

# Complex + Homogeneity among Urbanized UPGs

## A Challenge and an Opportunity

By **CHRIS CLAYMAN**, from a paper presented at the 2022 Ralph Winter Lectureship.

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From birth, Kadijata breached cultural norms in her country. Her mother, a Fulbe Futa, a subset of the larger Fulani people cluster, married one of the “forest peoples” of Guinea, West Africa. The Fulbe Futa people looked down on the forest people, and her mother’s family begrudged her divergence from endogamy. Shortly after Kadijata was born in Guinea’s forest region, her family moved to Conakry, the country’s capital.

In the city, Kadijata’s Fulbe Futa side quickly predominated. Kadijata’s mother spoke to her in Pular, the Fulbe Futa language, and Fulani family members from across the country frequented her home. In contrast, to “set Kadijata up for success,” her father spoke to her only in French. Month-long summer vacations were spent in the Futa Jalon (the Fulani region) instead of the forest. At the age of eight, Kadijata’s father moved to Eastern Europe for work. From that point on, she saw her father only when he returned on vacations. The residential and linguistic choices of Kadijata’s family meant her father’s ethnic identity effectively had no influence on his daughter. As far back as Kadijata can remember, she was always a Fulbe Futa.

While Kadijata spoke Pular and French at home and school, she also learned the *lingua franca* of Conakry, called Susu after the dominant ethnic group in the city, as well as Maninka to converse with her friends from that ethnic group. Because her family were devout Muslims, she also attended an Islamic school on weekends to learn and memorize the Qur’an in Arabic.

Shortly after her dad moved to Eastern Europe, Kadijata’s mom spent years with her husband in Europe or her brother in East Africa, leaving various aunts and cousins to take care of Kadijata and her siblings in Conakry. The international work and travel of her extended family piqued Kadijata’s global interests. As a teenager, Kadijata became the second-best junior table tennis player in her country, and she traveled to China as a Junior Olympian. There, she befriended competitors from Sri Lanka and Ethiopia, and continued corresponding with them for years.

At the age of 21, Kadijata received a scholarship to study telecommunications in Eastern Europe. She learned the language quickly and finished the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree in five years. Kadijata then moved to Paris to pursue a master’s degree and doctorate. Her plans were curtailed, however, when a relationship she formed with a fellow international student from Africa led to pregnancy. Kadijata’s conservative Islamic family felt shame over the ordeal, and she felt abandoned through their lack of support. Furthermore, her relationship with the baby’s father ended, leaving her as the sole provider for her baby daughter. She almost managed to complete her master’s degree, but the mounting pressure of single motherhood caused her to leave school and pursue a telecommunications career.

Kadijata earned a nice salary in Paris. She was promoted quickly through the company, frequently traveled France on business trips, and purchased a condo in southeast Paris. Her best friends were Caucasian

French co-workers and neighbors, Senegalese families in her neighborhood, and Algerian, Caribbean, and Asian colleagues. But none of those friends were Fulani. Kadijata was hurt by her people for the way they treated her after becoming pregnant. She threw herself into her work and quickly adopted a French lifestyle. When asked what people she belonged to during that time, Kadijata said, “I was French. To some people, I would identify as African or Guinean, but I was French.” Noticeably absent was an identification with the Fulbe Futa, from whom she had steadily distanced.

One of Kadijata’s co-workers was a Cambodian immigrant who had married a Muslim-background Christian pastor from Mali. Knowing about the West African Muslim culture, the co-worker was burdened to pray for Kadijata and share Jesus with her. At an opportune time, she gave Kadijata a recorded testimony in French of a West African imam who had turned to Christ. Kadijata knew a lot about the Qur’an, but she was unfamiliar with verses the former imam cited about Jesus’ followers being superior to those who reject faith to the day of resurrection (Al-Imran 3:55) or those having doubts being encouraged to ask Christians (i.e., those who have been reading the “before books,” Yunus 10:94). From her Islamic religious worldview, these verses gave her confidence to attend church and read the Bible. Soon after, she decided to follow Christ and was baptized.

Kadijata continued to be discipled in multi-ethnic French churches. For the next 13 years, she grew in faith, became a woman of prayer, and shared Jesus with others. Kadijata even wrote long notes to her family shortly before her baptism explaining why she followed Jesus. While her decision ostracized her even more from her family, several of her family members had moved to France and Italy, and she was able to continue relationship with some individuals. Her father, an influential man, became a follower of Christ as well, partly due to Kadijata’s witness. He then went on to share Jesus with many people back in Guinea; one of Kadijata’s sisters even came to Christ and is now married to a pastor.

Thirteen years after becoming a Christian, God called Kadijata to be a missionary in New York City. Through a variety of divine appointments, including an offer of free housing in Manhattan from a local church connection, Kadijata moved to New York and began learning English. One day, she observed a rally

of Hispanic and African Americans beleaguered by the drug and crime epidemic in their communities.

Moved by their cries, Kadijata began ministering among the homeless and drug addicts. She fed them, pointed them to social centers for counseling, shared the gospel, prayed for them, and started Bible studies. Meanwhile, Kadijata frequently passed by dozens of West African Muslim women in hair-braiding shops, the subway, and on the streets. A missionary family also formed a relationship with Kadijata. They were spreading a vision of reaching West African Muslims throughout the city. One day on the way to church, Kadijata met a Fulani cab driver who knew her family and revealed that dozens of her extended family members were in the city. Being estranged from many members of the family, Kadijata had no idea!

All these events set in motion God’s call for Kadijata to share Jesus with the Fulbe Futa and other West African Muslim women. As she began meeting the Fulbe Futa community, she realized that many women only spoke Pular. Even though Kadijata’s first language was Pular, she struggled talking about Jesus, sharing the Bible, or praying in her language. She was more comfortable talking about her faith in French and English. To remedy the cultural disconnect, Kadijata began reading and listening to the Bible, praying, and sharing Jesus in her mother tongue, which connected to her heart in fresh ways.

Kadijata had rarely heard of Christians from her people group, but she began discovering hundreds who came to faith in Christ in Africa and Europe. Through joining their social media groups, praying with them, and aiding their evangelism campaigns, she effectively joined a global Fulbe Futa Christian community. Kadijata’s family observed three decades of her life-transforming faith journey, and many have opened fellowship with her again.

Because of Kadijata’s strong character, Muslim family members call on her to give wisdom and counsel to life’s varied complications. Kadijata has come full circle. She desires nothing more than glorifying Christ with her life and being used to introduce her Fulani people to his kingdom. She’s a member of God’s family, and she’s also Fulbe Futa—with a French accent. No doubt, her story illuminates several observations that are applicable to other hybridized members of urban unreached people groups. 