

## AN INVESTIGATION OF TRADITIONAL RIGHTS AND CULTURES OF KANURI'S WOMEN IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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Bintuk Achallah Galađima

Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
University of Maiduguri  
E-mail: [bintukg@gmail.com](mailto:bintukg@gmail.com)

***Abstract:** It is well-known fact that women all over the world are considered and treated as inferior to men and this oppression, and discrimination is more manifest in traditional societies. Therefore, this paper examines the rights and duties of women in traditional communities with particular reference to the Kanuri community. It equally examined the rights and duties within the family pertaining to marriage, divorce, inheritance and their domestic and economic duties in the Kanuri community. The research is an explanatory study. The total sample for the study consisted of (132) people made up of equal number of males and females. Systematic sampling method was used to select the sample from the general public. Data was mainly collected from the primary source. Three areas were purposively chosen to collect the data, these included Maiduguri, Gubio and Kawuri. Ninety (74) people were from Maiduguri (34) from Gubio and (24) people from Kawuri. Personal face-to-face interview was utilized to get information from the respondents in the general public. Statistical method of simple frequency distribution and percentages were used to tabulate the data obtained. It should also be noted that the researcher declined to show the respondent's opinions tables, but attached the table questions and appendix. The analysis shows that there is an apparent gender in equality as regards the rights and distribution of duties within the family in the Kanuri society. It was found that women have more duties than rights. As pointed out in the analysis 60% of the respondents confirmed to it. It was also found out that women's subjugation and subordination was legalized through institution of marriage. In view of the analysis the researcher recommended that literacy rate particularly among the rural women should be improve and levels of family violence and oppressive social customs such as early marriage should be discourage.*

**Keywords:** Traditional, Right, Culture, Women.

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### INTRODUCTION

In almost all societies of the world women have been denied their rights and have been discriminated against socially, politically, economically, professionally. Even in religion women have been relegated to second position in preference to men. They are variously

portrayed as the weaker sex. They usually suffer serious disadvantages such as those that arise from denial of rights to equality in ownership of land and property, in education, distribution of duties functions and wealth in comparison to their male counterparts. This is the position in which many women find themselves in a patriarchal society. As Nwabara (1989) puts it

*"Women are discriminated against because they are not men; they are denied some of the rights of human beings; they are subjected to sexist practices and stereotyping, they are harassed, exploited and abused sexually. They are exploited particularly within the family"*

This is an apt description of the condition of women all over the world. In the Northern Nigeria Muslim Society tradition and custom is often mistaken for religion as regard the position of women, this is rightly pointed out by a great Islamic scholar Shehu Usman Dan Fodio:

*"Men treat their wives like household implements which become broken after long use and which are then thrown out on the dung heap"*  
(Hodgkin: 1975: 254).

Some selfish men deliberately misinterpret tradition and custom for religion to deprive women to rights God has given in order to satisfy their selfish ends. Such men tend to believe that to include women in education and production outside the home implies sexual segregation which they believed is against Islam and its laws. Usman Dan Fodio further pointed out that "Men seek only their own satisfaction and that is why they impose upon you tasks which the law of God and that of his prophet have never especially assigned to you. Such are the preparation of food stuffs, the washing of clothes and other domestic duties which they like to impose upon you while they neglect to teach you what God and the prophet have prescribed to you. (Hodgkin: 253). In Kilba, Mumuye and Jukun communities the communal and the capitalist modes of production is the basis for the sub-ordination of women which seems to have been legitimized through marriage (Sa'ad 1991:18). Therefore, the focus of this research is to study the traditional rights and duties of the Kanuri women within the family. In other words it is intended to identify and analyse the traditional rights of Kanuri women within the family pertaining to marriage, divorce inheritance, access to property and maintenance, and to find out their domestic duties, their duties towards the upbringing of the children and finally their traditional rights and duties towards the farm.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

It is scholarly vindicated that most cultures in the Nigerian traditional rural communities tend to view women as lesser human beings and is therefore not comparable to men. The Kanuri women, similar to other women in most societies all over the world, have been subjugated and discriminated against by their male counterparts. They are being denied many of their basic human rights and subjected to stereotyping. Many women in the Kanuri Community, particularly those who are in the rural areas do not know their basic

right and duties pertaining to marriage, divorces, ownership of property, inheritance and so on. They thereby carry out their duties as expected of women in society. They are relegated to child rearing and other domestic duties, because it is believed that these duties are purely for women. Generally women are not aware of their fundamental human rights and freedom in the Kanuri community that constituted a problem that the researcher felt the need to be studied. They do not have the right to do anything without the permission of their husbands or their fathers. Women among the Kanuri work along with the men on the field and they alone are responsible for the food processing at home, but they do not have right over what they produce. In essence, therefore, in the Kanuri society fundamental human rights and freedom have been denied women generally, which constituted a major problem to their development. Hence, there is need to look into the problem order to find out factors responsible for the denial of their rights.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- i. To examine the traditional rights of Kanuri's women in Borno State.
- ii. To determine whether traditionally women have more rights or more duties than men among the Kanuri in Borno State.
- iii. To examine possible changes that might have taken place over time and the reasons for the changes.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the traditional rights and culture of women within the family in the Kanuri community?
2. Do women have more rights duties in Kanuris culture than men?
3. What are the changes on the right and culture of women that have taken place overtime?

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The total sample for this research consists of 132 people made up of men and women drawn from Maiduguri, Gubio and Kawuri. The researcher purposively chooses these areas because these are settlements where the Kanuri ethnic group was largely found. It also enabled the researcher to get information from urban area that is Maiduguri, semi-urban that is Gubio and rural area that is Kawuri, in order to see whether there are changes over time among the Kanuri women. Systematic sampling technique was used to administer the interview schedule. Seventy four (74) people were selected from Maiduguri, thirty four (34) from Gubio and (24) twenty four Kawuri.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This analysis is based on transcripts of individuals interviewed with 132 people, seventy four (74) of these people were from the urban area, 34 were from the semi-urban and 24 from rural area. The public response reflects their needs and attitude, perceptions and opinion, it also reflect the objective condition of what women actually do.

Table one show the age and sex distribution of the respondents. It shows majority of the male respondents are between the age range of 31 – 59 years which constitute 42% of the total respondents. It is also shows that majority of the female respondents are within the age range of 31 – 59 years which constitute 37.9% of the total respondents. This indicates that to all intents and purposes they are adults who are old enough to know about the traditional rights and duties of women within the family especially among the Kanuri. Equal number of males and females responded to the interview. Table two explains the sex and marital status of the respondents. It shows that among the males, married persons are 45.5% divorced 28.7%, single 21.2% and widowed and separated 4.5%. Among the female respondents the married ones are 45.5%, divorced, 30.3, single 18.1%, widowed and separated account to be 6.1%. This indicates that there are more single males among the Kanuris than single females, even though the sample is too small to generalize. However, there are also more female divorces among the Kanuris than male. The same goes for widowed and separated. The reason for female divorcees being more in number is obvious, because the males are seriously involved in polygamy. As earlier mentioned Islam is the predominant religion among the Kanuris, thus, the males are allowed to marry up to four wives at a time while the females are only allowed one husband at a time. This infact is one of the major principal responsible for the high rate of divorce in Kanuri land. Even though divorce rate is high, we must remember that the tendency for divorcees and widows to remarry within the shortest possible time is very high as the Kanuri people encourage marriages.

It is not known exactly if the marital status of the Kanuris enables them to know about the traditional rights and duties of the Kanuri women as no empirically validated research has been conducted into the area. It is obvious that most Kanuri women spend most of their lives in marriage because early marriage is heavily practiced amongst them. Table three shows that majority of Kanuri men are farmers while 21.1% of them are of other occupation such as butchers, blacksmiths, carpenters, labourers etc. Among the female respondents the highest percentage of them are full time house wives 42.4% while 9.1% and 6.1% of them are into business and other occupations respectively. Such occupations are weaving of mat, basket, hair plaiting, pottery etc. This can be interpreted to mean that majority of the Kanuri women are either farmers or full time housewives. This also shows that women have limited occupational choices. Most of the Kanuri women work along with their husbands in the farm if they are not in seclusion, which is very common among them, and if they are in seclusion they remain as full time housewives in their homes and do their domestic duties. This shows that women among the Kanuri society do not have occupational choices.

Table four shows the public opinion on women's ownership of land to do their farming activities among the Kanuri community 36.4% of the male respondents held that women owned farm while 63.6% of them held the contrary view. Majority of the female respondents held that women do not own large plots of land to do their farming activities 72.7%. They claimed that even those of them who owned the land is just few hectares

which is not comparable to those of men whereby a single person many owned several hectares of land. This shows that majority of the women do not have access to the land to farm inspite of the fact that they are mainly into farming if they are not full time housewives. The respondents who opined that women do not own land to farm on were asked if it is justified, most of them responded that it is not justified but there is nothing they could do about it because it is entrenched in the traditional tenets. This also shows that in the traditional Kanuri community women have limited right to land ownership. This confirms earlier research by Sa'ad (1991) among Kilba, Mumuye and Jakun communities. In their societies the head of the community could only allocate land to the male members of the family. It was only the head of the household (husband) that could allocate land to his wives. Therefore women in these communities do not own land; they work only on their husband's land. These findings, contradicted the UN (1948) universal declaration of human rights that "all human beings are born free and equal indignity and rights". The UN Article II, further maintained that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth, without discrimination as regards to any demographic affiliations status (OAU, 1981).

Table five proves in a traditional set up, majority of the population are farmers. Both men and women are engaged in cultivation. As regard to the question on what women usually cultivate, whether food crops or cash crops it was found out that majority of the male respondents 54.5% confirmed that women cultivate more of food crops than cash crops, while 57.5% of the female respondents equally confirmed to it. This can be interpreted to mean that one of the traditional rights and duties of the Kanuri woman is the cultivation of food and cash crops to some extent, while the former is cultivated to assist in feeding the family, the latter is cultivated in order to assist them in solving their financial needs without much problem. Table six shows that 93.9% of the males and 96.9% of the female's respondents informed the researcher those women are engaged in the petty trading rather than full-scale business. This indicates that majority of the Kanuri women who are into trading are into business are of petty nature. This findings confirms earlier research findings such as those of Okhe (1991) and Akaugbe (1994) who found out that women in Nigeria are more into petty trading rather than full scale business. The reason for this is that women do not have enough funds which would be of immense help to them in establishing big businesses, secondly because of their marital status. Infact the respondents were asked whether this scenario is justified, almost all of them held that it is not in any way a justified situation.

Table seven shows that 90.9% of the males and 993.9% of the females respondents informed the researcher that certain restrictions are placed on women to own certain properties. Examples of such properties that the researcher discovered included exclusion of women from ownership of land, houses, war weapons etc. therefore, it shows that the traditional rights and duties of the Kanuri women do not extend to ownership of certain categories of properties. Table eight equally shows that the male respondents 25.8% of them informed the researcher that women have right over the farm products, while 74.2%

of them held that women among the Kanuri do not have right over the farm products. 30.3% of the female respondents held that women have rights over the farm products, while 69.6% of them held the contrary view. This can be interpreted to mean that most women do not have rights over farms among the traditional Kanuri society. Table nine shows that among the respondents 53% of males and 53% of the females informed the researcher that men alone have reproductive rights within the family, while 31.8% of the males and 30.3% of the females held that both men and women have equal reproductive rights within the family, particularly the literate families they discussed about their sexuality as well as the number of children to have. But from the above it can be observed that women alone can neither have right over their sexuality nor the number of children to have. Therefore it can be concluded that women alone in the Kanuri community do not have reproductive rights. This finding is perfectly normal as it is in the line with the cultural realities that obtainable in Africa.

Table ten demonstrates that the Kanuri girls are married out at the tender age of puberty that is between the ages of 12 – 14 years old. 42.4% of the male respondents and 45.4% of the female respondents informed the researcher that the age at which most Kanuri girls marry are ages, which they consider to be very appropriate. Because they confirmed that at this early when they got married the husband cannot have any difficulty in training the girl to be submissive. 53% of the males and 45.4% of the females considered the ages to be too early. On the other hand 9% of the females and 4.5% of the female's respondents contended that the age of which some Kanuri girls get married nowadays is too late, because it exposed them to promiscuity. This can be interpreted to mean that there are more early marriages among the Kanuri women. This is a problem militating against the rights of women. The effects of early marriage is very negative, it subjects the girls to diseases such as vesico vaginal fistula (VVF) among others. As to the question about intertribal marriage, all the respondents that are both the males and the females informed the researcher that women in the Kanuri community do marry from outside their community nowadays; it is only in the past that intertribal marriage was restricted. However, the researcher discovered that the Kanuri women are not allowed to marry non-Muslims. This shows that the rights of marriage among the Kanuri do not include marrying non-Muslims which is not the case for the Kanuri men. Therefore, this shows that the intertribal marriage is allowed amongst the Kanuri people while inter-religious marriage is not allowed.

Table eleven shows that in Kanuri's marriage system the bride is normally negotiated between the bride's and the groom's skins. 30.3% of the male's respondents and 34.9% of the females think that the bride price of women in the Kanuri society is rather too expensive, while 45.4% of the males and 31.8% of the female respondents contended that the bride price is fair. From the above it can be observed that the bride price among the Kanuri women is fair above normal. Table twelve also responses vindicates that 75.8% of the males respondents held that the bride consume the bride price, 72.7% of the females respondents also confirmed to it. 24.2% of the males and 24.2% of the female

respondents respectively informed the researcher that the bride price. This finding is normal because in traditional African societies, the bride prices are often consumed by the bride and her parents. In fact in the Kanuri community a significant proportion of the bride price is used to procure a lot of necessities to the bride, such items include furniture's, utensils, and jewelries among others. Table thirteen shows that majority of the male respondents 60.6% and 54.5% of the females informed the researcher that parents have the right of choice of partners for their children. Others such as relatives and guardians amounted to 3%. This can be interpreted to mean that the Kanuri people do not give the females the rights and duties of choosing partners for themselves. The respondents were asked their opinion about the choice of partners for children by their parents. To this question 56.1% of the male respondents and 60.6% of the females contended that it is good for parents to choose a partner for their children because at this tender age of marriage, the girls are too young to decide what is good and bad for themselves, while 30.3% of the males and 27.2% of the females said that it is bad for parents to choose partners for their children. The rest of the respondents were rather indifferent to the question this goes to show further that the Kanuri society accepts the parents to choose partners for their children.

Table fourteen opinions observed shows that 45.4% of the male respondents informed that men have more of duties within the family, on the contrary 51.5% of the males and 90.9% of the females respondents contended that women have more of duties to perform within the family than men. This can be interpreted to mean that the women have more duties within the family amongst the Kanuris if we go by the opinion of majority of the respondents. They also went further to confirmed that women in the family bears the children, cook food for all members of the family, fetch water either from the well or from the tap where there is non in the compound, fetch fire wood, processed grain, clean the compound, wash children's cloth and do all other similar domestic duties, work in the farm and in most cases she is either pregnant or nursing. 75% of the male respondents held that men do not assist wives with the domestic duties while 25% of them think otherwise, they confirmed that men assist their wives with the domestic duties such duties include bathing the child and washing their cloths, fetching of fire goods and sometimes in cleaning the compound. This can be interpreted to mean that majority of Kanuri men do not assist their wives with the domestic duties. According to the respondents this is because within the Kanuri society it is not part of their culture for the men to do domestic work and that is down grading of their manhood if they did so.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the analysis of the data collected for the study, the following conclusions were arrived at. The women in the Kanuri system have specific rights and duties, which they are expected not to breach. In the previous chapter it has been pointed out that majority of the women folk do not own farm, even though their main occupation is farming. This shows that their right to land ownership is specified. Women's view pertaining to the choice of their husbands are not recognized, as has been show from table they do not

even have the right to choose their partners with whom in most cases might spend the better part of their lives. The findings also pointed to the fact that women traditionally have more of duties than rights within the family, duty and submissiveness is always emphasized than rights, because in the previous chapter majority of the male respondents and of the female respondents had that women have more duties within the family. This also shows that traditionally in the Kanuri community women have more of duties than their men counterparts, but in contrast men have more of rights within the family. The researcher has observed that there are certain changes in the Kanuri society, like the age at first marriage and choice of partners amongst others. Nowadays because of the effect of western education the age at first marriage among the Kanuri girls has gone up, so also the girls nowadays choose their partners, there is also a change in the attitudes of man in assisting their wives with the domestic duties. Nowadays some of the literate men do assist their wives themselves or they employ the assistance of a house-maid to help their wives, so in that case the woman might not be over worked as in the olden days. Due to the change of age at first marriage, there is also change in the choice of partners as stated earlier. Men have upper hand in divorce; most women preferred staying in their first husband's house instead of constant divorce and remarrying.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- Women should be given education, particularly for the rural women. Most of the women in the traditional Kanuri society are ignorant of their rights and duties. Therefore education will lead or enable them to understand what is going on in the society. This is because when a situation is well understood, where to attack it becomes easy.
- Schemes should be established recommending and promoting women's right in education, economy and social spheres. Programmes such as girl's child education and poverty alleviation programmes, if strictly adhered to would definitely enhance the status of women in the traditional communities.
- Strategies should be adopted for achieving women's equality.
- Traditional practices such as early marriage and demand of high dowry by kins of the bride should be discouraged.
- The ministry of women's affair should also organize and create awareness about their economic position, nature and causes of exploitation, because when there is awareness they can challenge subordination and subjugation.
- The ministry of women's affairs in conjunction with commission of women should give credit and ensure women's access to low interest or free loans in appropriate amount to enable them economically dependent.
- That the men should understand that the children and the home are not for women alone, it takes the two of them to conceive, therefore if the women are being over burden by domestic duties, they should be given their helping hands.



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## APPENDIX

Table 1:	Age and sex distribution of the respondents
Table 2:	Sex and Marital Status of the respondents
Table 3:	Occupational and sex Distribution of the respondents
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