

# Origin and Meaning of Maiduguri

## Introduction:

Geographically Maiduguri is location @ Coordinates: 11°50'N 13°09'E. It occupies an area of 50,778 square kilometers. It remains center of trade, learning, culture, Durbar and home of tourism and history.

Fig.1: A map of Africa indicating the location of Maiduguri (A) and the Maiduguri Shehus Palace (B):

A.



B.



The name Maiduguri is from the name Maiduwuri, the name Maiduwuri itself is referring to the present day Old Maiduguri in Jere local government Area of Borno state in Nigeria.

The name Maiduguri is coined from the combination of two Kanuri language words namely “Mai” and “Duwuri”. Mai is a word in Kanuri referring to a King or a leader and Duwuri is from the word Duwu which means a thousand; hence Duwuri is referring to the plural of a thousand which is thousands, ordinarily it’s like saying something is in the category of thousands (a thousand in ancient time is the peak of counting because counting in millions was not known then). So literally Maiduguri (Mai+Duwuri) means “Thousand Kings” thus Maiduguri is a land of the “Thousand-Kings”.

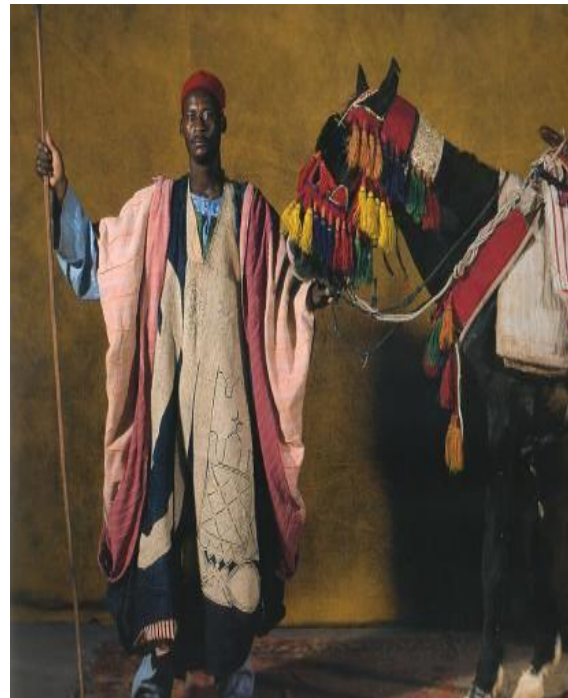
**Why Maiduguri is called the Land of the Thousand Kings:** During the colonial and pre-colonial eras the African societies and even the entire global economy is not as rich as it is today due to the effects of industrial revolution, development in transportation, agriculture, improvement in food preservation techniques as well as accelerated level in development of science and technology and stability in global governance/politics in general. In the ancient era of Africa (Pre-colonial Africa) ordinary citizens apart from the King /ruler and his children or siblings all other people in a kingdom hardly owns more than One Gown cloth (a set of complete ceremonial clothing) in the sub-Saharan African region including the Hausa lands/Danfodio caliphate and the great Songhai empires amongst others. This Gown is known locally as the Kuluwu in the Kanuri language and Babban riga or Malum-Malum in the Hausa language, this is because are expensive to be used as daily wears; thus making people using them only used them on special ceremonies and festive seasons like marriage, sallah festive, turbaning ceremonies, Quranic school graduations and other special occasions. But the royal families who were then the richest families in almost all the kingdoms of this African ancient time wears them on regular basis.

Fig.2: A photo of a typical Kanuri Kuluwu/Babban Riga Gown (A) and a Kanuri Man dressed in Kanuri/Maiduguri Gown(B):

A.



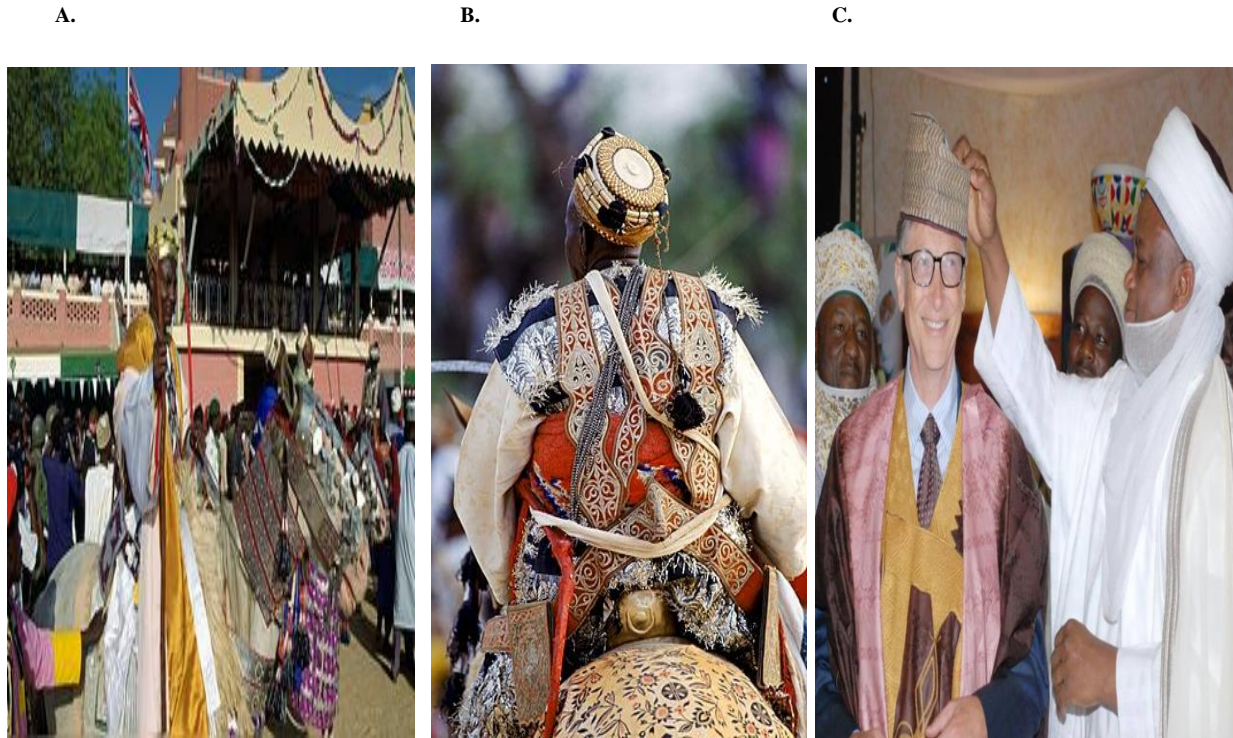
B.



However contrary to this practices in the neighboring kingdoms to the Kanuri's Kanem-Borno Empire here in Maiduguri (Old Maiduguri) which was then a town with booming economy and having Islamic scholars as its leaders (the Shehu's/Sheikh) who pays less attentions on their subjects on issues of who wears what made almost all the indigenes of Maiduguri then to be wearing the traditional Gowns for their daily activities and as daily wears. This aspect of the Kanuri society culture created a situation that looks very colorful in one hand and keeps making visitors visiting Maiduguri for the first time to get surprise and somehow confuse seeing

everybody in the city dressing like a King. Therefore the visitors generally feel that they are in a Land of a thousand Kings, Simply because there are thousands of people with everybody looking like a King. So this is the reason why old Maiduguri is called Maiduguri in the first place.

**Fig.3: Photos of Kanuri Horses and Horse riders (A & B) and a photo of Mr. Bill Gate in a traditional Kuluwu gown during his visit to Nigeria :**



To prove this claim of ordinary Maiduguri citizen of wearing ceremonial clothing materials as regular wears; just have a look at the Maiduguri society /people of today where its inhabitants are still wearing one of the most expensive traditional clothing /dresses in the country when compared to their neighboring counterparts or states. Just imagine how an ordinary man who is not a big time traditional title holder, business man, governor, minister ,an ambassador or even known publically to his immediate society wearing a Zanna Kanuri traditional cap along costing approximately N 50,000 (fifty thousand naira) equivalent to \$ 350 Dollars (USD) , Swiss branded Filtex materials and others on a normal day.

This aspect of the Maiduguri culture is now getting more admired all over the sub-Saharan African region as such that made in Maiduguri Caps and dresses are now considered to be best within African clothing and won by many important personalities.

**Fig.4: A photo of a Zanna Cap (A) and two Nigerian popular leaders (Muhammadu Buhari & Ibrahim Babangida both wearing the Zanna caps (B):**

A.



B.



It is also important to note that the present day Maiduguri is also called Yerwa because that was its original name before the name Maiduguri.

**Why Maiduguri is called Yerwa?** The name Yerwa was originally derived from the Kanuri word “HERWA” or "Herrah "which means a promising or a blessed Land. Experts said it is called Herwa because of its close proximity to the seasonal flowing Ngadda River that still flows through it. This seasonal Ngadda river annually disappears or empties its water into the Firki swamps in the areas around the Lake Chad. When considering the blessings associated with river flowing through a desert or semi-desert environment where water is considered to be a highly prestige resource it is very logical acknowledging the presence of such nearby river or rivers and in this case Maiduguri blessings is associated to a nearby river and then it was called Herra or Yerwa. It is common in Africa to name places after rivers for example the name of Yobe state was derived from the river Yobe, the name of Kaduna was derive from the river Kaduna same as the name Nigeria and Niger republics as a whole were both derived from the name of the river Niger that flows through them.

In this regard is good to remember that most of the Kanem Borno capitals like the cities of Ngazargamu, Kukawa, Monguno and others were either desert or semi desert cities , so water has a special prestige in the kingdom in fact it is even a determining factor in creating new settlements (towns & villages) and the entire Kanem-Bornu Empire itself was shaped historically by the Lake Chad and its associated resources.

**Maiduguri** is still called **Yerwa** by its locals.

Maiduguri is the present day capital and the largest city of Borno State and the Fourth largest city in Nigeria. Maiduguri was founded in the year 1907 as a military outpost by the British and has since grown rapidly in to millions in terms of its population.

### **A brief history:**

Maiduguri consists of two cities: Yerwa to the West and Old Maiduwuri to the east. Old Maiduguri was selected by the British as their military headquarters while Yerwa was selected at approximately the same time during the reign of Shehu Abubakar Garbai of Borno to replace Kukawa as the new traditional capital of the Kanuri people.

Maiduguri is estimated to have a population of 2,607,497 as at 2014 and presently 3.7 Million due to the recent past unrest, a factor that pushed the rural population to Maiduguri. Its residents are mostly Muslims and the main tribe of Maiduguri is the Kanuri others are the Shuwa Arabs, Hausa, Bura, Marghi, and Fulani ethnic groups.

It serves as the capital of Borno states and it once served as the capital of the entire North-Eastern region of Nigeria (Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa, Taraba and Gombe states)

### **Climate:**

The average temperature in Maiduguri is 25.8 °C. The highest record temperature was 47 °C (117 °F) on 28 May 1983, while the lowest record temperature was 5 °C (41 °F) on 26 December 1979.

The average annual rainfall is **613 mm**.

### **Socio Cultural Nature of Maiduguri:**

The indigents of Maiduguri are 100% Muslims though as a cosmopolitan city Maiduguri also has in it followers of many other faiths.

Maiduguri is the Sub-Saharan city of Africa with the largest number of Mosques. As at 2017 it has well over 11,000 Mosques in it with an average of 4 Mosques per street in Maiduguri central.

Maiduguri has many social facilities for both the indigents and tourists some of which are as listed below:

1. ***Maiduguri Ramat square***: This is a large Open space area within the CBD of Maiduguri city developed to host Durbar, Horse racings, Eid Prayers and other unforeseen future events needing large Open space area. On normal days it also serves as a Football ground for many Footballing clubs in Maiduguri.

2. *The Open Air Theater*: This is a Theater constructed to hold cultural events both public and private. In 1988 this theater hosted the international renowned Federlos Circus from Switzerland.
3. *Stadium and Sport Complexes*: Maiduguri has an Olympic size stadium under construction and it also has the El-Kanemi Warriors Sport center for playing Football, Handball, Basketball etc.
4. *Hotels and accommodations*: Maiduguri has many hotels ranging from 5 stars down to 2 stars and other unrated hostels as well for visitors and sometimes for pilgrims departing through Maiduguri international airport for hajj mostly coming from other parts of the country and the neighbouring countries.
5. *Sanda Kyarimi Park*: Maiduguri Zoo is known as the Sanda Kyarimi Park. It has collections of many different animals including the Big-Five apart from Giraffe and it also has in it a museum containing some historical artifacts of the Kanem-bornu Empire.
6. *The Ngadda River*: The Ngadda River bisects Maiduguri into two equal parts. The locals call it “Kumodu Gwangeye” it serves as an attraction to Maiduguri youths and children .Many swimming beginners starts here. Most people in Maiduguri take their first Canoe ride or Canoe paddling in this seasonal flowing river.

### **The Shehu palace:**





The Shehu Palace was built in 1907 by the British. The original settlers who were relocated to build the Shehu’s Palace on its spot were the descendants of the former Mais (Kings) of the Borno Empire before the coming of the Elkanemi dynasty. The palace was built in the year 1809 , however the construction work of the Palace began in the early 1900’s immediately after the defeat of Rabih az-Zubayr in the year 1900.

Though the palace was built by the British and has resemblance to a British super house with its Chimneys, but yet it also has more Kanuri style elements in it in terms of its central location and neighborhood arrangement patterns around it; with traditionally bounded by the courtier's residences including the; Waziriri, Shettimari, Abbari, Limanti, Kalari, Talbari, Yerimari, Kaigamari Moramti and Galtimari among others with the Shehuri (the Shehu’s Palace) standing at the center .

**Fig.5: A picture of the Shehu's Palace in Maiduguri:**



### **Economy:**

Maiduguri has an ultra-modern market known as the “Monday market” that has a spectacular satellite or Umbrella like image view from the above. Maiduguri has museum with great historical collections and the city is served by the Maiduguri International Airport. The city has one of the best layouts in Nigeria. It is connected by road to the republics of Cameroon , Chad  and Niger , from Maiduguri goods and services are transported to as far as the republic of Sudan  and Bangui in the Central African Republic. There are existing historical records of trade between Maiduguri and North African nations of Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Lebanon.

A survey of property markets in Nigeria (2009) positioned Maiduguri as the third most expensive for buying and renting in the country next to Abuja and Lagos. Maiduguri is the principal trading hub for the northeastern Nigeria. Its economy is largely based on services and trade with a small share of manufacturing.

Maiduguri manufactures locally and traditionally the best Horse Saddles known as “S3RD3” or “SIRTTI” to that end there is a street in Maiduguri named after the making of the Horses Saddles referred to as S3RD3MARI or SIRTIMARI (within Fezzan ward of Maiduguri) meaning where the local Horse Saddles are made. Horse Saddles and horse dresses /decoration from Maiduguri are considered to be one of the best in the in the World.

**Fig.6: Horses and horsemen decorated with a made in Maiduguri Silver wears, clothing and Saddles during durbar:**



The city lies at the end of a railway line in Nigeria connecting the cities of Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kafanchan, Kuru, Bauchi, and finally Maiduguri. This rail lines were originally intended by the British to convey Groundnuts (Peanuts) as well as Hides and Skin to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean in Southern Nigeria for upward transportation to Europe. Even though the Borno state town of Nguru in the present day Yobe state had its rail system functioning as far back as in the 1930s, but Maiduguri got its own rail lines in the 1960s. According to some Maiduguri based historians this was due to the fact that the elders of the ancient Maiduguri deliberately prevented the rail lines from reaching Maiduguri through prayers. People here are good in planning about events and developments. The elders of Maiduguri foresaw associated problems coming with the development of the rail lines. According to some historians they said that it was the efforts of the elders that prevented the rail lines from reaching the city of Maiduguri in the 1930s, 1940s and the 1950s until the 1960s , however later when the original elders where mostly no more the rail lines finally reached Maiduguri in 1963. However today we can now say with confidence that their guess is now true as the unrest that started on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2009 that seriously affected the city actually started from the “Railway compound” of Maiduguri “.



**Fig.7: The Railway Terminus of Maiduguri:**



Maiduguri is blessed with various communities which offers differing expertise and professions helping in economically, educationally and socially building in developing the city since inception ; that’s why some places (wards, streets or boulevards ) are still named and called after the original profession that exist or the most popular profession still existing within them for example Arinmari – dyers , Mundulmarai (Hyde and Skin business), Mundulmari – tanners, Kaalmari – blacksmiths,S3rtemari (Sirttimari)-Horse saddle makers , Kumozomari -calabash decorators and Aritamari-Trumpeters .

### **Education:**

Maiduguri is known to be a center of Islamic and Quran studies for the past 100 years since its founding. In fact it is very impossible for great Islamic scholars that remain popular in the Islamic history of Sub-Saharan African region including Sokoto, Gwandu, Kano, Zaria, Katsina, Hadejia and many others that have never come and acquire Islamic knowledge and the Quran in Maiduguri . Some neighboring students and Scholars from other part of Africa still feels that their studies is somehow incomplete without coming to study in Maiduguri during the course of their studies.

So it is not a surprise that Maiduguri based Scholars like late Sheikh El-Miskin,Sheikh AbulFathi,Sheikh Abba Aji, Sayinna Alhaji Bashir, Imam Upchama (Ba Liman),Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh,Sheikh Sherriff Tijjani and Mallam Usman Bida still remained popular across Nigeria,Niger,Chad, Cameroon and within Africa and parts of the Middle East and “Magerib” (Morocco/Algeria). In fact this is one of the reasons that made one late Sheikh Mahmud Ja'afar from the city of Kano in Nigeria and a graduate of the University of Madina Saudi Arabia , keep acknowledging that during his life time he was greatly inspired by the teachings of Sheikh Abba Aji which was one of the reasons he read to become an Islamic scholar and at the same time saying that after visiting Sheikh El-Miskin's library in El-Miskin house Maiduguri he acknowledged that he has never seen a library that has so much unique collections of books with

some of its books not even available in the market or in the other libraries that he has known ; in fact he concluded by saying that some of the books looks new to him.

**Fig.8: Pictures of some of the most popular religious scholars of Maiduguri including Sheiks Elmiskin (A), Abba-Aji (B) and Abulfathi(C):**

A.



B.



C.



In terms of modern education Maiduguri has one of the best-equipped university and hospitals in Nigeria. The University of Maiduguri attracts foreign students from neighboring countries especially Cameroon, Chad, Sudan and Niger Republics as well as some commonwealth students from Malaysia, Kenya, Ghana, Belize, Jamaica and Gambia among others. The College of medical sciences is among the top 5 best medical schools in Nigeria. Other higher institutions include Ramat polytechnic, Elkanemi college of Islamic Theology, Muhammad Goni college of Arabic and Islamic studies, the Lake Chad Research Institute, College of agriculture and College of education among others.

**Fig.9: A photo of some of the Most Recognized Educational Institutions of Maiduguri:**



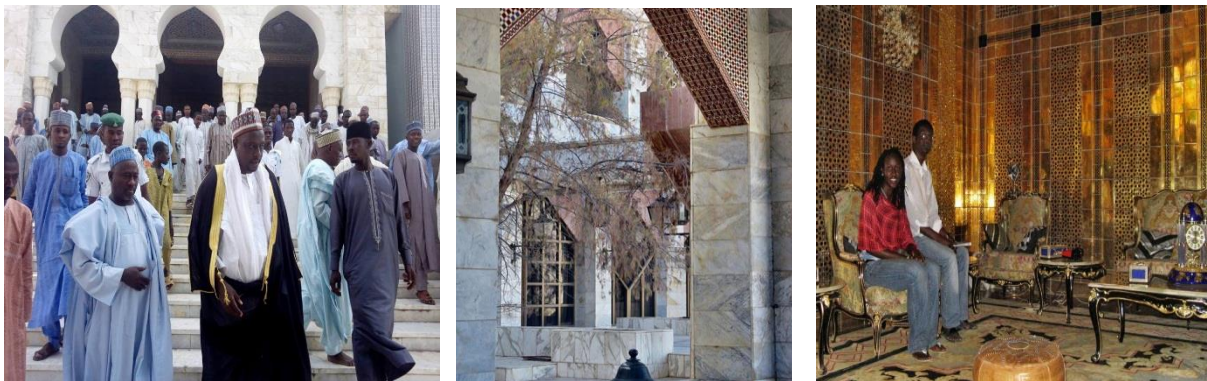
Attractions of Maiduguri: Kyarimi Park, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri Monday Market, Deribe Mosque, Deribe Palace, the Maiduguri Museum, Shehu's Palace, Imam Malik Islamic Center, Indimi Mosque, Maiduguri International Airport, Maiduguri Sports Center, Ramat square, Lake Chad hotel, University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital and the Maiduguri International Hotel.

**Fig.10: A photo of University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital, Indimi Mosque and Maiduguri International Hotel:**



The Deribe Palace which is considered as the most expensive House in Africa and one of the best in the World is in Maiduguri. Remember this house hosted King Carlos of Spain, Prince Charles and Lady Diana of the United Kingdom as well as the American President.

**Fig.11: A photo of different parts of the Deribe Palace & Deribe Mosque in Maiduguri:**



Maiduguri serves as a home and remains a home to many great business men, scholars, military generals, academicians, technocrats and diplomats; Some of the popular names under this category are Alhaji Mai Deribe, Sheikh Elmiskin, Babagana Kingibe, Sir Kashim Ibrahim, Waziri Ibrahim, Sheikh Aabba Aji, Professor M.M. Daura (former VC), Professor-Emeritus, Umaru Shehu, Shehu Mustafa Elkanemi, Alhaji Bukar Mandara, Alhaji Bukar Bolori, General Abba Kyari, General Mamman Shuwa, Major General Yusuf Brutai, Kashim Ibrahim Imam, Mala Kachalah, Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh, Mukaddam Bukhari, Alhaji Zanna Deribe, Muhammad Indimi, Alhaji Zanna Dipcharima, Imam Ibrahim Ahmed (The chief imam of Borno), Dr. Shetima Ali Monguno, and Babagna Monguno among many other great personalities not mentioned here that are either residence or indigenes of the city.

### **Faces of some Maiduguri people:**



### **MAIDUGURI COLLECRTIONS:**

The Maiduguri museum, the Maiduguri main Islamic library, the Maiduguri University libraries, private libraries like that of Sheikh Elmiskin, Chief Imam Ibrahim Ahmed, Sheikh Abulfathi, Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh as well as the Deribe collections in Maiduguri altogether hold a lot of unique historical artifacts, thousand years old books, letters as well as customised collections of items and objects that remain rare or in very limited editions that among the few places on Earth to reach such items or objects includes Maiduguri. This makes Maiduguri a unique city and one of the World's capital of artifacts, special customised and unique collections.

### **Conclusion:**

Though Maiduguri is a young city with most part just 100 years old, but its strategic location, climate, history, nature and quality of its inhabitants made it popular to rank with cities of thousand years history. Its inhabitants are historically mostly experts and established professionals in diversity cutting across craft making, education, international trading and its leaders are wise gentlemen that made all aspects work together in developing the city to an extent that today Maiduguri serves as not only the capital of Borno state, but has the economic and social powers that extend to many regions of Africa. An economic earthquake of Maiduguri has the ability of sending shockwaves within the entire West and Central African regions.

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