significantly from the Spanish census of 1974 (86,000 against 73,000), vindicating in this regard the POLISARIO position. While Jensen’s treatment of the Identification Commission’s work is of great value, especially because he studied it from the inside, it makes for sometimes tedious reading. Also, Jensen narrates in detail the approaches taken by U.N. secretaries general.

The author clearly shows that the fundamental flaw in the whole process was the attempt by the great powers and U.N. officials to turn something that was profoundly political into a matter of technical resolution. This overlooked the nature of the interests at stake. POLISARIO could not compromise on its demand of formal sovereignty and settle for autonomy proposals, as that would not provide adequate protection against Moroccan encroachment. The tendency of the international community to transform the conflict into a technical issue was, in the end, tied to the unwillingness of the great powers to push the belligerents toward a settlement and use sticks as well as carrots to effect a deal. Thus, the Security Council treated the conflict as one in which the United Nations was allowed powers only under chapter VI of the U.N. charter—i.e., no enforcement powers. This, in turn, was linked to the interests of the great powers (notably France and the United States), which the author could have given more central treatment in the book as a determinant of U.N. success and failure. Much U.N. involvement in the conflict reads as a smokescreen for political indifference. The great powers, even the United States, which expended much energy in negotiations during the 1990s, stand condemned for acquiescing in Morocco’s expansionism and letting the Sahrawis down. As Jensen points out, the longer the conflict continues, the more irreversible the demographic shift toward which Morocco has worked. This is tantamount to legitimating a fait accompli. The utility of this book lies in the conciseness of its presentation of almost twenty years of fruitless negotiations, a presentation enhanced by useful appendices and an index.

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Nast, Heidi J. 2005. CONCUBINES AND POWER: FIVE HUNDRED YEARS IN A NORTHERN NIGERIAN PALACE. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 244 pp. $68.95 (cloth); $22.95 (paper).

Geographer Heidi Nast has written a refreshing study of the history of the Kano Palace—a study that challenges much received wisdom about the character of power in the Hausa kingdoms. Historical work on the Hausa-speaking region has long suffered from myopia regarding how gender, reproduction, and the control of grain influenced the history of state-building and the transformation of power over time. An overemphasis upon the period from the nineteenth-century jihad of Usman ‘dan Fodio to the present has colored the interpretation of the available sources. Politics has often been
treated as a male enterprise, and where women have been treated within that period, the work has had a celebratory quality, emphasizing the roles of exceptional women among the family of jihadist Usman ‘dan Fodio. To this overworked terrain, Nast brings a welcome feminist sensibility and an innovative sociospatial analytical approach, which invited her to reflect upon the history of Kano palace occupants who were not from among the elite: the concubines and the eunuchs. She has had the courage to push familiar and not-so-familiar sources to shed light on the rise of the Kano kingdom before the jihad and to trace the sociopolitical landscape of the palace over five hundred years. The result is a book that is thought-provoking, challenging, and at times exhilarating.

Nast argues that large-scale state concubinage enabled the elaboration of a slave-based administrative hierarchy that linked the palace to the kingdom’s agrarian base. Concubines literally and figuratively embodied links to the fertility and productive capacity without which the kingdom could not thrive. At a bureaucratic level, they were nodes in a network through which the palace was provisioned with food and the king’s capacity to provide for others was made visible. In productive terms, concubines brought different kinds of knowledge to the palace: knowledge about the social structures from which they came, knowledge about the production and distribution of grain [the kingdom’s primary source of wealth], and knowledge about techniques of dyeing, weaving, animal-raising [secondary sources of enrichment]. Their most important function was reproductive: they produced freeborn offspring for the king, generating an expansive pool of children whose marriages could be used to generate political alliances. Through such alliances, slave lineages could become inextricably bound to royal households, ensuring that slave households would have an abiding interest in sustaining the patronage patterns created through the system of royal concubinage.

Taking a broad comparative frame to contextualize her material, Nast makes it clear that reading state formation exclusively through the lens of the spread of Islam is inadequate. Thus, while she offers numerous comparisons with Funj, she notes consistently interesting parallels with the kingdoms of Dahomey and Buganda, and she goes to great lengths to seek confirmatory data from other Hausa kingdoms. The book strikes an interesting balance, noting the centrality of Islamically derived institutions [such as the inheritance of free status from the father] and exposing traces of un-Islamic practices in the architecture of the Kano palace well after the jihad. The palace was at once a central marker of the Islamicness of the kingdom and a site in which powers derived from concubines were exercised to the benefit of the kingdom.

The book takes the dictum “follow the money” and recasts it literally to follow the pathways of the wealth generated by grain. By attending to the pathways linking the countryside to the palace, the palace to the market, and the unthreshed grain to the cooked and redistributed grain, Nast convincingly argues that concubines were at the heart of the system of taxation and distribution. Central offices existed for them in markets and grain collection
sites. As modes of taxation and wealth shifted, they gradually lost centrality within the grain-distribution system and cloth-production network. This book tallies up their losses of power after the jihad with a materiality and specificity that brings those losses home.

This is an engaging and well-written book, which will revolutionize the study of the state in Africa. It has methodological implications that are likely to be wide-ranging. Nast draws upon an impressive array of approaches and sources: landscape mapping, photographic analysis, interviews, archival sources, and the linguistic analysis of place-names. By using them in conjunction with one another, she succeeds in producing a compelling mosaic assemblage of evidence; however, to the plodding, earthbound historian, some of her more speculative reconstructions may appear to require feats of trapeze artistry, linking fragments of evidence across gaps in time and space. Like a master artist, she somehow makes the leap work: her reflections are always exciting and generally plausible, and to her credit where the evidence is thin, she admits that her thinking is speculative. To help the nonspecialist understand better how she “reads” the texts available to her—the topography of the palace today, the aerial photographs, the toponyms—and how she deploys ancillary evidence and comparative reasoning to fill in the gaps, the book might have benefited from a lengthier exposition of the methods it borrows from geography. Nevertheless, the book is an intriguing model for a more spatial approach to the reconstruction of history, and it offers a fresh and urgently needed rethinking of gender, power, and the state in Africa.

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