HAUSA

History Explorer
Majority of the people who regard Kano as their only home are Muslims who speak Hausa language as their first language or mother tongue. The Kano identity has come a long way since the settlement of the Abagayawa in the area. The earliest settlers were Hausa speaking and all those who came later adopted it as their language.

The Hausa

The Afro-Asiatic phylum of African languages is divided into the Berber, Coptic, Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic and Chadic[1]. The most prominent Afro-asiatic family found in Nigeria is the Chadic, and "it includes Hausa, the most widely spoken language in West Africa, and perhaps as many as a hundred other languages spoken by much smaller populations". Chadic languages have been divided into nine sub-groups as follows: (1) (a) Hausa, Gwandara, (b) Bede-Ngizim, (c) (i) Warjawa (northern Bauchi) group, (ii) Barawa (southern Bauchi) group, (d) (i)Bolewa group, (ii) Angas group, (iii) Ron group; (2) Kotoko group; (3) Bata Margi; (4) (a) Musgoi group, (b) Marakam group; (5) Gidder; (6) Mandara - Gamergu; (7) Musgu; (8) Masa-Bana group; (9) Eastern Chadic, (a) Somrai group; (b) Gabere group, (c) Sokoro group, (d) Modgel, (e) Tuburi, (f) Mubi group[2].

From the above linguistic classification there are clear evidences of unity and diversity amongst Nigerian tribes and linguistic groups. Linguistically the Fulani, who speak Fulfulde, are closer to Niger-Congo languages than to Hausa and Kanuri. Whereas the Angas group are closer to the
Hausa than to the Birom, Tiv, Jukun and other "middle belt" languages. Likewise the Hausas are also closer linguistically to Angas than to the Fulani, because apart from the fact that both Angas and Hausa are members of the Chadic family they also belong to the same sub-family. The closer a language is to another in these classifications the greater the possibility of their common origin before divergence. The adoption of certain tendencies, which contain racist elements such as pula`aku by the Fulbe may be the result of external and migratory influences. Linguistically they are closer to their Niger-Congo brethren than to the Semites.

Hausa identity is closely linked with Islam. Mahdi Adamu made a brilliant attempt of defining Hausa culture and the Hausa person when he wrote thus:

The person should be fluent in the Hausa language, and in all his dealing with Hausa people should use it as first language. . . . the prospective assimilant should either be a Muslim or bear a Muslim name, at the very least he should use a name, which was distinctly Hausa. . . . He should dress in the type of garments which were usually associated with the Hausa people. . . .The person should have historical claim to Hausa ethnicity.[3]

Apart from Islamic identity the Hausa have distinctive clothes especially the babba riga (Gown) for males and zani (wrapper) for women. They are also very proud of the Sarauta (Kingship) and paraphernalia of which the Kano style is the most prestigious with the Sallah procession of horses called Durbar that was instituted in Kano by Sarki Muhammadu Rumfa. The Kano Durbar is the largest procession of colorful horses in the world.

The Hausa of Kano also have distinctive ceremonies of naming a newborn baby called suna, of wedding called biki and the funeral rites. Islam modified all of these but some people practice
certain customs that are not in conformity with the teachings of Islam. Some Western educated
elites have also adopted some Christian customs in their weddings for example the reception
after the solemnization of the marriage contract instead of the Walimah feast encouraged by the
Sunnah after consummation. The Hausa cuisine has also been transformed over time especially
by the importation of several North African dishes.

The Fulani

Fulani is a Hausa plural word with the singular Ba-Fillaci of the people who call themselves
Fulbe (singular Pulo) in their own language of Fulfulde. In French, they are called “Peuls or
Peulhs” while in Arabic they are known as Fellata with masculine singular Fellati and feminine
singular Fellatiyya[4]. Fulfulde belongs to the West Atlantic family of languages in the Niger-
Congo phylum of African languages.

The Fulani distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups by specific distinguished personal
virtues, which are collectively known as Pulaaku. There are several components of Pulaaku but
Catherine Vareecke has listed ten of them namely semteende (shyness, reserve), munyal
(patience, endurance), ngoru (bravery), marugo na’i (owning cattle), en’dam (kindness), ne’d’aku
(dignity), ardungal (leadership), daraja (honour or prestige obtained through position) and
ndottaku (honour acquired with age). And later when most of Fulbe became Muslims dina and
juldamku (Islam and Islamic piety) were included in Pulaaku[5]. The Hausas and Fulani who
cannot speak Fulfulde call the virtues of the Fulani, Fulatanci.

The Fulani scholars first came to Kano during the reign of Sarkin Kano Yakubu (1452–63). The
Kano Chronicle has reported that: "in Yakubu's time the Fulani came to Hausaland from Melle,
bringing with the books on divinity and ethymology”. The Hausa Mallams were more conversant with books on Law and Hadith (traditions of the Prophet peace and blessings of Allah are upon him). The exact time during which the Bororo came to Kasar Kano is hard to determine but it might have been earlier than the time of the arrival of the scholars. Before the jihad led Shehu Usman Dan Fodio there were many Fulani clans in Kasar Kano and most of their leaders were Islamic Scholars.

Prior to the 19th century the Fulbe or Fulani were scattered all over Northern Nigeria. Their lifestyle at that time was parallel to the present day Bororo. Economically they were nomadic cattle herders. Politically their leadership was egalitarian; their community was governed by the elders and in some few cases by the ardo'en (chiefs). They were socially based on patri-clans which were genealogically wives’ giving units. They were also racially conscious thus they encouraged group endogamy (teegal bandiriga) in which marriage to closest relative is most desirable[6].

There is an apparent melting of Fulani and Hausa identity in most parts of northern Nigeria including Kano were most of the descendants of the followers of Shehu Usman Danfodio cannot speak Fulfulde the language of their ancestors. Members of the traditional ruling classes still identity themselves as Fulani even though they cannot speak the language as observed below:

Ethnic identity is not necessarily the same thing as the language one speaks. Fulani families, which speak Hausa, but not Fulfulde, still retain a strong sense of Fulani identity and some Kanuri, such as the “Lafia Beriberi”, speak only Hausa. Apart from Adamawa and Gombe even the Emirs, all of unexceptionable Fulani stock, do not know Fulfulde today. In Nupe, Mohamedu, who died in 1915, was the last Etsu to speak Fulfulde, and it was already so exceptional that he was called the Etsu with tongues[7].
[1] This paragraph and the next paragraphs were adopted from Ado-Kurawa 2000


[5] Ibid pp. 93-106

