ISLAM AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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NORTHERN NIGERIA covers an area of roughly 250,000 square miles of savannah country in the south, merging into desert scrub in the north, and supporting a sparse population (the average density is 53 persons per square mile) which is mainly scattered along water courses in villages and hamlets of varying size. There are, however, important urban centres which have developed since the sixteenth century on trade routes for Sahara caravans, and on dominant military positions for defence of the surrounding farming communities, and for carrying out slave-raiding expeditions further afield. It is these urban centres, which were political capitals of military chiefdoms and later Mohammedan Emirates, that are most interesting and most important from the point of view of social stratification.

Of a total population of roughly 10 million, about 70 per cent are Mohammedan, 30 per cent Pagan and less than 1 per cent Christian.

Under centralized British Administration since early in the nineteenth-hundreds, the region has been divided into Provinces, but as these overlap the boundaries of traditional Emirates and Chiefdoms, I am ignoring these and the political superstructure of the British Administration until later.

Ethnically, the population consists of one major cultural group of Hausa-speaking people, who constitute over a third of the total population. These are now very largely Moslem, and, so far as can be gathered from their own oral and written chronicles, and from accounts of Arab travellers such as El Bekri and Ibu Batuta, were organized into military chiefdoms before the twelfth century. According to earlier sources there were seven main Hausa States and seven upstart or subsidiary Hausa States. There are other non-Hausa chiefdoms such as Nupe and Bornu, and a large number of culturally and linguistically distinct pagan tribes, who, up till the time of the British Occupation, were being constantly raided and enslaved by both the Hausa and non-Hausa Chiefdoms.

Historians vary in their estimates as to the earliest introduction of
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Islam in Northern Nigeria. There is mention of Arab traders introducing Islam in the north-eastern towns of Bornu and Kano before the twelfth century, and of the peaceful penetration of other Hausa States by Fulani clerics during the thirteenth century, but there is definite evidence that by the middle of the fifteenth century Islamic preachers and scholars, many of them members of nomadic Fulani tribes, had settled in the urban capitals of Hausa chiefdoms, attended the courts of the Hausa Chiefs, and by the end of the sixteenth century had persuaded some of these Chiefs to become Mohammedans.

Other Fulani clans, while remaining nomadic, attached themselves through these clerics to Hausa chiefdoms, and, in return for grazing rights and protection in the Hausa walled cities in the event of attack, provided military reinforcements for the Hausa chiefs, who, up to the nineteenth century, were in a state of constant warfare.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of Fulani clans had settled in the Hausa cities, and the clerics were gaining positions of importance at the courts and converting numbers of urban Hausa to Islam. A crisis came in 1804 when the pagan Hausa chief of Gobir, fearing the increasing political influence of the Fulani, forbade any further Moslem observances and threatened to expel the Fulani clerics, sending word to other Hausa chiefs that they should do likewise.

Shehu dan Fodio, the head of the local Fulani clan, and a fervent Moslem scholar, declared a Jihad, and, with the support of the nomadic Fulani and some of the Moslem Hausa, one after another of the Hausa Chiefs was overthrown, and Fulani leaders were installed as local Emirs in their place. All these were appointed by, and owed allegiance to, Shehu, and later his son, Bello, who became Sultan of Sokoto, political and religious leader of all the Mohammedan Fulani-Hausa Emirates. Three Hausa Chiefdoms never gave in to the Fulani, but remained politically independent under their traditional rulers up till the time of the British Conquest, when they became Mohammedan Emirates on a political equality with the Fulani Emirates.

Prior to British Rule, there had undoubtedly been Islamic influence in the independent Hausa chiefdoms, as there had been throughout the Hausa States before the Fulani rising of 1804. Although, however, some of the Hausa chiefs had adopted Islam and kept Arab or Fulani clerics as advisers and scribes at their courts, none the less the establishment of Moslem Courts and the official acceptance of Islamic religion and jurisprudence was only brought about in the independent Hausa States after British Rule. This official acceptance of Islam was, in part at least, due to motives of political prestige, following on Britain’s acceptance of the theocratic authority of the Fulani rulers as legitimate. It resulted in an increasing number of conversions to Islam among the Hausa-speaking population of the non-Fulani Emirates, although non-Hausa tribes

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politically subject to both Hausa and Fulani-Hausa Emirates remain predominantly pagan.

In this paper, I am considering only the Fulani-dominated Hausa Emirates, chief among which are Sokoto, Gwandu, Kano, Katsina and Zaria—with one of the independent Hausa Emirates, that of Kebbi, as a control in considering such factors as whether the traditional Hausa status system has been significantly affected by factors of Fulani ethnic domination, or by a relatively longer period (about a century) of direct Islamic influence on political life. Except where differences are expressly brought out, material on social stratification applies to both Fulani-Hausa and independent Hausa Emirates. For much of the Fulani-Hausa material I have drawn on Dr. Smith’s work on Zaria, supplemented by personal experience of altogether six years spent in Northern Nigeria, chiefly in Sokoto and Niger Provinces, while for the independent Kebbi I have only personal information acquired during two years spent there.

In considering the social stratification among the Hausa, one must first distinguish between the concentrated population of the urban capitals, such as Kano with a population of approximately 60,000, Zaria with 30,000 and Sokoto with 25,000, and the rural Hausa communities which vary from a population of 50 to one or two thousand. These villages are very largely self-supporting agricultural communities, although since the main food crops can only be grown during a short wet season of from two to four months, for the rest of the year farming is supplemented by fishing, hunting and various craft activities.

Dr. Smith’s material for Zaria is concerned with the stratification of the rural communities only in so far as they are the ground level of the political hierarchy, but internally, at least among the indigenous rural Hausa communities, they have in some measure a distinct system of social stratification based on kinship, generation and hereditary functions connected with pre-Islamic spirit cults, the officials of which still maintain their rank and economic functions despite very gradual abandonment of the cults.

The highest social status in a rural village community is accorded to the Village Head, who is the link with the political hierarchy of the Emirate. His position must now be sanctioned by a political superior, but was traditionally filled by the most suitable male member of the senior patrilateral extended family, seniority being based on putative first occupation of the village site. Next in order of status are those holding the rank of village elders, who are heads of other or junior branches of patrilateral extended families, headship passing normally to the eldest son of the eldest brother. Equal to them in status are the holders of hereditary fishing, hunting and priestly titles connected with annual sacrifices to local spirits. Within the general village community, status is acquired through seniority of generation, but no significant
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distinction, outside kinship relations, is made according to age within the generation. The status of males is higher than that of females, and within a patrilineal kinship group of three generations, status (being defined in terms of rights and obligations) is given according to agnatic descent, generation and primogeniture.

Between non-kin, relative social position is shown in different verbal greetings and physical gestures appropriate to relationships of equality, inferiority or superiority. Social equals stand and touch hands when greeting, while an inferior crouches before a superior and removes his shoes before entering the superior’s compound. Only social equals may eat together, and therefore the sexes eat apart, while an inferior goes to greet a superior at his or her home and not vice-versa.

Occupational status plays a relatively insignificant part in differentiating social groups at the level of the small homogeneous rural community, although it begins to assume importance in villages with a population of several thousands.

Before proceeding to the main analysis of political and occupational status in the urban capitals of Hausa Emirates, there are three other important and closely linked aspects of status—namely, legal, ethnic, and religious, which affect urban and rural communities alike.

Everywhere Moslems enjoy higher status than Christians or Pagans. Ignoring the Christians as numerically insignificant, we have seen that superior religious status of Mohammedans since the beginning of the nineteenth century was linked with Fulani ethnic domination over Hausa, except in the three independent Hausa Chiefdoms. However, since Hausa have themselves adopted Islam, this has crystallized only in a pseudo-ethnic superiority of the hereditary aristocracy descended from the Fulani rulers appointed at the time of the Jihad. Urban Moslem Hausa now consider themselves the religious and social superiors of nomadic Fulani, whom they rightly regard as only nominally removed from paganism. Similarly, Moslem Hausa occupy a position of superior status vis-à-vis the pagan tribes within the Emirate. The marks of religious status, apart from attendance at communal prayers, are expressed in such customs as shaving the head and wearing a gown and red fez or turban, which are not enjoined in the Koran, but, according to Greenberg,\(^\text{14}\) have been adopted from North African Moslems. The wearing of more voluminous gowns, the use of Arabic expressions, and such things as the possession of an imported aluminium kettle for prayer ablutions, also serve to distinguish the more sophisticated urban Moslem from his nominally Moslem fellow Hausa in the villages.

Legal status historically was closely linked with both Islam and ethnic factors. For several centuries before the rise of the Fulani to power, Hausa Chiefs had been enslaving surrounding non-Hausa pagan tribes. After Fulani domination, slave raiding continued, and although theoretically Mohammedans could not be enslaved, there was in fact
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constant raiding by one Fulani Emir against the Hausa population of another, and Moslems and Pagans alike were captured. Moslems could not, however, be sold in the market, nor recaptured if they escaped, and might be ransomed. The legal position of slaves varied according to whether they were first or second generation slaves, and this also had a religious connotation. Purchased or captured pagan slaves could be punished or disposed of by their owner as he pleased. Children of male and female slaves belonged to the mother’s owner, and slave marriages could be dissolved by their owners. Where slave females were taken by the owner as concubines, the children were born free and were legitimate heirs of the father. Their mothers also became free on the death of the owner. Other slave offspring were brought up as Mohammedans, and were linked to the owner’s family by quasi-kinship and could not be violently punished or alienated.

The most significant difference in slave status with regard to social stratification was the privileged position accorded to personal slaves, particularly in royal households, as compared with slaves who were put out in farming settlements. Dr. Smith estimates that in Zaria Emirate, which is in the centre of hill pagan country, ‘there are probably as many slaves as free persons’,¹⁶ the majority would therefore have been slaves in the traditional sense of the word, i.e. lacking the legal, social and economic privileges of free persons, although there is ample evidence that even farming slaves were well treated, a fact which is supported by the very small percentage of desertions after Lugard’s abolition of slave status.¹⁶ In the Kebbi Emirate on the other hand, captives taken in war against neighbouring Sokoto and Gwandu were largely ransomed, since if put out in farming settlements they would immediately have deserted. Almost all the slaves were therefore the privileged personal retinue of the Chief and fief-holders. Among the royal slaves in all States, a minority were given important offices and titles which included military rank, titles as fief-holders, and also positions as courtiers, royal messengers, etc. Such slave officials clearly occupied a higher status than many free persons, including some of the hereditary aristocracy, and were wealthier and more powerful. In Daura, one of the independent Hausa Chiefdoms, for instance, slave officials had become sufficiently powerful during the nineteenth century to have chiefs dismissed and appointed.¹⁷

The rest of the paper deals firstly with the Hausa system of social status in the context of the urban centres, secondly with the Hausa conception of prestige and how this fits into the status system, and thirdly the distribution of rank within the political structure of the Emirates and how the institution of clientage permits mobility within the political hierarchy. Finally there is an examination of the relative effects of Islam and Western influence on the Hausa social hierarchy.

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THE MALE STATUS SYSTEM OPERATING IN THE URBAN CENTRES

In the urban centres, although the factors in social stratification based on kinship, generation, and to a lesser extent pre-Islamic cults, are still operative, factors of occupational and political status assume far greater importance due to the marked specialization in crafts and trade developing in the capital cities and the tendency for various craftsmen to occupy distinct quarters in the town.

Although among the Hausa there is no guild system, and any cooperation normally takes place only within an extended family group, members of the same craft, whether living in the same town, ward of the town, or in surrounding villages attending the same market, tend to be identified as a social group. This is expressed in the sharing of common ‘lines’ in the market, no distinction being made between urban and village craftsmen, while within the town individual crafts headmen are appointed who act as the representatives for the members of their craft in any matters of common concern, although they have no authority over other craftsmen or powers of decision without their consent.

Among the independent Hausa of the Kebbi Emirate, craft skills can be acquired only within the patrilateral extended family, and definite prestige attaches to members of one of the main specialized crafts, such as potters, blacksmiths, weavers and dyers, as compared with participants in the more universal crafts of net-making, mat-making, building, etc. There is, however, no tendency for group endogamy except among potters, the only craft practised by both sexes. According to Dr. Smith, on the other hand, among the Fulani-Hausa of Zaria, 18 it is possible to become a craft apprentice, and following upon this, a distinction is made between those following hereditary crafts and those who acquire skill by apprenticeship, although it is not clear as to what generation span is necessary for a craft to become ‘hereditary’ within a particular family. Prestige is said to attach to the hereditary craftsmen, among whom there is preferential ‘marriage of friendship’, and therefore a tendency towards group endogamy. The only sense in which this distinction between hereditary and acquired crafts can be applied among the independent Hausa of Kebbi is in the higher prestige of traditional craftsmen as against the modern type of petty traders, sellers of kola nuts, cigarettes, scent, and the like, who deal in the local town and who are often the sons of traditional craftsmen preferring this easier way of obtaining profits.

Until very recently, that is, within the last thirty years or so, urban craftsmen retained ownership of land on the outskirts of the town, or in associated villages or hamlets, on which the younger brothers or sons of the family, possibly assisted by slave labour, raised crops for the whole extended family group. This is still largely the case in the Kebbi Emirate, but recent increase in trade and the size of the towns, together with the
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effect of Islamic Law in allowing for individual ownership of land and the sub-division of inheritance, has resulted in an increasing isolation of the urban population in the main Fulani-Hausa Emirates. Following from this, one can now distinguish fairly clearly, broad divisions of social class based on wealth, religious prestige and occupational grouping which over-ride individual craft distinctions. These form sub-divisions within the broader status groups of the hereditary aristocracy, their privileged and wealthy supporters, the independent commoners, and the descendants of slaves or those economically dependent on a patron.

To distinguish the broad status groups first, according to Hausa terminology the most fundamental distinction in status is the political division between rulers and subjects. The ‘rulers’ in this sense are not equivalent to the group of people holding official positions or rank at any particular time, but includes all those eligible for office, i.e. members of hereditary ruling families. In some Emirates there are two or more royal dynasties who compete for the position of Emir, and who, once established, proceed to re-distribute other offices within the dynasty and its supporters. In other Emirates, the position of Emir, of certain fiefs or ranks, such as Chief Judge, are held exclusively within certain dynastic branches. In any case, highest status attaches to those members of the aristocracy in positions of rank, or those dismissed from office but still addressed by their previous title and retaining its status although not its prestige. These are closely seconded by their non-aristocratic supporters appointed to official rank, and junior members of the aristocracy in potential positions of rank.

Separated from these are all those of commoner status, including urban craftsmen, prosperous traders and clerics, and the peasantry. Within this amorphous group and starting from the bottom, Hausa distinguish the very poor, beggars, blind and lepers and the menial retainers economically dependent on a compound head. Above these are the economically independent peasantry, which includes such low-status occupations as butchers, hunters, drummers and praise-singers, etc., which merge into the higher status craftsmen such as blacksmiths, weavers and petty traders. In this group there is no very clear cut overall system of ranking as between one craft and another, and positioning varies in different areas, but in all areas the successful merchants who engage in long distance trade, together with Koranic teachers, rank second only to the aristocracy.19

Of these, Koranic teachers acquire status through religious learning but are expected to live largely by charity and to be content with the economic standard of living of the farming peasantry. Wealthy merchants, on the other hand, acquire status through their power to ally themselves with aristocratic families, since, in the absence of slave estates, nobles very largely depend on the merchants to support them, when out
of office, in their customary standard of living. Merchants cannot themselves acquire rank, but since to the Hausa rank is the traditional means of obtaining wealth, and political protection is necessary for the enjoyment of wealth achieved through trade, merchants are compelled to live in a sort of symbiotic relationship with the junior members of the aristocracy who are aspirants to rank and office. Merchants, however, like clerics, although they remain in an inferior status group to the aristocracy, have a separate idiom for acquiring prestige.

_Prestige_ among the Hausa is only meaningful in terms of status, there being an appropriate type of prestige for each of the higher status groups. At the level of the higher status craftsmen, it is possible for especially skilled craftsmen such as silversmiths or embroiderers of gowns or saddle cloths, to be appointed to a monopoly of royal trade in making bugles, horse trappings, etc., which implies only slight economic advantage, but considerable social prestige. This is expressed not only in forms of address and deference used towards them by other craftsmen, but also in such ways as a refusal to trade goods in the market in the normal way, but instead to conduct business only through middlemen petty traders, or by the purchaser placing orders at the craftsman’s compound.

Koranic scholars acquire a quite different type of prestige through a reputation for piety and ability to teach boys Arabic writing and recitation of the Koran, a prestige which is demonstrated in gifts and respect shown to them within the general community.

Merchants acquire prestige not through the ownership of wealth as such, since there are very definite socially legitimate ways of using the wealth they acquire. They may not display it ostentatiously by owning a Pontiac (these are reserved for Emirs and senior rank holders), nor may traders dress in gowns and turbans or build houses which might rival the aristocracy, nor may they own racehorses or keep concubines, all of which are marks of prestige among the aristocracy. The main means by which a merchant acquires prestige is through religious observances—by making an expensive pilgrimage to Mecca, and thereafter receiving the title of Alhaji, which establishes him as eminently respectable in the trading world—and by liberal almsgiving to beggars, to Koranic scholars and to the professional praise-singers who are attached to noble households, but are free to pay their attentions to wealthy merchants, and can in one day destroy a merchant’s hard won social prestige if they are not satisfied with the reward given.20

Aristocrats, particularly those in office, acquire prestige through ostentatious display of wealth in all forms, but which must also include hospitality, lavish entertainment at feasts, and generous support of their kinsfolk and unrelated dependents, who include ex-slaves.

Traditionally, official rank has implied the opportunities for obtaining wealth through taxation and extortion, as well as slave raiding and farming, wherewith to meet all these demands, and to tide over periods
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out of office. Without the wealth necessary to maintain prestige, aristocrats lose supporters, and with them the likelihood of regaining office, and in this way junior branches of aristocratic families lose status over the generations and merge into the commoner group. Status is therefore largely determined by birth, although one can also acquire it either through Islamic learning or outstanding success in trade. Prestige on the other hand must be carefully acquired by the individual within the very definite social context of a particular status group.

Mobility into the highest status group, that of the titled officials and nobility, is only possible through the political hierarchy. The highest position, that of Emir, is restricted either to patrilineal descendants of the pre-Islamic chiefs in the independent Hausa states, or to descendants of Fulani leaders appointed as Emirs by the Sultan of Sokoto. In most cases there are two or more branches of the ruling dynasty eligible, and within either branch appointment is made by a council of hereditary electors, and depends on age, suitability for office, previous rank, number of supporters, etc.

Prior to British rule, the Emir had authority over all the territory which he could control through military forces, since within a few years of the founding of dan Fodio’s theocratic empire, they were in practical independence of the overlordship of Sokoto. Each Emir appointed fief-holders who had complete charge of certain areas, and who handed over to the Emir a stipulated amount of the goods taken in taxation. They were required to provide military contingents when necessary, and could only leave the capital with the Emir’s permission. These fief-holders might be relatives of the Emir, or, where relatives themselves had conflicting political ambitions, might be trusted supporters who had led successful military expeditions in support of the Emir, or less frequently, they might be trusted household slaves of the second generation.

Since the fief-holders were confined to the capital, they had to appoint subordinate retainers known as ‘jakadu’ to live in their districts and extort taxes, to recruit military contingents, to administer slave farming estates, and generally keep the area in submission. Day to day administration of the villages, settlement of disputes, etc., was the function of the traditional village heads and elders. These ‘jakadu’ were normally household slaves, and had virtually complete power in their districts to extort taxation, only part of which they passed on to the fief-holders. They might threaten to report any insubordination to their master, who had the power to physically punish or banish offenders.

The only redress villagers had against the ‘jakadu’ was through an independent cleric or landowner who was related to or had established a connection with, the fief-holder. Such independent clients were called ‘fadawa’, and were often in competition with the ‘jakadu’ for the favour of the fief-holder. Commoners were obliged to keep on the right side of both ‘jakadu’ and ‘fadawa’ by means of regular ‘gaisuwa’, translated,
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euphemistically, as ‘gifts of greeting’. Likewise ‘fadawa’ had to present bigger and more frequent ‘gifts’ to fief-holders, and would expect to receive protection from him in return.

Anybody could establish this relation of clientship to a member of the aristocracy if he could make himself sufficiently useful, and it was possible in this way for ambitious clerics to attach themselves to a noble, not necessarily a fief-holder or one in office. If the client backed a successful candidate for office he might expect to receive subordinate office himself, and might gradually establish himself, through his own ability and supporters, in the political hierarchy of the capital.

The extent to which this was possible varied in different Emirates. As Spencer Trimmingham 21 has pointed out, the adoption of Islam by indigenous Hausa Chiefs led to the incorporation of a religious hierarchy composed of chief cleric, chief scribe, etc., into the traditional political structure, to give the rulers Islamic support. There were therefore opportunities for those literate in Arabic, and having some knowledge of Islamic Law, to achieve positions of rank and power. In the Fulani-Hausa Emirates there was opportunity for Hausa landowners with support in the districts built up on kinship, or wealth through slave settlements, to become clients of Fulani fief-holders. There was a separate system of non-fief-holding titles for royal slaves who performed duties of war, supply and general liaison and who could receive promotion through loyal and efficient discharge of these duties. Through political clientage, therefore, mobility was possible into all but the highest positions reserved for the hereditary aristocracy, but since political patronage was highly unstable, the status so acquired tended not to be heritable.

So far I have deliberately ignored the changes, brought about under British Administration, which affect the status hierarchy and the possibilities for mobility. Before going on to western influence, there are certain points, which arise out of the present material, relating to the effect of Islam on Hausa stratification.

Although Koranic doctrine ideally stresses social equality between all male Moslems, and, to quote Spencer Trimmingham, 22 under Islam, the only ‘constitutional principle of the State is the unity of the political and religious community’, in fact, Islamic teaching and ceremonial have been adopted as supports of the Hausa social hierarchy in various ways. Firstly, Islamic sanctions supported the ethnic superiority of the Fulani ruling clans over the Hausa population. Here a point by Spencer Trimmingham 23 is relevant. He writes: ‘Islam introduces an anarchic element in that the law of God alone is absolute. Friction is possible between the State and the ecclesiastical body who also claim to know the divine will.’ In this case, the Fulani States, having been established by military conquest, Fulani ethnic domination has to stress religion as ‘the new binding force of a precarious equilibrium’, 23 with the ruling
clans as defenders of the faith. This is more clearly seen in a comparison of the Fulani Emirates with the independent Hausa Emirates. Among the Fulani Emirates the ethnic superiority of the ruling dynasties, known by their clan names, is now largely a myth. Although they practise preferential cross-cousin marriage traditional to the pastoral Fulani, nevertheless, with plurality of wives and concubines, they have inter-married with the Hausa population to a considerable extent, and no distinction is made between the children of a Fulani father by a Fulani or Hausa mother whether she be wife or concubine. In any case the ethnic distinction is one of a ruling clan only, since far greater numbers of settled Fulani, to a greater or less extent inter-mixed with the Hausa population, remain as subject commoners, and any religious distinction between rulers and subjects has in fact disappeared. The putative ethnic distinction has therefore political meaning only, but relies on historical religious prestige for backing. Among the independent Hausa of Kebbi on the other hand, where there are three main tribes in the Emirates, ethnically, distribution of rank and status is made according to traditional military alliance. Distinction on grounds of religious status is made between urban Mohammedan and rural pagan communities, but without any political or ethnic context.

In another way, Islam, in sanctioning slavery, tended to support the aristocracy in the monopoly of political rank, although in stressing that all slave children should be brought up as Moslems it also facilitated political mobility to positions of rank within slave status for a minority.

Thirdly, in Fulani and independent Hausa Emirates alike, all the important Islamic ceremonies, including even the weekly attendance at the Friday Mosque in the cities, are taken as occasions to stress the social hierarchy. The Salla prayers after Ramadan, which all Moslems are expected to attend, are immediately followed by a royal procession on horseback to the Palace, where all nobles and title holders display themselves in traditional finery and show their allegiance to the Emir.

On the side of mobility, Islam has provided scholars and scribes with the opportunity to achieve positions of rank through stress on the need for knowledge of Islamic Law in the administration of the Emirates. The administration of Islamic Law in matters of ownership and inheritance, together with the expansion of the trading community made possible by a common faith in Islam, provided an opportunity for the emergence of a new merchant class but, at the same time, Islam provides ways in which members of these new status groups can acquire religious prestige without necessarily entering into political rivalry with the hereditary rulers.

The effect of Western influence on the other hand, although not immediately felt, appears to be more fundamentally disruptive of the Hausa status hierarchy. Lugard’s prohibition of the sale and capture of slaves and of the legal status of slavery did not immediately under-
mine the economic basis of aristocratic status in the absence of office, since the vast majority of slaves remained on their master's estates and became a serf class paying tithe to their previous owner.

Under British Administration, fief-holders became District Heads and were required to reside in their districts, while the positions of slave 'jakadu' were abolished, and administration of justice was vested in Moslem District Courts. Boundaries of Emirates normally coincided with new administrative units termed Native Authorities, which were grouped together into Provinces, each Province being a unit of administration for Government Departments such as Treasury, Communications and Public Works. The N.A. for each Emirate consisted of the Emir and a Council drawn from previous fief-holders or hereditary nobles, who together administered the affairs of the Emirate and appointed the new officials necessary to act as local administrators for the affairs of the Government Departments. These were drawn either from younger brothers or sons of the Emir or from his trusted supporters. Previous royal slaves became official courtiers and messengers of the Emir, and acted as liaison officers between him and the District Heads. Native Authority Police forces were established and recruited largely from ex-slaves of ruling families.

Where schools were established with secular western education, Emirs and Councillors were pressed to send their children and their relatives' children to act as an example in view of the initial strong opposition to secular education. The net result was that the traditional social hierarchy remained unaltered virtually until the expansion of Government activity in technical departments during the last ten years.

Since the traditional means by which the aristocracy had supported themselves—extortion of taxes—was no longer open to officials of N.A. departments, despite the efforts of British Administrators, embezzlement of public funds was substituted as a legitimate means of insuring against the instability of office. Further, since N.A. appointments remained in the hands of the Emir and Council, or were delegated to Departmental Heads, the customs of clientage and 'gifts of greeting' continued, and even young men trained in government schools could only obtain positions as clerks, technical assistants, etc., through the traditional channels.

Political status and channels of mobility have therefore remained virtually unchanged within the Emirates, except that there is now a new social group of junior clerks and technical officials, who have received secular education, and who are increasingly drawn from all sections of the population. Only outside the Emirates, at the level of regional and provincial administration, are there opportunities in government departments which offer them promotion to high status. These opportunities are, however, of increasing significance, and in the regional capital at Kaduna, which was deliberately chosen as not being the administrative
centre of an Emirate, the influence of western education and administrative organization has resulted in open competition for official positions, which are equivalent in status to all but the highest traditional ranks in the Emirates.

*The social placement of women:* While I fully endorse Dr. Smith's general analysis of the Hausa status system as applicable to the area with which I am most familiar, the Kebbi Emirate, and have quoted liberally from him in this paper, I cannot agree with the theoretical conclusions that he draws from his statement that . . . 'Hausa society contains two independent status systems, the male and the female, which, although they have certain common characteristics, remain mutually independent'. Dr. Smith makes this the basis for disagreeing with Talcott Parson's view that stratification is co-extensive with society. I am not here concerned with Talcott Parson's view, but only with what I consider to be an over-emphasis of the mutual exclusiveness of the male and female status system among the Hausa, which Dr. Smith has made in an attempt to refute Talcott Parson. Although one cannot take the male status system and apply it directly to females, since obviously those status determinants depending on political position, and specific occupations such as clerics and merchants, are not applicable to women's roles, this would be true of most societies, but does not necessarily mean that, broadly, factors operating to determine status are not applicable throughout society, but merely that they take different forms according to sex.

I shall first describe the facts on which Dr. Smith bases his analysis, and then point out, on the basis chiefly of material from the Kebbi Emirate, various ways in which the female system is co-extensive with, or dependent on, that of the men. Firstly, women are legal minors and both legally and economically the wards of men. Under Islam they have a religious duty to marry, and all unmarried women, including widows of child-bearing age, are considered anomalous and referred to as prostitutes. Hausa marriage is polygamous and patrilocal. Within polygamous households, co-wives are ranked in seniority by reference to marriage order to the common husband. Divorce rates are high and under the local administration of Maliki Law, can be obtained by a simple repudiation of his wife by the husband—or by the wife's desertion and refusal to return to her husband's compound.

Among women there are special relations of bond-friendship and patronage which formally express equality, and superiority—inferiority relationships. Bond friendship expresses social equality and is normally between women of equivalent age who establish the relation freely, and publicize it by the initiator giving a feast. Thereafter the bond friends exchange visits and gifts and assist at each other's ceremonies according to a set pattern. They are bound to support one another in disputes with co-wives or neighbours, and to try to arrange arbitration in matrimonial
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disputes. Relations of patronage are formally established in the same way, normally between women of different ages, and the terms adopted are those of mother and daughter or elder sister and younger sister. In the former, the adopted daughter carries out menial tasks for her adopted mother such as carrying water, pounding grain, or looking after children. In the latter, the 'younger sister' assists the 'elder sister' normally only on ceremonial occasions. We are not told the relative frequency of relations of bond friendship and patronage in Zaria, but certainly in the Kebbi Emirate, while bond friendship is universal, and any one woman may have several bond-friends, relationships of patronage are only found among wives or female relatives of the aristocracy and non-aristocratic female clients, who, in exchange for their menial duties, are periodically rewarded with gifts and can expect financial help in meeting expenses of feasts, etc.

In both bond friendship and patronage, relationships are individual to the two women concerned and do not correspond to any group divisions. Moreover, since the relations are freely entered into, they are expressions of status rather than determinants of status.

Theoretically, concubines share a common status below that of married women, and prostitutes below that of concubines. In fact, concubines, being restricted to members of the aristocracy, share a common status with junior wives of the household, while the status of prostitutes depends entirely on their individual success, unsuccessful prostitutes touring the villages having lower status than wives of the peasantry, while successful urban prostitutes associate openly with wealthy and aristocratic men and have their own compounds and male and female servants. The last factor to be considered is the religious status of marriage. Wives may either be kept in full purdah, partial purdah or under no restrictions. Prestige tends to be in relation to the degree of purdah imposed, but is only marked at the two extremes, and in fact purdah has more significance for the prestige of the husband than for that of the wives.

Dr. Smith makes the following comments on the differences in the regulation of status among men and women which I quote:

Under conditions of marital instability, spouses cannot share the same social status. Indeed the status differentiation of co-wives by marriage order precludes their status identity with the common husband. Legally and politically, this identity is also impossible, since women are wards of men. Moreover, since divorce rates are high, and spouses change frequently, marital careers are highly individual and variable, accordingly a man and his wife or wives are not treated as status equivalents but sharply distinguished. . . . A man's sons and male dependants will be accorded a social position roughly similar to that which he holds, but his daughters cannot be treated in this way, and his wives are even more clearly distinguished from him. There are, in fact, two quite distinct status orders, one regulating the social placement of men,
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the other applying to women. Only within the special context of kinship are these two status orders inter-related systematically. . . . Among the females, the criteria which govern social placement are those of generation, age, marriage order to a common husband, ethnicity and descent, fertility, marital career, the position and prospects of offspring and, to a lesser extent, differences of wealth.

Out of these criteria, we can first distinguish those factors which are co-extensive with male status determinants—namely generation, and ethnicity and descent, although the latter are of far less significance among women than among men. As for age, the only significance of this within the generation is in determining bond friendships, where these have been established since girlhood, and in establishing relations of patronage. But since these friendships concern individuals and not groups or strata, within the female community, they are hardly significant. Marriage order to a common husband can be of significance only within a group of four wives, and polygamous households constitute less than a third of the total in rural areas and less than half in urban areas. 27 It would be extremely difficult to prove that fertility was a criteria of social placement among women, since there is a very high infantile death rate and customary adoption of children within the patrilineal kinship group. One should further link marital instability with the fact that the mother has no legal rights over her offspring, and that on divorce they remain with the husband or are returned to him after weaning. We are not told what is implied in the term ‘marital career’, but this implies the fact that women directly take on their husband’s status. With ‘position and prospects of offspring’ this is certainly a factor giving prestige, but only where the woman remains in the husband’s compound and where the prestige affects them both equally. Differences in wealth may also give prestige, but, as with men, does not itself imply status unless linked with occupational status, as, for instance, among teachers, or with marital status as the wife of a nobleman or rank-holder, though an exception to this might be found in the wealthy prostitute.

If we are looking for broad overall determinants of female status, we find that the same basic factors in social stratification apply to both sexes equally. Historically, prior to British rule, the legal status of free-men, household slaves and farming slaves among men, was paralleled by free married women with definite legal rights, concubines with partial rights, and slave wives of slaves who had no legal rights. In the economic post-emancipation context, where male household slaves have become menial servants and retainers, there are female equivalents of household retainers who serve in aristocratic households as messengers having access into the women’s quarters, and who often act as personal servants and escorts of wives of aristocrats.

Historically also, prior to the establishment of Mohammedan Emir-

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ates, in the political sphere, female relatives of the Emir, usually sisters, were entitled to hold certain ranks, to which fiefs were attached, and although under the Islamic states these ranks ceased to have political significance, the titles still continue to be held by royal sisters. In Kebbi the title of ‘Magijiya’ involves the position of supervising the prostitutes—an office which still entails considerable economic profit, and also certain leading roles in the traditional annual spirit cults, in the performance of which the prostitutes now play an important part. Aristocratic status among women, and this includes mothers, sisters, daughters and brothers’ daughters of Emirs at the present time, are addressed by the deferential formal greetings used for the aristocracy by both men and women, and are also subject to the attentions of praise-singers at weddings and naming ceremonies. They are also entitled to a privileged form of marriage, called ‘the marriage of take up your stick and walk’ which refers to the fact that the husband must come to visit his royal wife in her compound, of which she remains the undisputed head.

Prestige of such aristocratic women and also of the wives of Emirs and senior councillors and of brothers and sons of Emirs, is shown firstly in purdah marriage, secondly in dress, ornaments, and the provision of large dowries in the case of daughters, thirdly in having special female servants and messengers who relieve them of menial tasks. Aristocratic status exists, therefore, for women as for men, and is acquired by birth, although to a lesser extent mobility into this group is achieved through marriage. It is significant to note that the two factors which determine male mobility, clientage and western education, are also significant for women.

With regard to western education, of the girls from all social groups recruited to Government Boarding Schools, from figures for Sokoto and for Birnin Kebbi in Gwandu Emirate, approximately three-quarters marry either Emirs, Senior Councillors, District Heads or N.A. officials. Women’s part in political clientage is indirect, as pawns in the male game. Aspirants to office where possible marry their daughters into the households of the aristocrat on whose favour they depend, and merchants, in their efforts to secure political protection, frequently give their daughters in marriage to nobles, Moslem judges or important clerics in what is called a ‘marriage of almsgiving’. In such marriages no bride payment is given, the girl being conducted to the house of the bridegroom, often without his previous knowledge, and presented with her dowry as a ‘marriage of almsgiving’, whereby the father or guardian acquires religious merit, notwithstanding, provided she is welcome, political alliance!

Among commoners, occupational status among men is not directly transferred to their wives, but purdah marriage tends to be correlated with occupational status among men, although this is only marked at the two extremes of farming peasantry on the one hand, and the higher
status groups of mallams, merchants and officials on the other. Linked, however, with purdah status, are the various occupations practised by women. Married women with lowest status are the petty market traders in fish, snacks, etc., and water sellers, who are necessarily free from all purdah restrictions. Of slightly higher status are women who prepare snacks, cure fish, etc., but do not themselves trade these on the market, depending on children to hawk their goods for them. Of higher status again are women engaged in special crafts, such as pottery, calabash decoration, weaving, etc., whose husbands see to the buying and selling necessary, and who can therefore remain in complete purdah. Linked to this group are those without special crafts but who are wives of minor officials, wealthy merchants or clerics and enjoy purdah, and the freedom from water and wood collecting that this implies, by virtue of their husband’s position. The peak achieved in occupational status in their own right are the teachers, normally also married to men of high status, who outside the special conditions of their work, are in purdah-type marriage.

In these ways, despite the fact that men’s and women’s occupations are distinct, and that women cannot aspire to the higher status positions of clerics, merchants and officials, one can say that occupation broadly determines their social position, and that this is related to marital status in being dependent on the degree of purdah imposed, which, in turn, is related to the occupational status of the husband.

REFERENCES

1 1951 Census of Northern Nigeria.
2 See Lugard, A Tropical Dependency, pp. 236–7.
3 Ibid., pp. 240–2.
7 F. J. Arnett, op. cit., p. 20.
8 Abuja, Daura and Kebbi.
9 Thus ignoring Nupe and Bornu.

11 By the term ‘Fulani’, when unqualified I refer only to the ruling clans, not to other settled Fulani nor to nomadic Fulani. (See C. E. Hopen, op. cit., pp. 3–5.
14 J. Greenberg, Influence of Islam on a Sudanese Religion, p. 11.
15 M. G. Smith, op. cit., p. 242.
16 Orr, op. cit., p. 201.
17 M. G. Smith, op. cit. p. 242.
18 Ibid., p. 248.
19 Ibid., p. 249.
22 Ibid., p. 139.
23 Ibid., p. 143.
25 Arewa, Kebbawa and Kyengawa (also Zabbaramawa and Pastoral Fulani who are nomadic or semi-nomadic and non-Hausa speaking).

26 For the information used by Dr. Smith and his conclusions drawn from it, see his article ‘The Hausa System of Social Status’, Africa, 29, No. 3, July, 1959.
27 This is a generous estimate of the extent of polygamy, based on my investigations in Argungu Emirate.