

## A HISTORY OF THE HAUSA MIGRANT COMMUNITY IN BENIN, 1906-2022

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the history of the Hausa migrant community in Benin since 1906, when the earliest migrants came to Benin as hunters, traders and herders. The paper explores the three waves of Hausa migration to Benin from the pre-colonial through colonial to the post-colonial periods. The extant literature has concentrated on the history of the Hausa migrant community in the towns and cities in North-Central and Southern Nigeria, while the Hausa migrant group in Benin has received marginal attention from historians. The overarching thrust of this paper is that the new waves of Hausa migration to Benin in the post-colonial era were more dynamic as they engaged in diverse social, economic and political activities that contributed to fostering good inter-group relations between the Hausa and Benin host communities. It argues that the Hausa migrants have established good inter-group relations with the indigenous Benin community, as there has not been any significant violent conflict between the two groups. This paper relies heavily on primary data utilizing archival materials and oral interviews are complemented by secondary sources. It analyses both sources using historical narratives, thus contributing to the growing literature on the role of migrant groups in fostering inter-group relations in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Hausa, migrant, Benin, community, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Migration as a form of human activity and response to economic, socio-political or physical challenges constitutes an important factor in the transformation of societies, especially as it is a cause-effect phenomenon. Whether forced or voluntary, migration is responsible for redistribution of human populations across the globe.<sup>1</sup> It also enhances the transfer of ideas, skills, cultures and admixture of races.<sup>2</sup> Various ethnic groups in Nigeria belong to particular geographical locations where they are considered indigenous; thus, groups whose ancestors are traceable to areas outside their localities are considered migrants. In this respect, the Hausa groups are considered indigenous to the northern part of Nigeria but are referred to as migrants in areas outside of northern Nigeria

Benin was the capital city of the ancient Benin Kingdom, reputed to be one of the oldest and prominent kingdoms in West Africa. It is one of the oldest cities in Nigeria that owed its prominence as an important centre of arts and crafts, especially in bronze casting and other artistic works for centuries. Benin was the capital and seat of the Oba, the king of the ancient Benin Kingdom, one of the most powerful kingdoms in West Africa. The city was a major traditional urban centre in pre-colonial West Africa and has since retained its heritage as a political and economic hub in the sub-region. Benin is an ancient city and a melting pot with peoples of diverse origins and cultures that dates back to the twelfth century which enriched its cosmopolitan outlook and rich cultural heritage. It is the political and economic hub inhabited by predominantly indigenous Bini people, who reside mainly in the city.

Benin has a long history of attracting people to the city from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Some of these migrants such as the Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri have been residing there for at least a century; others, like the Hausa, Fulani, Idoma, Ibibio and people of other ethnicities in Nigeria, also have a significant presence in the city. . It is ethnically, socially, religiously mixed, but still maintains its indigenous rich traditional cultural practices. Benin is the capital and largest city of Edo State in the South-south geopolitical region of Nigeria. As at 2023, its population is estimated to 1,973,000.<sup>3</sup> A significant number of Hausa people reside in Benin and had established Hausa community in Aduwawa, Eyean, Sakponba and other areas.

The history of migration of the Hausa and settlements from Hausaland to other regions of West Africa has been studied by scholars such as the work of Adamu Mahdi<sup>4</sup> who examined the spread of Hausa migrant community in West Africa with the attendant socio-economic and cultural implications. Others include Smith's work which focused on how socio-cultural and religious influences triggered migrations in Kano Emirate, one of the prominent Hausa states in Northern Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Murray Last in his prodigious work titled: *The Sokoto Caliphate* gave detailed accounts of the Sokoto Caliphate, a centralized political institution that covered most parts of Hausaland. He examined how the expansion of the caliphate caused southward migration of Hausa people to southern Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> Paul Lovejoy's work looked at the dynamics of economic changes that occurred during the slave trade, slavery and long distance trade. It contended that the Hausa participation in external trade in such as kolanut and other commodities was a compelling factor for their migration from Hausaland to Gonja in Ghana and other states and/or empires in West Africa.<sup>7</sup> Mortimore's work dwelled basically on how environmental factors have influenced migration patterns among ethnic groups in West Africa.<sup>8</sup>

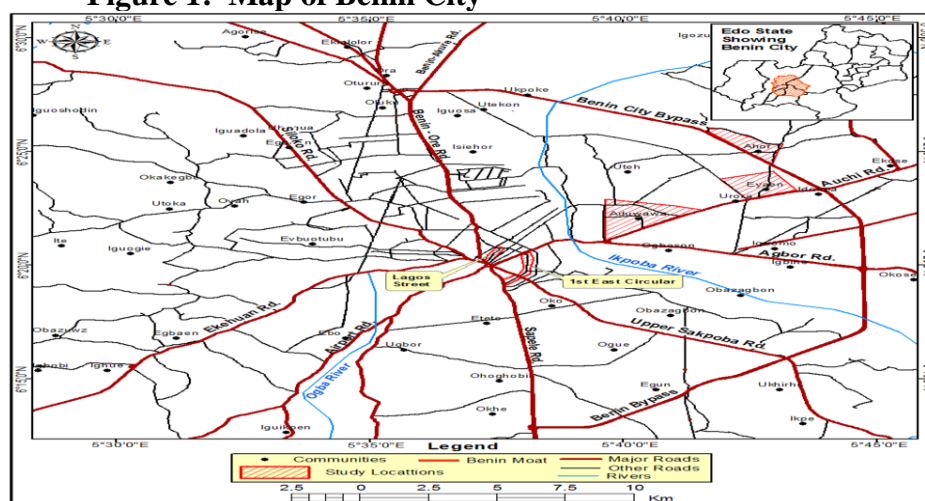
Scholars from varied disciplinary fields have examined the dynamism of ethnic migration and settlement outside their culture areas in Nigeria. The works of Mohammed Suleiman (2001) explores the history of evolution of migrant Hausa community in Lokoja in the Niger-Benue confluence area from 1860 to 1966.<sup>9</sup> Abdulwahab Tijani (2008) studied the Hausa migration, settlement and inter-group relations in Ogbomoso in Yorubaland from 1924 to 1967.<sup>10</sup> Odoemene (1998) is a seminal work that studied the origins and development of the migration of diverse ethnic groups including the Hausa to Enugu in Igboland. It posits that despite some challenges, there have been mutual and harmonious relations between the host community and the Hausa migrant elements in the city.<sup>11</sup> Isaac Albert (1993) focuses on the historical trajectory of Igbo migration and settlement in Kano in Hausaland. It contends that despite the series of ethno-religious conflicts between the Igbo and Hausa from 1953 to 1991, there have some aspects of peaceful inter-group and inter-religious relationship between the two groups. Thus, there relations have oscillated between harmonious peaceful co-existence and violent conflicts.<sup>12</sup>

Other works that have examined the Hausa and other ethnic groups' migration and settlements in different regions of Nigeria could be seen in works of Anthony Douglas (1994), Rasheed Olaniyi (2006), Ahmed Bako (2006), Sada (1984), A. B. Goni-Giwa (2007), Onigu Otite (2002), Osaghae (2002) A.F. Usman and A. Bako (2006), Gatawa (2012), Adamu (2015), Akran (2011), Osudibia (2018) Azeez Olaniyan (2009), Dusai (1986) and others.<sup>13</sup> A few works that concentrated on the migrants' settlements in Benin includes Usuanlele and Edo (2007), P. O. Sada, (1984); Sadoh & Alenkhe (2014).<sup>14</sup> Despite the profundity of the extant literature, the history of Hausa migration and settlement in Benin, in Southern Nigeria, is yet to be studied.

This paper is aimed at examining the history of the Hausa migrant community in Benin from 1906 to 2022. It contends that the Hausa migration to Benin predated colonialism and was primarily motivated by environmental, economic, political and social factors. The paper is structured into four sections: The first section presents the geography, people and historical background of Hausa migration to Benin. The second section examines the motivating factors for Hausa migration, while the third section looks at the social, economic and religious impact of Hausa migration to Benin. The fourth section discusses the challenges faced by Hausa migrants in Benin. A study of the history of Hausa migration and settlement in Benin is a significant addition to the historiography of migration studies in Nigeria.

Benin lies within latitude  $6^{\circ}12'38''.36''\text{N}$  and  $6^{\circ}29'5.00\text{N}$  and longitude  $5^{\circ}29'46.03\text{E}$  and  $5^{\circ}45'00.41$ .<sup>15</sup> It falls within the tropical climate with annual average temperature of about  $27^{\circ}\text{C}$  and annual rainfall is about 2000mm.<sup>16</sup> Benin is made up of three local government areas, namely: Egor, Ikpoba-Okhai and Oredo<sup>17</sup> It is, at present, the administrative capital of Edo State in South-south Nigeria. Benin is strategically located at a crossroads which serves as a gateway to the eastern, western and northern parts of Nigeria. It experiences two major seasons, the wet season, which lasts from March to October and the dry season, which lasts from the remaining part of the year. The topography of Benin can be described as low and sloping gently from about 105m above sea level in the northeast to about 55m in the southwest.<sup>18</sup> The natural vegetation of Benin is rain forest that is rich in tree species such as Obeche Iroko, among others, and this makes lumbering and timber processing a major economic activity. The fertility of the soil makes farming activities to be the economic mainstay.

**Figure 1: Map of Benin City**



**Source:** Compiled using Open Street Database (2020)

### **The Historical Background of Hausa Migration to Benin**

No one can say with absolute certainty the actual date the Hausa community migrated to Benin. Neither can anyone say with a degree of certainty the actual date the first Hausa community settled in Benin. There are various versions of the Hausa migration and settlement in Benin. One of the versions has it that at a certain point during one of the sojourns of the Hausa, hunters from Hausaland *Yan-Koli* journeyed and reached Benin. The discovery of the economic potential of Benin attracted the second wave of migrants who moved in droves and began to establish permanent settlements in Benin from 1906.<sup>19</sup>

The Hausa migrants had been living in Benin even before the amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914.<sup>20</sup> This view was corroborated by Hanatu Musah, who maintained that long after the Sokoto Jihad of 1804, the Hausa hunters, as well as hunters from other groups

from northern Nigeria came to Benin before the British arrival in the area. The hunters usually came in bands for safety purposes because it was risky for a handful of hunters to travel far. With time, some traders started accompanying the hunters to purchase their animal kill.<sup>21</sup> Adamu Mahdi also posited in his work, *The Hausa Factor in West African History* that contacts between the Hausa and other ethnic groups predated colonialism. He opined that migration of the Hausa had reached areas as far as what became Dahomey and Gold Coast. He further stressed that the movement of Hausa into the southern part of Nigeria was informed by seasonal migration and long-distance trading.<sup>22</sup>

Oral information has revealed that Sarki Bala Musah was the first Hausa man to request from the Oba of Benin a piece of land to reside with his people. The first Hausa settlement in Benin City was around the present-day First-East Circular Road, which later served as the main settlement of the Hausa in Benin before the Nigerian-Biafra War. After getting an approved settlement which became the first Hausa quarters in Benin, members of the hunting groups appointed Baka Musa as their leader, but he turned down the offer of becoming the *Sarkin Hausawa* of Benin. As a hunter, he preferred his hunting vocation to being a *Sarki*. The Zama'a people later appointed Mallam Isah Adamu to be the *Sarkin*. This development led to the movement of the settlement from the previous First-East Circular to the town centre, especially Ibiwe and Iguisi.<sup>23</sup> Credible oral evidence suggests that by 1899, the Hausa community had already been established in the present day Lagos Street, Benin City under the leadership of Mallam Adamu. He was a hunter from Ningi in the present Bauchi State who later became the first *Sarkin Hausawa* of Benin.<sup>24</sup> He is believed to have possessed certain extraordinary powers as a result of his braveness and extraordinary hunting expertise. These sterling qualities and success led to his installation as the first *Sarkin Hausawa* of Benin, which probably may have taken place in 1874 before the Benin conquest in 1897.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Motivating Factors for Hausa Migration to Benin**

People migrate from one place to another for many reasons. The primary factors that motivate people to migrate from one country or environment to another are called push factors, while the factors that attract people from another locality or place to a particular place are pull factors. Pull and push factors are the things that make people either migrate to a place or migrate away from a certain environment. Push factors relate to the country from which the people or individuals migrate. Pull factors relate to the country the people or persons are migrating to. The push factors that compel people to migrate could be primitive conditions, desertification, famine/drought, natural disasters, slavery, poor housing and others.<sup>26</sup> Some of these factors played a significant role in the migration and subsequent establishment of the Hausa community in Benin.

The pre-colonial Hausaland was politically constituted into several Hausa city-states and one the most populous and fertile regions in West Africa. The geographical location and environment of Hausaland influenced the patterns of migration its people, movement of goods, services and ideas including migrations to Benin and other parts of southern Nigeria. The migration of the Hausa people from their geographical location in the savanna vegetational zone in Northern Nigeria to Benin in the rain forest zone has been influenced by environmental, economic, political, social and insecurity factors.

Although Hausaland is characterized by vast by savannah grasslands West Africa, which support agriculture and pastoralism that sustained the population, it receives moderate annual rainfall and often, the hot and dry climatic condition, especially during certain parts of the year, makes some areas not unsuitable for agricultural practice and animal husbandry. The region is

affected by periodic droughts which compelled some Hausa people to migrate in search for fertile lands for agricultural practice and pastoralism that were not be available in some areas of Hausaland. Environmental conditions have rendered some areas in Hausaland to be less habitable leading to migrations to regions with more favorable environmental and climatic conditions.

Economic factor is the predominant motive the Hausa migration to Benin. The economic activities of Hausa people include agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing and craftsmanship. The Hausa inhabiting the savannah grassland, the strength of her economy was centred on agriculture in which they produced crops such as guinea-corn, and millet, cotton, groundnut and so on. Thus, Hausa peasants were farmers, herders and fishermen and craftsmen.<sup>27</sup>

Trade was another economic factor. The Hausa are renowned traders who have been known have engaged in both local and long-distance trade. Hausa migration to Benin was driven by the economic motive to exploit new markets, search for other business opportunities and means of livelihoods. Benin possessing diverse economic opportunities, including rubber and timber industries, palm oil and palm kernel trade has attracted the Hausa migrants to partake in the trade and economic opportunities. Hausa people are well known itinerant traders, who came to Benin to trade in various items such as clothing, kola nut, supply of cattle and so on. They came to exploit abundant business opportunities in Benin. Located in the rain forest region that receives heavy annual rainfall, Benin possesses abundant grasses for the grazing of herds. This made the Hausa herdsmen to migrate to Benin to pastures to graze their herds. From the rearing of animals, the herdsmen established cattle markets in various locations in Benin. The boom in the cattle trade attracted more Hausa herdsmen from Hausaland to Benin.<sup>28</sup> This development gave rise to the influx of new Hausa migrants who engaged in other economic activities as butchers, currency dealers, tailors, drivers, craftsmen and petty traders, hawkers of goods and subsequently established permanent settlements in Benin. Thus, the Hausa migrants in Benin were composed of the earliest migrants, their descendants, and the new migrants.

The sporadic eruptions of political conflicts such the Jihad of 1804 and upheavals in Hausaland have caused displacements, population movements from the region to Southern Nigeria. At various periods, Hausa states had expanded their territories southward, leading to the migration of people seeking refuge and more stable political environments in some parts of southern Nigeria.<sup>29</sup> Insecurity is one the factors that caused the Hausa migration to Benin.

The outbreak of insurgency, kidnapping and banditry in Northern Nigeria has caused some Hausa elements to forcefully or voluntarily migrate to Benin to escape the insecurity that engulfed Northern Nigeria.<sup>30</sup>

### **Hausa Social and Economic Activities in Benin**

The economic activities of Hausa migrants in Benin have been conditioned by the nature of the trade they engaged in. The Hausa migrants have contributed immensely to the economic development of Benin in several ways, such as trade in livestock, Forex exchange, food items, metal recycling, petty trading and other services in the informal sector. They are also visible in road transportation from Benin to different parts of Northern Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is well known that most of the Hausa migrants came to Benin with herds of cattle. The most important factor behind their coming to Benin was the search for greener pastures for their cattle which was abundantly available in Benin. The Hausa migrants had already established a community long before the cattle market was created. The Hausa livestock market known as *Kara*, located at Eyean along the Benin-Auchi highway, has

experienced a series of transformations. Available oral evidence has revealed that the first wave of Hausa migrants that settled in Benin were hunters, and the *Yan Koli* (Itinerant traders) later joined them.<sup>31</sup> With the establishment of the cattle market, there evolved other leadership titles such as the chairman, *Kara*, who controlled the affairs of the cattle market appointed by the *Sarkin Hausawa*, while *Sarkin Ganaika* oversaw the affairs of the cattle herders. The market was organized in an elaborate setting comprising dealers, brokers and retailers with an elaborate credit system in operation. The administration of the market was organized in a commercial arrangement, with the leadership of the market performing specific functions in the running of the market affairs. The methods of business transactions were the credit and payment systems. The credit method in the livestock business was solely based on mutual trust, which in some cases was abused.<sup>32</sup>

Hausa marketers bought cattle from the markets in Northern Nigeria and transported them to the markets in Benin and other parts of southern Nigeria. They are mostly young men between the ages of 35 and 50 years. They command a lot of respect and are very influential in the cattle market because of possession of the huge amount of capital outlay that is required in the cattle business.<sup>33</sup> The cattle dealers are well-travelled and known to pastoralists/local middlemen and transporters in the northern states of Nigeria. Sometimes, they operated through agents who represented and acted on their behalf in the southern states while they stayed in the North, arranging for the purchase and transportation of cattle to Benin. The dealers bought and transported between 70 to 145 cattle in each trip from Northern to Southern Nigeria. They made about 14 trips per year on an average of one trip per month.<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 2: Eyean Cattle Market, Eyean, Benin City**



**Source:** Pictures taken by the researchers during fieldwork May, 2021.

The most common use of the cattle is the production of beef. After breeding the cattle to maturity age, the herdsmen sold some to the people either for daily consumption or for special

occasions. The cattle were killed in the numerous abattoirs scattered across the nooks and crannies of Benin, from where the beef meat was then distributed all over the city and neighbouring communities.<sup>35</sup>

Another food product from cattle is *Suya*, which is a kind of meat that is roasted with pepper and other ingredients. It was mostly done and sold at night near restaurants, hotels, bus stops, motor parks and other public spaces. An allied product of *Suya* that the Hausa people also made is a special and delicious meat called *Kilichi* which is obtained from thinly sliced raw cattle meat. Although the making and selling of this special and delicious kind of meat in Benin started long ago, it is still in vogue. The process of preparing it is simple. After adding ingredients like pepper, maggi, and salt to the thinly sliced and raw beef, it is dried under the sun after which it becomes ready for consumption. It is as a result of this sun-drying process involved in preparing it that some people call it dried *suya*. They are sold by Hausa children at bus stops and motor parks and along the roads.<sup>36</sup>

Hausa migrants engaged in the cultivation and distribution of foodstuffs and vegetables, tomatoes, pepper, onions, carrots, watermelon, lettuce, cucumber, and green pepper, among others, in various markets in Benin. They played two main roles in the marketing of these products. Firstly, they served as the link and intermediaries between the farmers in the North and their customers in Benin. Secondly, the Hausa migrants also participated in the distribution of these products to retailers in Benin. Hausa businessmen in Benin also brought food items like millet, yam and beans in very large quantities from Northern Nigeria and transported them to Benin. On the other hand, they bought some food items such as palm oil, cassava flour, plantain and others to the north.<sup>37</sup>

Hausa people are also good fashion designers who are found in the Lagos Street area of Benin. Hausa tailors are good at sowing clothes of different styles and designs. The migrant Hausa tailors have made various Hausa dresses in varying styles for their customers in Benin. The most common of these dresses are *Babariga* and *Kaftan*, with beautiful embroideries. This explains why these Hausa embroiderers have been continuously and increasingly been patronized by a large number of tailors from far and near. For instance, Mallam Ali Usman, one of the renowned embroiders at Lagos Street in Benin stated that he was a trained embroiderer as well as a tailor, but due to the increased number of customers that patronized him daily for embroidery, he had to leave tailoring to concentrate on embroidery business.<sup>38</sup> The Hausa embroiders brought new designs and exchange of knowledge and ideas about tailoring and embroidery, which have greatly led to better improvement in the fashion industry in Benin. Mention must also be made of some itinerant Hausa tailors who do not have shops but move on the streets looking for customers, though their services entail more of mending and amendment.

Another vital economic contribution of the Hausa migrant community in Benin is in the area of road transportation. Some of the Hausa migrants who embarked on the seasonal migration often travelled during the dry season and went back to the North during the rainy season to engage in agricultural activities. The mobility of people and materials, especially in the present days become one of the greatest needs that have to be adequately satisfied by society and the economy. According to the Manager of Magorawa Motors, the quest to have a viable transport service for the Hausa migrants` community led to the establishment of the company.<sup>39</sup> The transport company started its operations in Benin in 2002 at Aduwawa, adjacent to Big Joe Motors. It focused mainly on the conveyance of Hausa migrants and non-Hausa and their trading goods and items from Benin to all parts of Northern Nigeria, especially Kano, Sokoto,

Kebbi, Kaduna, Zaria and so on.<sup>40</sup> The transport company has contributed greatly to the economic development of Benin and Edo State at large. It charged lower and more affordable prices when compared to other established indigenous-owned transport companies in Benin that transverse the North. The company is mostly patronized by migrants and non-migrant who reside in Aduwawa, Eyen and other neighbourhoods in Benin.

**Fig 3: Magorawa Transport Terminal, Aduwawa, Benin City**



### **Foreign Currency Exchange**

An important economic activity that has remained the exclusive preserve of the Hausa migrants in Benin is engagement and dominance in the foreign exchange business. The migrants are involved in the buying and selling of foreign currencies such as the Saudi Riyadh, the German-Dutch Mark, the Japanese Yen, the French Franc, the British Pound Sterling with the American dollars. Though most of the Hausa Forex exchange outfits are not legally backed, their owners and operators can sustain their businesses because they buy foreign currencies from sellers at higher rates than the formal commercial houses and sell to their buyers.

The competitive nature of the forex business made many of them solicit customers at Sakponba Road, Ring Road and Oba markets in Benin metropolis. They are visibly seen at the Sakponba market which is the main centre for the unofficial foreign exchange (forex) trade that operates outside the rules and regulations of the government's monetary exchange policy. The Hausa from Northern Nigeria and those from Niger Republic who engaged in currency exchange within the markets reside at the Hausa Quarters at Sakponba.<sup>41</sup> Others are found at Mission Road and New Benin soliciting customers such as tourists, businessmen and academics, traders and among others.

The presence of the Hausa forex exchange vendors has led to enhanced business transactions as many people could easily convert foreign currencies without the formalities of commercial banks. However, they operated on the "black market", which served as an easy and seamless means of conducting foreign exchange. It was observed that some of these Bureau-de-Change vendors and Hausa people also engaged in buying and selling Gold. They buy and sell both new and old Gold chains, bangles, earrings and so.



**Fig 4: Hausa Foreign Exchange Dealers at Ring Road, Benin City**

**Source:** Picture taken by the researchers during fieldwork in May, 2021.

Another area where the presence of Hausa migrants is visible in Benin is in the splitting and breaking of planks and woods. They are referred to as the Axe men. This is the first kind of job that new Hausa migrants do when they first arrived in Benin. In the period of study, it was common, therefore, to see them going around the town with axes, looking for who will engage them. These Hausa men rendered their services to owners of restaurants and food joints by helping them to split big planks into firewood for their daily cooking. Their services were also engaged by commercial firewood sellers in the Urora and Aduwawa areas of Benin. They also provided their services to housewives, especially before kerosene stoves and gas cookers became prominent or whenever there was an increase in the price of kerosene and gas. The Hausa axe men usually have more to do at the Sawmill, where they split planks into smaller portions. Apart from splitting the wood, they also helped in loading the wood into lorries at various sawmills within Benin city.

Hausa migrants also engage in the buying of scraps, metals, broken plastics, disused electronics and household items. Some of them also buy and sell iron rods, or fairly-used iron, which some of which were taken back to some of the northern states for remolding into other tools. The buying of used irons in Benin has helped in getting rid of the scrap iron rods that would have littered the environment. Data collected during the fieldwork revealed that virtually all the metal scavengers in Benin are Hausa migrants, and they are between the ages of 18 and 32 years, with major locations in Idahosa and Lagos Street areas.<sup>42</sup> There are three levels in the scrap metal scavenging business chain. They are primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary level which is usually engaged in more by youths, involves going to the field, dumpsites, landfills, streets, homes, and highways to search, acquire or purchase scrap metals.<sup>43</sup>

The group moves from place to place with wheel carts searching for scrap metals. They sort materials based on their types and forms. The dumpsite scavengers are still under the primary level of scavenging. The secondary level in the metal scavenging business chain involves those referred to as the middlemen. They partly supply the first group with finance to go in search of scrap metals. They have between 4-6 field primary scavengers working for them with a moderate size of the metal deposit. The tertiary level involves large-scale buying of metal scrap from secondary dealers. Those involved are usually merchants whose accredited middlemen supply them with scrap metals. It is instructive to note that these merchants do not buy directly from the primary scavengers. They buy only from accredited merchants.<sup>44</sup> The metal and

recycling activities of the migrants in Benin has helped to boost the economy of the city and reduce gas emission through the recycling method.

Many cattle dealers and businessmen used the profits that accrued to them to diversify into other lucrative ventures in the estate business, among others. Some of them bought lands and built houses mostly rented by their fellow Hausa and other people of northern extraction. Most of these houses are located at Eyean, which is the busiest place for Hausa activities in Benin.

### **Religion**

According to the chairman of Hausa communities in Eyean in Benin, Alhaji Muhammadu Sa'adu, the majority of the Hausa inhabitants of Eyean, if not all the Hausa in Benin, prefers to be Muslims.<sup>44</sup> He stated that of this number, only about 80 per cent practice the religion as it ought to be. Fridays are usually the busiest days when most of the migrants usually observe their *Jumat* prayers at the Central Mosque. Because of the large crowd of worshippers at Ring Road adjacent to Oba market and Lagos Street, the road cutting across Lagos Street and ring road is usually closed to traffic at certain hours every Friday.<sup>45</sup> Very significant in the religious organization of the Hausa people in Benin is the positions of Mallams (Islamic scholars). They lead the Muslim congregational prayers and are generally looked upon as the custodians of Islamic virtues. The leading mallams at any of the areas of Aduwawa, Eyean, First East Circular Road and Lagos Street led the observance of Islamic rituals in the areas. The Mallams are also consulted by their followers for guidance not only on issues bordering on religious dogma but also on matters related to economics and politics.<sup>46</sup> The most noticeable Islamic scholars are those that sit in front of the various mosque daily, reciting verses of the Quran to the admiration of the Hausa passersby who offer them arms in appreciation of their eloquence and the divine blessings associated with arms given in Islamic belief. Some of the *mallams* have private Islamic schools and sometimes use the mosques as Islamic centres (*Islamiyyah*) where children are taught how to recite the verses of the Quran and live a good life through Islamic teachings.<sup>47</sup>

Islamic religion has been used in recent time by some Islamic clerics and mallams make money and amass wealth. In the course of teaching the Qur'an to the *Al-majiris* the Imams manipulated the unrefined Islamic verdict, *fatwa* to solicit funds for the Muslim *Ulma*, community. This class of clerics or mallams is what the prominent Islamic scholar, Uthman Dan Fodio described as the "venal mallams", who mixed Islamic religion with traditional worship. Most mallams used the pulpit to campaign for certain politicians and solicit funds from them. Such acts have made them to lose their dignity and respect. They are described as and politician mallams who often times, do not share the money given to them by politicians with their followers.<sup>48</sup>

The Islamic charity organization, *Dawah* that is usually set up with the aim to further the spread Islam, promote Islamic education, morals, provide social amenities in the mosque and reach out to the vulnerable, less privileged, destitute.<sup>49</sup> At times, some Imams divert the funds generated from voluntary donations, pledges and contributions from the followers for personal use instead of using the funds for the aim the *Dawah* was established. The Imams have used religion as a means of making money and enriching themselves.

**Fig 5: Central Mosque, Eyan Cattle Market, Eyan, Benin City**



**Source:** Picture taken by the Researchers during fieldwork, January 2020.

In the social sphere, the Hausa community in Benin has good inter-group relations with the people of Benin in the pre-colonial period. This is evidenced in the creation of the institution of *Sarkin Hausawa* of Benin in 1899 when it became necessary to establish a settlement for Hausa migrants under a leader recognized by both the British Resident and the Oba of Benin.<sup>50</sup> The Oba also bestowed other titles such as *Sarkin Hausawa*, *Madaki*, *Sarkin Shanu* (Leader of Eyan cattle market) *Liman*, the chief Imam of Hausawa and *Sarkin Fulani*.<sup>51</sup>

The Hausa community in Benin has played a prominent role in enhancing good inter-group relations with the indigenous Benin people and other migrant ethnic groups in Benin. The socioeconomic and political intercourse among the different ethnic groups has led to fostering of peaceful and harmonious inter-ethnic co-existence and national integration. The intermingling of people from different ethnic groups through commercial and socio-cultural contacts has enhanced tolerance, mutual understanding and unity in Nigeria, despite incessant ethno-religious strife in some cities in Nigeria.

### **Challenges Faced by Hausa Migrants in Benin**

Despite the enormous economic opportunities that abound in Benin that the Hausa migrants have benefited from, they have been confronted with numerous challenges. One of the major challenges faced by the migrants in Benin is the inability of the migrants Hausa to contest for any electoral position. This challenge is hinged on the notion that the Hausa are not indigenes. While some of the Hausa migrants feel that they have nowhere to go other than live and die in Benin, the Binis feel that the Hausa already have their homes at the expense of the far North and cannot claim to be indigenes of Benin.<sup>52</sup>

Another major challenge of the Hausa migrants in Benin is the incessant crisis of farmers and herders in Benin and neighbouring communities. The Hausa migrants in Benin have been in recent times accused by the Bini people of involving in crimes ranging from the deliberate destruction of farm produce to kidnapping, rape and armed robbery. Some members of the Hausa communities have seen this as a big challenge and asserted that not all the Hausa residing in the city are criminals. They have argued that they are also victims of kidnapping and rape perpetrated mostly by *Bororo* (bush Fulani).<sup>53</sup> The *Bororo* Fulani are the ones involved in the criminal act of encroaching and destroying farm produce, not the Hausas. They are regarded as harsh and violent and often the perpetrators of various violent acts attributed to the Hausas. They usually do not stay in one place and, thus, cannot be held accountable.<sup>54</sup> The provision of basic social amenities, such as water and electricity supply as well as security, has been a

challenge for both the indigenes and the migrants. This has made it difficult for some of the migrants to establish more viable businesses that could have enhanced more on the economy of the host community.

### Conclusion

This paper has examined the history of the origin and settlement of the Hausa migrant community in Benin. The Hausa came in different periods from the pre-colonial through colonial to post-colonial periods establishing Hausa community in various locations in Benin. This paper has shown that the earliest migrants were hunters who came to Benin in the course of their hunting expedition. The second waves of migrants were traders and herdsmen who established permanent settlement at about 1906. Other migrants were traders, currency dealers, artisans and unskilled workers. It has been established that the Hausa migrant community has been living harmoniously with their Benin hosts, devoid of violent conflicts as obtainable in major cities in Nigeria. The two groups have engaged in economic, social and political interactions, which fostered and enhanced harmonious inter-group relations in Benin. This paper, therefore, challenges the contention that it is ethnic, cultural and religious diversities that are inherently the bane of Nigeria's disunity. Rather, it is more of the manipulative activities of the political class that have led to incessant violent conflicts in Nigeria.

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