

Review Article

Joking Relationship (*Wasan Barkwanci*) in Hausa: A Tool for National Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract: Joking relationships meaning; Wasan Barkwanci or Taubasantaka in the Hausa language is a Hausa term referring to different forms of joking relationships, a cultural phenomenon that is played both among the Hausa people and to some extent, their neighbors. Joking relationships in their simple form exist between people who share kinship relationships. Prior to the British conquest of Hausa states and the subsequent imposition of colonial rule in the early part of the 19th century, notable Hausa states waged interstate wars of conquest for territorial expansion and gaining access and control of trading routes, to further enhance their revenue drive and economic viability. The British however halted these wars as a result of which peace prevailed and this brought about stability among the states. During peacetime, a joking relationship sprung up between the people of the warring states. Culturally, practitioners of similar but different occupations do engage in jokes between themselves, each claiming superiority, prestige, and worthiness of their trade over another. Culture being a dynamic phenomenon, joking relations as it relates to trade groups, were shifted to incorporate people who undertake the practice of new occupations that were introduced as a result of the contact between the British overloads and their Hausa subjects. Hence, joking relationships exist between masons and carpenters, between drivers and People who transport goods using camel. The main feature of these joking relationships is that the persons who engage in it are automatically related to one another such that one is entitled to say and do things to another without offence, which ordinarily when said or done to a different person will generate quarrels and misunderstandings. This paper is an attempt to examine this cultural phenomenon and its efficacy in bringing about harmonious relationships and social integration of Hausa people and their neighbors, which if properly harnessed will bring about national integration.

Keywords: Joking, Relationship, Tool, National, Integration.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Joking relationships is a cultural phenomenon that has existed and been practised by the Hausas for a long time. The cultural practice has caught the attention of scholars who have written to bring to the fore, the basis as well as the practice of jokes as it relates to Hausas and their neighbors. Harris, (1938), Tukur, (1991, 1999), and Bunza, (2015), have all written to describe this Hausa Cultural practice. The basis for which the jokes are cracked may be by reasons of kinship relationships. Culturally, grandparents both male and female, and their grandchildren both from the paternal and maternal sides, play the jokes between themselves. Likewise, the jokes are cracked between the children of the male brother and the children of his sister *taubasai*. Joking relationship also exists between members of some ethnic groups that make up the Hausa society. In this type of relationship, kinship may be a reason for the jokes and of course, sometimes it may be for reasons of wars fought between the ethnic groups. In the days of the old, the need for territorial expansion and the desire to control trading routes for economic gains led the Hausa states to wage war against one another. Now that peace has prevailed, the wars waged led to the cracking of jokes and teasing of one another by the victorious and the vanquished ethnic group. The third joking relationship in Hausa is the one that exists between people who practice different but related trades and traditional occupations in Hausa society. This cultural phenomenon has

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contributed in no small measure to the stability and cohesion among the Hausa people on one hand and their neighboring tribes on the other; as there are also joking relationships between the Hausas and some of their neighbors, a clear example of which is the jokes existing between the Zamfarawa ethnic group of Hausaland and their southwestern neighbors, the Dakarkari (Clela) of Zuru in Kebbi state. It is the wish of this paper to examine these cultural traits about how it promotes harmonious relationships between people and tribes of the country, Nigeria.

1.1 Definition of Joking Relationship.

Barkwanci, joking relationship, is a cultural trait that has attracted the attention of anthropologists. Several scholars have tried to define the term. Marshall, (1988) view it simply as a relationship of reciprocal ritual, mildly abusive behavior between persons who are not only expected to behave in ways that would be offensive or insulting to persons not related. These relationships express a form of friendliness through a show of mild hostility. Joking relatives are expected not to take offence but to respond in kind. Madden, (1986) sees it as a relationship that involves a particular combination of friendliness and antagonism between individuals or groups in certain social situations. In these, one individual or group is allowed to mock or ridicule the other without offence. From the foregoing, is pertinent to say that a joking relationship is a kind of joking play in which individuals utter offensive and demeaning words or apprehensible actions to ridicule, jest or gag, and even tease one another without arousing anger, and or even altercation from the persons so involved. It is, in fact, true and clear that no offence is taken as a result of any ridicule emanating from joking relationships.

2.0 Forms and Basis for Joking Relationship in Hausa.

In the Hausa cultural practices, there exists forms and basis upon which joking relationships strive between individuals or groups. Kinship relations as per as Hausa culture is concerned, may be the basis upon which a joking relationship is cracked both between individuals and groups. The wars of expansion of territories waged between one Hausa state and another, fought in the pre-colonial period also became a base upon which jokes exists between the two conflicting states, at the time of peace. Both the victor and the vanquished became joking partners to further cement the bond of friendship between them and to heal the wounds that the war might have caused. The practitioners of various traditional occupations and crafts are not left out in the engagement of jokes, most especially, the occupations that offer similar but different services. Below is an exposition of the joking relationship as practised in the cultural realms of the Hausa people.

2.1 Joking Relationships Due to Kinship

Kinship means affinity or sharing a relationship by blood or even relatedness by marriage. Hausa culture condones or even approves joking relationships between persons related by blood. This is particularly practised between the grandparents of both sexes and their grandchildren from male and female children. The female grandmother will jokingly refer to her male grandchild as her husband, while the male grandfather will refer to his female grandchild jokingly as his wife. During the festive period of *cika-ciki*, the grandchildren offer gifts, in cash or kind, to the grandparents both male and female. Hausa cultural practices also allow the children of both younger and elder brothers to play jokes with the children of both elder and younger sisters of their parents.

This is irrespective of whether they are from the same parents or step brothers and sisters. This type of joking relationship is referred to as *Taubasantaka* in Hausa. The children of the male brothers are regarded as masters to the children of the sisters even if they are elderly. It is common to find a younger person of the male parent addressing an elder son of his father's sister as "*kai yaro*" meaning 'Hey young man.' The reason for this is not farfetched. Bunza, (2015, p.6) has posited that it is the children of the elder or younger sisters that collect *Shara* from the children of the brothers. This act of giving out gifts gives them an edge over those that collect from them. They, therefore, become the masters. Another form of kinship type of joking relationship is that which is been practised between the husband and younger siblings of his wife. The elder siblings of the wife are however regarded as in-laws, hence, they are held in high esteem and are therefore respected by the husband. All younger brothers and sisters of the wife, including step brothers and sisters are regarded as joking playmates of the Husband. Furthermore, exclusive of the elder brothers and sisters, the younger brothers and sisters of the husband are equally, jokingly related to the wife of their elder brother. This however does not warrant offering the gift of *shara* to either party involved in this category of joking relationships.

2.2 Joking Relationship Due to Distant Kinship

There are joking relationships that exist among the Hausa people which emanate due to distant kinship or family ties. The Hausa people before colonial administration, had developed states, each governed by the *Sarki* and his council. The earliest states formed seven, they include Daura, Gobir, Hadejiya, Kano, Katsina, Rano, and Zazzau. The latter states are Kebbi and Zamfara, to mention but a few. Among the inhabitants of some of these states, joking relations becomes manifest whenever they meet, whether casually or on formal occasions. According to scholars, Bunza, (2015) Tukur, (2019), and Tukur, (2021), the reasons behind a joking relationship of this nature are two. In some instances, it culminated as a result of a war fought between the two states. Now that peace prevailed, a joking relationship ensued

between the people of the once-warring states. The other reason attributed is that at a time in history, there were intermarriages that were contracted between the ruling families of the states which make the offsprings or descendants from the marriages become cousins. As the Hausa customs dictate, a joking relationship is practicable between the children of the male and female siblings. Though this kinship is historical, it is held with a high premium, and as such joking relations exist between the distant cousins. Examples of these joking relationships are:

2.2.1 The Zamfarawa and Gobirawa Joking Relations

The people of Gobir referred to as Gobirawa enjoy and practice joking relationships with the Zamfara people. Both are said to be cousins. Harris, (1939 p. 347) said that an oral tradition narrates that there was a marriage contracted between Fara, the daughter of one of the Gobir kings, and a hunter from Zamfara. The marriage was fruitful as the children resulting from the marriage became cousins. This, therefore, became the reason for the jokes cracked between the Gobirawa and the Zamfara people. The Gobir people are regarded as the children of the male, while those of Zamfara are children of the female.

2.2.2 The Fulani and Gobirawa

The Fulani people are found in every nook and cranny of Hausa land. Among them are the town dwellers that enjoy sedentary life in the towns and cities of Northern Nigeria. Some cattle herders are nomadic in nature, as they move around with their cattle-looking pasture. The revered Sheikh Usman bn Fodio was a Fulani man who led the struggle for the revival and reformation of the Islamic religion in Hausa land. A series of wars were fought between the Islamic revivalist and the Hausa aristocracy [1]. War and hostility erupted and were fought decisively between the revivalist and the Gobir kingdom, which later spread to other Hausa states. In the course of these wars, captives were captured. Harris, (1939 p. 347) posited that, by marriage, the Fulani are related to the *Gobirawa* through Katembale, the daughter of sarkin Gobir Mayaƙi, who bore children, Hodi and Mu'alledi, with sultan Muhammadu Bello. In another account, Katembale was said to be the wife of sarkin Gobir Yumfa. She was captured by the forces of the Islamic revivalist at Alƙalawa (Last, 2009 p. 133). The union is said to be the reason why a joking relationship exists between the Fulani and the people of Gobir because the descendants from the union become cousins.

3.1 Inter-Ethnic Joking Relationship between Hausa and their Neighbors

The Hausa people majorly occupy the Northwestern region of Northern Nigeria. There is, however, a population of some minority ethnic groups who cohabit in the same geographical area as the Hausa people. The inhabitants of this area enjoy peaceful co-existence with each other. The Fulani people, for instance, co-exist with the Hausa people in the same environment. The *Clela*, popularly called *Dakarkari* by the Hausas, are a tribe mostly found in the Zuru emirate of Kebbi state. They share a common border with the people of Zamfara, who are Hausa both in their culture and language. The Ningawa are people inhabiting the Ningi emirate of Bauchi state. They share a joking relationship with the Kanawa, the Kano people. Ningi shares a border with Kano in its Northern part. The *Dakarkari* of Zuru enjoys joking relations with their Zamfara neighbours. The Nupe people whose language is Nupe occupy the central part of Nigeria, precisely Niger state. They partake in joking relations with the Katsinawa. In all instances of the joking relations practised it used to be reciprocal in nature. Among the practitioners, whoever is more endowed with the art of speaking or use of the language, takes the upper hand. The person less endowed will have to swallow, hook, line, and sinker whatever is said to him, without quarrel, no matter how provoked he becomes. The joking relationship entails that whatever provocative words of jest or tease are said to one another, it does not in any way result in provoking anger as to warrant quarrels or even fisticuff with one another. Sometimes, provocative actions are done to one another which in whatever way and manner, does not lead to wrangling or fighting between the participants in the jokes.

3.1.2 Occupational Joking Relationship

Hausa cultural practices do not only entails joking relationships between people and their kinship relation or that between different tribes that co-exist in the same or neighboring environment. Joking relationships are also practised between people who practice or undertake related but different traditional crafts and occupations. This is not however restricted to the traditionally inclined occupations but also those occupations that came about as a result of modernity, precisely, western-oriented crafts and occupations, examples of which include but are not limited to driving, carpentry, and masonry.

Bunza, (2015) has advanced several traditional occupations whose practitioners engage one another in a joking relationship including the jokes that are usually cracked between the butchers *mahauta* whose main work is the processing and sale of beef and other animal meat, on one hand, and the fishermen *masunta*, whose predetermined occupation is the catching, processing and sale of fishery products. There exists also a joking relationship between the *masunta* and the hunter's *mafarauta*. This emanates due to the similarity of their different crafts or occupations. Both

¹For detail discussion on this, see Last, D. M. (1967) *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longman or its Hausa Translation, *Daular Sakkwato Na Murry Last* translated by Bunza, A. M., S. S. Ibrahim, B. B. Usman (2009).

seem similar because all entail hunting of their prey, though are executed on different grounds. While hunting takes place in the bushes and forests where game is found, fishing on the other hand is mainly conducted in the water, which is the main habitat on which fish survives. Each of the practitioners of these trades claims superiority and prestige of one's occupation over another. There is also a form of joking relationship between the traditional barbers, *wanzamai*, and the blacksmith, *maƙera*. Maƙera, the blacksmith almost always claim the worthwhileness of their occupation over and above that of the barbers. The argument they advance to back their claim is that they produce the work tools for the barbers' use. The barbers in retaliation refer to the blacksmith as practitioners of witchcraft, and without being circumcised by the barbers, the religious genuflection and prostrations in the prayer of the blacksmith could not have been accepted due to impurity.

The other form of occupational joking relationship is the one practised between the drivers of commercial vehicles and the owners of camels who transport goods with the use of the beast of burden, the camel. The driver always at the sight of the camel rider shouts out to him "*gana Kurmi.*" meaning 'here are goods destined for southern Nigeria'. He does this to tease the camel owner because gone are the days when the camel is used for long-distance transportation of goods. In reply, the camel rider retorts '*kai ma ganakarkara*' meaning 'here are goods to be transported to the remote areas', knowing fully that there is no access road. The driver will then hard press his horn to frighten the camel. Both will then laugh it up with smiles. This joking relationship also applies to the carpenters and the masons who work in the construction industry. The mason builds while the carpenters roof the building. Their work in the same sector makes them become rivals in a joking relationship, each teasing the other to further strengthen the relationship.

3.1.3 Gobirawa and the Yoruba People

Both Gobirawa and the Yorubas in some traditions traced their descents to the east - referring to the Arabian Middle East. Gobirawa is famous in gallantry and wars have become part of their culture and today they are simply identified through the facial markings of 6 and 7 on their cheeks. According to oral documented history, Gobirawa is considered the Hausa cousins of the Yoruba-speaking groups. The Gobirawa has a long history with the southwestern part of Nigeria and even have tribal marks in common with the Yoruba people, particularly the Yoruba people in the Northern parts of Yoruba land domiciled in Ilorin, parts of present Kwara State, Northern parts of Oyo and Osun States, Nigeria (Metz 1991).

As a result of the cordial relationship that ensued between them, they requested Gobir leader Bawa Jan-Gwarzo to give them one of his daughters' hands in marriage which he did. Today, following Hausa culture which the Gobirawa practice, there is always a traditional joke between cousins, and as such, the Gobirawa call the Yoruba their 'cousins' because they believe that the Yoruba were begotten by the daughter of Bawa Jan Gwarzo.

Some people believe that the first Hausa man to come in contact with the Yoruba was a Gobir. As a result, some historians believe the term "Gambari" which is used to refer to the Hausa by some Yoruba is an adulterated way of saying "Gobir". However, according to the Oduduwa legend, two of his children who left 'Mecca' or the 'east' together with him eventually became the kings of Kukuwa (also spelled Kukawa) and Gogobir (Gobir) in Northern Nigeria. But some historians argue that there is no historical record to support this assertion and that it is not known when the children of Oduduwa began to rule these two Northern kingdoms. Historical records also support that the Hausa have always been the rulers of Gobir. Recorded history has shown that the kings of Gobir include Babari, who was succeeded by Bawa Jan Gwarzo who ruled from 1770–1795, and later on his brother Mallam Yakuba (Okpevra 2014).

4.1 The Advantages of Joking Relationship

Joking relationships is a socio-cultural practice that is advantageous both to the individual that partakes in it and the society in which it is practised. Below are some of the advantages of cultural practice in the socio-cultural lives of the society where it is practised.

- i. To the individual, it is an avenue where one learns tolerance and patience no matter the high degree of provocation. This is so because one becomes used to taking and tolerating jest, innuendoes, and demeaning remarks including derogatory statements from a fellow joking partner. All these a person takes without recourse to physical assaults or fights. The highest one can do is to come up with a verbal attack in a friendly manner.
- ii. It also makes one proficient in the use of his language. Joking relationships provide an effective practice ground for the joking partner to learn the art of speaking and thinking and employ the best defence mechanism in terms of best utterances to use for retaliation of whatever his joking opponent might say against him. With this, a joking relationship becomes beneficial in learning and improving the use of his language and the art of self-expression.
- iii. Joking relationship is a source of entertainment and amusement and soothes the mind and as well, has a refreshing effect on the human soul. It brings a sort of relief for one's worries and discontentment in worldly affairs most especially, it makes one forget his worries at the time when the jokes are being cracked by the persons involved.

- iv. It is a cultural practice that brings about harmonious and peaceful co-existence most especially between the ethnic groups that participate in inters ethnic joking relationships. A clear example is the Nupe and Katsinawa joking plays. Wherever they meet, they jovially play their jokes and no matter the provocative words said to one another, they depart gracefully and live peacefully with one another. Perhaps, the Dakarkari and the Zamfarawa who live peacefully with one another in the same neighborhood might have enjoyed peace among others but were not limited to the existing joking relationship between them.
- v. Joking relationships as practised in Hausa culture is a catalyst for cementing and strengthening family relationships. This is so because there is a tradition of family visits by the children of the female younger or elder sisters to the family of their cousins to collect the yearly *shara* gift from the siblings in the family. The visits coupled with the presentation of the gift attached to it have the efficacy of further bonding and solidifying family ties.

4.2 Harnessing Joking Relationship for National Integration

Obah (2021) conceptualized national integration as the acknowledgment of a shared identity among the inhabitants of a country. This implies that despite belonging to diverse castes, and religions, and speaking different languages, individuals recognize their unity. Building upon this idea, Akwara *et al.*, (2013) viewed national integration as a sense of togetherness and unity towards one's own country, irrespective of cultural and religious differences. They emphasized the significance of national integration in facilitating the promotion and upliftment of all races, sexes, and religions within a state (Okonkwo, 2009). The existing joking relationships among various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria have played a very important role in cementing harmonious relationships among Nigerians. Nigeria is blessed with over 250 ethnic groups and has about 500 dialects validating her rich cultural diversity and resources (Patrick *et al.*, 2019, & Okonkwo, 2000).

Therefore, the utilization of joking relationships as a cultural phenomenon has been recognized as a means to foster national integration in Nigeria. By facilitating the resolution of past conflicts and animosities among conflicting parties, these humorous ties contribute to the restoration of peace and harmony. When different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds coexist peacefully within the country, the importance of national integration becomes apparent. Culture plays a pivotal role in the lives of individuals and society as a whole in Nigeria. Upon becoming members of society, individuals acquire knowledge about the language, symbols, values, norms, customs, and traditions of their environment. Culture serves as a unifying force, integrating people and ensuring the collective strength of society (Northern Nigeria, 2010).

Jokes and cultural ties have consistently facilitated the coming together of diverse ethnic groups, thereby creating a platform for regional and national understanding and integration. A notable example within the Nigerian context is the Benue State arts and culture, which has successfully integrated the Idoma, Igede, and Tiv ethnic groups into a unified entity. It is intriguing to observe that these groups can perform each other's cultural dances and share common customs and beliefs to a significant extent (Osaghae, 2002). This exemplifies how cultural exchanges and shared experiences contribute to fostering a sense of unity and integration among different ethnic communities.

Jokes shared among and between ethnic groups offer significant social and economic advantages, contributing to improved learning, better health, increased tolerance, and opportunities for social cohesion. Culture plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of life and overall well-being of both individuals and communities. Jokes, as a part of a culture, implicitly regulate people's behaviour in various settings such as family, school, work, and home. In Nigeria, different generations are closely linked through their shared culture. This intricate system ensures the transfer of social experiences from one generation to another and from one era to the next. Consequently, cultural practices have historically served as a unifying force among humanity and continue to do so (Okeke, 2019).

From a broader perspective, the impact of joking relationships has extended far beyond simply reducing envy and enmity among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. These relationships have even paved the way for intermarriages between ethnic groups. Moreover, the practice of joking and the associated interpersonal connections have been instrumental in resolving disputes, including minor conflicts. They have played a crucial role in fostering harmony, diffusing tensions, and persuading conflicting groups to embrace amicable resolutions for conflict management. In doing so, they contribute to the promotion of sustainable peacebuilding initiatives (Obasi, 2010). These patterns of humour and social bonds have proven to be powerful tools in bridging divides and fostering positive relationships among diverse communities.

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