



Map 2: Major ethnic groups in Nigeria.

ample. Of course, for centuries Islam remained a court religion which had little influence on the lives of the peasant population. Only when Usman dan Fodio, a Fulani preacher, called for a Holy War against the unbelievers did Islam spread across vast parts of northern Nigeria. His jihad is still regarded by today's Sharia campaigners as a model of religious renewal. But the fight against unbelievers was coupled with a claim to ethnic domination. The Fulani, to whom Usman dan Fodio belonged, had pushed forward mainly as pastoralist nomads into the territory of the Hausa. A minority of them took up residence in the capitals of the Hausa kings where, thanks to their Islamic education, they were able to rise to important positions, either as advisors to the kings or as their secretaries and tax collectors (Hogben 1967: 53; Lewis 1980: 30 f.). Other Fulani scholars, however, preferred to stay aloof from the residences of the kings and formed their own rural settlements. From these religious enclaves, the rebellion against the "godless" rulers started.

Calling for divine justice, Usman dan Fodio turned against the corruption and tyranny of the ruling class: "Whomsoever they wish to kill or exile or violate his honour or devour his wealth they do so in pursuit of their lusts" (Isichei 1984: 203; Last 1967: lxviii-lxx). Within five years the Hausa kings had been toppled, but the feudal order remained. The "royal" families of the Fulani simply

put themselves in place of the old aristocracy. Their hegemony might have eroded quickly, yet they managed to overcome internal dissent by directing the aggression towards "unbelievers" in neighbouring territories. The cavalry of the Fulani and their Hausa allies did not stop at the borders of the old kingdoms but pushed on in an easterly direction towards Bauchi (the "land of the slaves") and southwards to the Nupe and Yoruba. During the course of the nineteenth century, in all these conquered regions, emirates were founded which were dependent on the Sultan in Sokoto.

The only possibility of uniting the subjugated peoples and of keeping the disparate empire together lay in Islam. In order to gain legitimacy, the emirs had to establish a theocratic rule which de-emphasised ethnic loyalties (see Map. 2). By setting themselves up as custodians of the true religion, they were especially concerned with imposing the outer manifestations of their faith such as the observation of Ramadan, Friday prayers, and other rites which spread a uniform culture. So, wherever they set up a permanent state authority, they urged the conquered peoples – or at least their leaders – to embrace Islam. But conversion did not imply that the new converts were treated as equals. Being a Muslim meant recognising the religious and political authority of the emir and accepting one's place within the social hierarchy. Thus Islam established a lasting structure of subjugation which