economic activities, such as a shift from traditional pastoralism to diverse livelihoods impact familial roles and relationships within the community. This highlights the interconnectedness between economic factors and the structures of Fulbe kinship (Crossman, 2019).

Ibrahim (2021) delves into the subject matter of nomadic traditions and examines how education influences the Fulbe kinship structures. Increasing levels of education among the Fulbe

community introduce modern ideologies that potentially challenge traditional kinship norms. As individuals become exposed to new ways of thinking and are empowered by education, he/she can re-evaluate roles, responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships within families.

In a similar vein, Musa (2022) and Kadiri (2023) investigate the influence of globalization on Fulbe kinship and agree that globalization brings about increased exposure to external influences, which can result in the adoption of new ideas, lifestyles, and even alterations in kinship terminology and practices.

Urbanization and migration patterns disrupt traditional kinship structures. As individuals move away from their ancestral homes to urban settings, new social dynamics are introduced, potentially altering the traditional roles and functions of kinship within the community (Ibrahim, 2021). Moreover, religious beliefs, particularly in predominantly Muslim communities, significantly influence the shaping of kinship structures. The impact of Islamic teachings on familial relationships and responsibilities helps to understand how religion intersects with kinship dynamics among the Fulbe (Miller 2011; Wellman, 1999).

### **Methodology**

The study employed the qualitative approach, particularly utilizing secondary sources such as documents and records, books, journals, and internet sources as means of data collection. The obtained data underwent thorough content analysis, with particular emphasis on identifying and interpreting the underlying themes found within the authors' archives and documents to successfully achieve the study's objectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework employed in this study is the social structure theories which elucidated the intricate mechanisms through which societies are organized, the intricate roles that individuals assume within these societal structures and the multifaceted factors that exert influence on the very fabric of social organization (VanderPyl, n.d.). Proponents of this theoretical framework include Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, among others.

There are three main variants of social structure theories, notably; structural-functional theory, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

The structural-functional theory posits that societal structures, as complex and interconnected as they may be, serve specific functions that play a pivotal role in upholding stability and order within a given society (Form & Wilterdink, 2024), while conflict theory places a firm emphasis on the notion that society is characterized by inherent inequality, with social structures being perpetuated and maintained by dominant groups to safeguard and perpetuate their power and resources (Hayes, 2024). Symbolic interactionism on the other hand, places great importance on the micro-level interactions between individuals and the significant role that symbols and shared meanings play in shaping social reality (VanderPyl, n.d.).

The most relevant of the three variants of the social structure theories to the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State is the structural-functionalist theory. It holds particular significance in shedding light on the traditional Fulbe kinship structures within this specific region. By emphasizing the functional roles that kinship plays within this cultural context, this theory serves as a powerful tool for understanding the intricacies of Fulbe kinship structures and the vital functions they fulfil within the broader societal framework. This theoretical lens creates the enablement for a proper understanding of the multifaceted ways in which kinship serves as a

mechanism for maintaining social order, providing support networks, and preserving cultural identity in the Fulbe community of Jigawa State.

Furthermore, applying the structural-functional theory to the analysis of changing Fulbe kinship practices and terms in Jigawa State, allows the understanding of how these changes may disrupt traditional functions and give rise to new dynamics within the community. In essence, the structural-functional theory offers a comprehensive framework through which the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State can be comprehensively examined and analyzed.

## **Discussion**

### **Structure of the Fulbe Kinship System in Jigawa State**

The structure of the kinship system in Jigawa State is characterised by a primarily patrilineal structure in line with the traditional Fulbe kinship. The lineage of individuals is traced through the paternal line, resulting in the formation of extended family units known as "ngel" or "ngelooji." These units encompass multiple generations residing under one roof or close. Additionally, belonging to a clan, referred to as "pulaaku," further solidifies an individual's position within the larger community. Clans often share a common ancestor and possess distinct symbols or totem animals. The kinship system determines the roles and responsibilities within the community. Elders are held in high esteem due to their wisdom and experience, while younger generations are expected to demonstrate respect and learn from them (Crossman, 2019).

The impact of the kinship system on societal organization can be observed in the domains of land ownership and inheritance, marriage and family formation, as well as conflict resolution and social control. Land, which holds immense significance for the traditionally nomadic lifestyle of the Fulbe, is frequently passed down through successive generations within the family lineage. This ensures the continuity and stability of land utilization (Sarkin Fulani, 2022).

The kinship system also exerts a significant influence on marriage arrangements, with an emphasis on preserving social ties and strengthening clan bonds. Furthermore, it serves as a mechanism for resolving conflicts and upholding social order within the community. Elders and lineage leaders often mediate disputes and enforce customary laws (Curtin, 1955). The kinship system of the Fulbe community in Jigawa State contributes to the development of a collective identity and a sense of belonging through the transmission of shared history and traditions from one generation to the next. This fosters a shared sense of historical consciousness and identity among community members.

Kinship ties also provide a robust support network for individuals and families, with the expectation that members will assist one another in times of need. This reinforces a sense of community and belonging. Moreover, the Fulbe kinship in the Jigawa State system plays a crucial role in the preservation of cultural values. The emphasis on respecting elders and upholding traditional practices helps safeguard the unique cultural values and way of life of the Fulbe (Sagheer, 2017).

### **Factors Contributing to the Evolution of Fulbe Kinship Structures in Jigawa State**

Factors that contributed to the evolution of kinship structures among the Fulbe people in Jigawa State are multifaceted and complex. One of the foremost factors that played a pivotal role in this transformation was the advent of British colonialism. The imposition of colonial rule brought about significant changes in various aspects of Fulbe society, including land ownership, political structures, and religious practices. These changes had far-reaching implications for

traditional kinship systems that had been deeply entrenched in the fabric of Fulbe culture in Jigawa State for generations (Sarkin Fulani, 2022).

Another key factor influencing the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State is the spread of formal education. This educational expansion, particularly among women, has fostered increased individual mobility and economic independence. Consequently, traditional gender roles and family structures are challenged as women gain access to education and opportunities outside the household. This paradigm shift in gender dynamics has had a profound impact on the traditional kinship system, as it disrupted the established norms and expectations surrounding familial roles and responsibilities. A famous 19th-century reformist jihadist leader (Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo) bolstered considerable support on the influence of education in the provision of uncommon transformation, he averred that “if you desire to liberate a woman, give her sound and enviable education” (Last, 1977).

Furthermore, urbanization has played a significant role in reshaping Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State. With the migration of Fulbe people to urban centres, there is a breakdown of extended families and a growing reliance on nuclear families. This shift towards nuclear families has a profound effect on traditional patterns of kinship support, as the close-knit intergenerational relationships that were once the bedrock of Fulbe society in the state have begun to erode. The urban environment necessitated a reconfiguration of kinship networks, leading to a reevaluation of the roles and responsibilities of various family members (Sagheer, 2017).

In addition to the aforementioned factors, economic changes also have played crucial role in the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State. The transformation from a predominantly pastoral economy to one centred around wage labour and commercial agriculture has brought about significant shifts in patterns of resource sharing and interdependency within the kinship network as individuals have to adapt to new economic realities and navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing society (Wandel, 2013).

The adoption of modern values such as individualism and egalitarianism cannot be overlooked when examining the factors that contribute to the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State. The embracement of these modern values has brought about a decline in the authority of elders within the kinship system and a greater emphasis on individual choice and autonomy within the family unit. As traditional hierarchical structures give way to more egalitarian ideals, the dynamics of Fulbe kinship have undergone a profound transformation, reflecting the broader societal changes occurring in Jigawa state (Sarkin Fulani, 2022).

### **Notable Adaptations Made to Accommodate the Demands of Evolving Fulbe Kinship Structures in Jigawa State**

The kinship structures of the Fulbe people in Jigawa State in the contemporary era have shown a fusion of both traditional and modern influences, thereby reflecting the dynamic nature of societal transformation. While certain customary practices still hold significant value, such as the veneration of older individuals and the significance of ancestral lineage, some adaptations have been made to accommodate the demands of an evolving society (Adefila, 2021).

One of the fundamental aspects of contemporary Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State is the increased importance given to individual choice, particularly in matters about marriage partners and career paths. This newfound freedom challenges the traditional emphasis on familial obligations and elevates the autonomy of individuals in these critical life decisions. Consequently, the influence of extended families has diminished, and nuclear families have gained prominence, assuming a central role in the daily lives of the Fulbe people. This paradigm shift in family

dynamics has brought about changes in the traditional social fabric, altering the way individuals perceive and interact with their kinship networks (Carsten, 2023).

In addition, the kinship ties within present-day Fulbe communities in Hadejia Emirate, Ringim, Dutse, Kazaure, Birnin Kudu, and Buji in Jigawa State have become more fluid, as they are no longer solely based on lineage affiliation. Instead, these connections are formed based on shared interests and experiences, allowing for a more inclusive and dynamic social structure. This departure from strictly lineage-based kinship networks has enabled the Fulbe people to forge relationships with individuals who may not share the same ancestral background but possess similar values and aspirations in the State. Consequently, the Fulbe society in Jigawa state has become more diverse and interconnected, fostering a sense of unity and cooperation among its members (Carsten, 2023).

Furthermore, an increased emphasis on education and individual achievement has emerged as a defining feature of contemporary Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State. Education is regarded as a crucial pathway to success and social mobility within the community. As a result, traditional gender roles and family expectations have transformed, with both men and women actively pursuing educational opportunities and aspiring to attain personal goals. This shift in aspirations has contributed to the empowerment of individuals, promoting a more equitable distribution of power within the Fulbe society in the State (Sarkin Fulani, 2022).

### **Challenges and Opportunities of the Evolution of Kinship Structures among the Fulbe People of Jigawa State**

The evolution of kinship structures among the Fulbe people in Hadejia Emirate, Ringim, Dutse, Kazaure, Birnin Kudu, and Buji in Jigawa State encompasses myriad challenges as well as opportunities. One of the challenges that arise is the potential loss of cultural heritage, whereby the waning of traditional practices and values engenders a profound sense of cultural loss and identity confusion, particularly among the younger generations who find themselves grappling with the clash between their ancestral customs and the influence of external forces. Moreover, the process of modernization further compounds the issue of social inequality within Fulbe communities, as those who are more adept at adapting to the changes and advancements brought about by modernity are more likely to reap the benefits, potentially widening the existing disparities that already exist within the community (Wandel, 2013).

Another significant challenge that accompanies the evolution of kinship structures in Jigawa State is the breakdown of extended families. As traditional family units become more fragmented, the once prevalent support systems and networks that extended families provided begin to dissolve, consequently leading to amplified levels of social isolation and vulnerability, particularly for older adults and children who may no longer have access to the same level of familial care and support that they once enjoyed. This breakdown in family units has far-reaching consequences and necessitates concerted efforts to address the potential ramifications on the social fabric of the Fulbe community (Adefila, 2021).

Fulbe communities in Jigawa State were predominantly nomadic, moving with their herds across vast territories. However, factors such as land scarcity, environmental degradation, and government policies promoting sedentary agriculture have led many Fulbe to settle in permanent villages. This transition from nomadism to settlement has disrupted traditional kinship systems based on mobility and pastoralism, impacting social cohesion and community organization among the Fulbe (Maryah, 2014).

The shift towards sedentary agriculture and modernization has altered the economic basis of Fulbe society in Jigawa State. While some Fulbe continue to engage in pastoralism, others have diversified their livelihoods, becoming involved in trade, commerce, and wage labour. This economic transformation has introduced new dynamics into Fulbe kinship structures, as traditional roles and responsibilities associated with cattle herding may no longer hold the same significance. Within Fulbe communities in Jigawa State, social stratification based on wealth, education, and occupation has emerged, creating divisions among kinship groups. Wealthier and more educated Fulbe individuals may have different social aspirations and lifestyle preferences compared to those engaged in traditional pastoral activities. These socio-economic disparities can lead to tensions and conflicts within Fulbe kinship structures, affecting intra-group relationships and solidarity (Crossman, 2019).

### **Opportunities**

Despite these challenges, the evolution of kinship structures also presents a range of opportunities that can be harnessed for the betterment of the Fulbe people in Jigawa State. For instance, as kinship structures evolve, individuals are afforded increased empowerment through expanded choices and greater autonomy. This newfound individual agency can contribute to enhanced personal fulfilment and overall well-being, as individuals can shape their destinies and make decisions that align with their aspirations and values. Moreover, the process of modernization can also catalyze fostering greater gender equality within Fulbe families and communities in Jigawa State. As traditional gender roles and expectations are challenged and redefined, there is an opportunity for a more equitable distribution of power and resources, thereby empowering women and promoting gender parity. This shift towards greater gender equality is pivotal in dismantling deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

The evolution of kinship structures in Jigawa State also allows Fulbe communities in Hadejia Emirate, Ringim, Dutse, Kazaure, Birnin Kudu, and Buji in Jigawa State to adapt to changing circumstances and maintain their cultural identity and social cohesion amidst the rapid changes taking place in the World arising through globalization. By embracing and adapting to new forms of kinship structures, the Fulbe people in the State will have the potential value to strike a delicate balance between preserving their rich heritage and embracing the benefits that globalization can offer (Sarkin Fulani, 2022). This, in addition, will possess the social strength to accelerate a greater understanding of Fulbe kinship structures in the creation of renewed hope towards repositioning Fulbe's psycho-cultural belief system against some misconceptions ideations about them.

### **Conclusion**

The study on the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State highlighted the complex interplay between tradition and the transformation among the Fulbe people in the State. While some traditional practices remain important, the system is undergoing significant transformations in response to social, economic, and political changes. This is significantly influenced by inherent greater external and internal robust interactions emanating from systemic global changes. The kinship structure was hierarchical, with elders wielding significant authority. Specific features of this system included patrilineal descent, extended families, clans and lineage groups, arranged marriages, and strict gender roles. These elements worked together to create a



cohesive and interconnected kinship network that played a fundamental role in shaping the social fabric of the Fulbe society.

The paper reveals that the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State is influenced by a multitude of factors, ranging from the impact of colonialism to the spread of formal education, urbanization, economic changes, and the adoption of modern values through a globalized system. While the evolution of Fulbe kinship structures in Jigawa State presents its fair share of challenges, such as the loss of cultural heritage, social inequality, and family breakdown, the opportunities that arise from this evolution include individual empowerment, greater gender equality, and the ability to adapt to change. By embracing these opportunities, the Fulbe people in Jigawa State can navigate the complexities of the modern world while preserving their cultural identity and fostering social cohesion within their community.

### Recommendations

In light of the identified challenges in the study, it is, therefore, recommended that:

- (a) The government and the Fulbe leaders in Jigawa State should encourage unbridled communication between generations to share Fulbe values and traditions.
- (b) The government and the Fulbe leaders should promote Fulbe participation in decision-making processes concerning kinship systems among the people in the State.
- (c) Fulbe communities in Jigawa State should collaborate to create strong synergistic relations with the government in the State to design policy statements that will advocate unflinching support for unique kinship structures.

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