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# Social Anthropology of Work

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## **WOMEN'S WORK AND CHILDREN'S WORK:**

### **Variations among Moslems in Kano<sup>1</sup>**

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#### **Economic Roles of Women and Children**

The notion of the division of labour has several aspects of sociological interest: the categorization of different types of work in particular societies; the comparison of societies with different classifications of work; and consideration of modes of recruitment of persons into roles as workers. In addition, as anthropologists, we inevitably focus attention on the cultural values which validate categorizations of work and modes of recruitment into work roles. A study of work-related values — what one might call the “culture of work” — includes consideration of how the definition of work and the allocation of economic roles relates to values in other cultural domains such as religion, ethnicity, class, age and sexual stratification.

Among the modes of labour recruitment given most attention in discussions of the division of labour is ascription based on class, caste, ethnicity and sex. Age has been virtually ignored, undoubtedly because of the relative insignificance of children and older people in the labour force in modern western industrial society. In dealing with countries with rapidly changing economic and demographic structures, this gap is significant, for it leads to ignorance of the economic contribution of large segments of the population. An emphasis, particularly among economists, on the formal sector of the economy also contributes to an underestimation of this portion of the labour force.

This paper is an attempt to examine aspects of the division of labour by age and sex in Hausa society in Kano city. It deals exclusively with Hausa people in an urban setting. Even so, within this limited context, men, women and children are by no means monolithic categories in regard to their economic activities. The high degree of occupational specialization among men in Hausa society has often been noted, and several detailed studies of particular occupational groups have appeared (Jaggar 1973; Tahir

1976). Occupational specialization among men relates closely to social status, for a man's position in society is in many ways, although not entirely, defined by his occupation (Smith, M.G. 1959).

The economic roles of Hausa women have not gone unnoticed (Barkow 1972; Bashir 1972; Hill 1969; Smith, M. 1954), although discussion of women's economic roles are inevitably subsumed under discussions of marital status. Although occupational roles are varied among women, they do not define women's status to the extent that they do that of men. The emphasis on Islamic values in defining the position of women; the importance of the institution of marriage, and seclusion, or *purdah*, within marriage; the dominance of men in marriage and in political life – all obscure the significance of women's economic roles. Consequently, variations in these roles and the factors which lead to occupational choices and income differentials among women – including age, class, marital status, child-bearing history, and husband's occupation have not been given much attention.

Among children, too, there are significant variations in economic activities, depending upon age, class, birth order, family size, parents' occupations and education. Adults in Hausa society, particularly women in *purdah*, are dependent upon children in many ways. Changes now taking place in the economic roles of children, mainly as a result of the spread of western education, have far-reaching implications – not only for the future of the children themselves, but for the adults dependent upon children's economic services.

### **Kano City**

The research on which this paper is based was conducted in two wards<sup>2</sup> in Kano city between 1977 and 1979. There are many similarities between the populations in the two neighbourhoods: both have been settled for many generations by Hausa speakers, all of whom today are strongly committed to Islam. Most of the inhabitants of one ward, Kofar Mazugal, trace their ancestry to the original Habe inhabitants of Kano; while those in the other, Kurawa, trace theirs to the Fulani invaders who seized political control of the state in the early nineteenth century. There has been so much social and cultural integration between these segments of the society, that the ethnic distinction has only minimal significance today, as one among many markers of identity (Paden 1970). It is reflected primarily in a continuing distinction in occupational roles between the inhabitants of the two wards. Most of the adult males of Kurawa

are currently in salaried civil service jobs, many of them messengers and clerks; formerly many of them were palace officials — from district chiefs to servants in the Emir's palace. The men of Kofar Mazugal are today, as in the past, engaged primarily in mercantile activities.

Both wards are similar in their inhabitants' commitment to a common set of values with regard to the status of women. These values stipulate early marriage, high fertility, submission to male authority in decision making in the domestic and political domains, polygamy, and seclusion, or *purdah*, in marriage. Women's occupational activities, while of considerable social and economic importance, are subordinated to other social considerations as indicators of status. There are very few women in Hausa society who do not rely on men in some way for economic support: married women receive housing, some food and some clothing from their husbands; elderly women who have sons rely on their sons, usually more than on their husbands, for support in old age; divorced or widowed women often rely on gifts from men in exchange for sexual favours. This male economic support — its source and extent — is very important in defining a woman's social position. A woman who receives no support from or through men also lacks a certain form of social support — she may work as a housemaid, beg, pound grain, or fetch water — but her status and usually her income are far lower than those of women who are in some ways dependent on men.<sup>3</sup> Those women who are, at least partially, financially and socially dependent on men, are nevertheless able to pursue economically remunerative occupations. These occupations are highly significant in economic terms — often paying for most of a woman's clothing, some of her food, some of her children's living expenses including much of their bridewealth and dowry, gifts for exchange with other women, medicines and luxury goods. Nevertheless this income plays little part in determining status; economic "independence", even relative wealth obtained from a woman's occupation, does not in itself imply high socio-political status for women in Hausa society. There are constraints on the status of women which limit the transferability of economic gain into social or political advantage.

There are also many similarities between the two wards with regard to values about children. Filial piety, first-child avoidance, an increasing separation of the sexes with maturity — accompanied by a strong emphasis on the notion of *kunya*, or shame — are important in all Kano Hausa families.<sup>4</sup> Children are expected to accept increasing responsibility in household tasks from a very

young age: there is no notion that "work" is the exclusive prerogative of adults. This is particularly evident in the domain of housework, where women's and children's work is intimately connected. Women in purdah are extremely dependent upon children's services for performing essential household tasks, including shopping, communicating with others outside their houses, removing refuse, caring for younger children, escorting women when they leave the house to go for medical services or to visit friends or relatives on ceremonial occasions. Except in the wealthiest families where some, but not all, of these tasks are performed by servants, children's services are absolutely essential for performing basic housework, not to mention the necessity of assistance from children in helping women with their income-earning activities. All children spend some time every day helping women with various kinds of housework, although there are differences in amounts and types of work done by different children. In addition, all children are expected to attend Qur'anic school, where verses from the *Qur'an* are memorized and the basic obligations of the Muslim person are learned. Most of the boys in both wards attend "boko" or secular school.<sup>5</sup>

A striking difference between the two wards which will be discussed in much of the remainder of this paper concerns the education and work of girls. While most girls in Kurawa are now attending "boko" school none in Kofar Mazugal are doing so. The girls in Kofar Mazugar are actively involved in street trading, or *talla*, while those in Kurawa rarely do *talla*. There are corresponding differences in the roles of the women in the two wards: while most women in Kofar Mazugar trade, few in Kurawa do so.

Given the broad cultural similarities between the two wards outlined above, how are we to explain these differences? As we have said, the populations of both wards are Muslims and both accept the same Islamic prescriptions regarding the status of women; both stress early marriage for women, male dominance, high fertility and purdah. Yet the attitude towards work, towards what is an acceptable occupation for women and girls, differs markedly in the two wards, as does the attitude towards western education for women. Thus beneath the ideological commitment to Islam, the common use of the Hausa language, and the cultural integration that has occurred among the various segments of Hausa society, differences persist in the domain of the "culture of work" which reflect a long history of economic specialization. The roles of women and young girls not only reflect the Islamic ideals of early marriage and purdah, they also are complementary to male economic roles and reflect a similar divergence. However, only

among men is the occupational specialization acknowledged and translated into socio-political status. The ideology of purdah ignores the economic roles of women, which have been aptly termed the "hidden trade" (Hill 1969). Unlike male economic activities, female trading, including the street trading of young girls, is justified by the actors not as an end in itself, not as means of "making a living", but as a means towards the attainment of the ideal status of the Muslim woman — a status which denies and restricts these very activities: women's need to work. Thus the street trading of young girls or the occupations of married women are not seen as means of subsistence, but rather as means of obtaining dowry for the young girl — the *sine qua non* of entry into purdah. In Kurawa, where street trading is rare, dowry and marriage are no less important. There, school attendance has become an alternate means to attaining this end. For young Hausa girls, school attendance and street trading are different kinds of work: both preparatory to entry into purdah — the status in which, ideally, women need not work, but which in reality requires them to work to obtain the means for their daughters' entry into the same status.

### Kurawa

Kurawa is near the Emir's palace, and many of the present inhabitants trace their ancestry to the Fulani invaders who, following 'Uthmān dan Fodio, seized political power in the early nineteenth century. Except for claims to certain traditional offices which are based on descent, this ethnic status has little contemporary political or economic significance.

In the last century most of the men in Kurawa had employment within the Emirate administration (see Bashir 1972). Relatively few were traders or craftsmen. The women, most but not all of whom also claimed Fulani descent, practised spinning and embroidery, and specialized in making *jalala* or embroidered saddle covers which are part of the regalia associated with chieftancy. They also embroidered men's trousers and boots. Although in the past, as today, they claim to have kept their earnings separate from the household economy, it is important to note that most of the occupations they pursued were ones which were related to the occupations of the men. The men were the market for women's income-producing activities, while the women supported male status by manufacturing the finery which expressed this. All of these occupations were done from within purdah, as they are today, with men and children assisting women in purchasing supplies and marketing the final products.

Purdah was well established in urban Hausaland by the nineteenth century. In his teachings on women 'Uṭhmān dan Fodio complained (quoted in Hodgkin 1975: 225) about the abuse of purdah before the *jihād* of 1807. He lamented that men "locked their women up in ignorance, subjected them to the oldest women in the house like 'slaves' ", and kept more than four wives. He certainly did not suggest that women should be removed from seclusion, but rather than men should be concerned with women's religious education within purdah. He emphasized that women should not go out to market if someone else could go for them, although it was appropriate for them to pursue business activities from within the house; they should attend funerals only of close relatives, and they should not attend mosque or court (Ogunbiyi 1969). What was novel about 'Uṭhmān dan Fodio's teachings about women was his emphasis on education: restricted as it was to the basic tenets of Islam, the notion that women should have some knowledge of written law set a precedent which is cited today when people accept western education for women. As with Muslim education in the past, this is not seen to be in conflict with the ideals of Muslim marriage.

A concern with literacy and education is also evident in the occupations of men in Kurawa. Today, the majority of men are in various civil service occupations, mainly in the Local Government Authority which is, basically, the traditional Emirate administration incorporated into the modern municipal and state government system. All of the Kurawa men have some formal Islamic education, and many are partially literate in Arabic. Some of the older men, over age forty, have studied English at night school or have attended some primary school. All, of course, have attended Qur'anic school. Reflecting the general level of western education in northern Nigeria, very few have attained literacy or fluency in English, but most recognize that their careers would be enhanced by these skills. The relatively low level of western education here, as elsewhere in the north, has kept the income and status level of wage earners down. In Kurawa, the wealthiest families are members of the few trading families who live there, for among traders income is not as dependent upon western education as it is with wage earners. Nevertheless, because of their traditional political status and because of the length of time these families have been settled in Kano, most families are not exclusively dependent upon wages for income. Most houses are privately owned and most families receive some income from family farms outside the town. The inhabitants of the ward (the estimated population of which is about 800) as a whole vary considerably in income and are not clearly distinguishable from

other wards in the old city of Kano in terms of a simple notion of economic class. Many of the inhabitants of the ward do, however, have some common identity as members of an occupational category.

The attitude towards western education among men in this ward is evident in the seriousness with which sons are now sent to school. With the exception of *almajirai* (Qur'anic students living with malams) and boys working as servants (none of whom are living with their own families), the male children in Kurawa are in primary school. Some older sons have now finished secondary school. The only girls not attending primary school were ones who lived in female-headed households: girls whose mothers were divorced or widowed, and who needed help from their daughters in procuring the basic means of subsistence, one girl who was a foster child living with relatives, and one girl, age ten, who was married and in *purdah*.

### **Kofar Mazugal**

The other ward, Kofar Mazugal, is one of the oldest wards in Kano. Most of the men, like their fathers, are traders, many in the cattle trading and butchering businesses. Today trade in manufactured goods, transport, and building contracting are also important occupations. Very few of the older men have any western education and only a few can speak English. Few of them see western education as a means to occupational advancement although most have complied with the Federal Government's policy of universal primary education by enrolling their sons in primary schools.

In Kofar Mazugal, as in Kurawa, there is a gradation in wealth from fairly wealthy to poor. Many houses are privately owned, but there are more renters than in Kurawa. (The ward is also three times larger.) Houses can be found adjacent to one another whose inhabitants vary greatly in income, even though most are traders. Many of the families also receive some produce from family farms, although these are often at a greater distance from Kano city.

The women in Kofar Mazugal, also in *purdah*, are involved in trade as are their husbands. They trade in raw food stuffs, cooked food and manufactured goods. Many receive initial or periodic help from their husbands, fathers or brothers, mainly in the form of credit or loans. Most of the women trade in items that can be sold in very small quantities and children are extremely important in commodity distribution. Selling is either done from within the house, in which case children come as buyers, or outside, in which case children are both sellers and buyers. Depending on the nature of the commodity, children either take the wares to one place



outside the house, or hawk their wares in the street on head trays. Some children, whose mothers do not use their services, trade for other women or for men, receiving either a ten percent commission or a fixed rate of pay.

As in Kurawa, women are dependent on children for carrying on daily household activities. In Kofar Mazugal, however, the role of children in enabling women to carry on their income-producing activities is more noticeable. While dependence on children for either household tasks or income-producing activities is ubiquitous, the extent of this dependency and the nature of children's activities varies with a number of factors: the wealth of the family — especially the presence of servants or clients, the size of the household, the numbers and ages of the children, and the occupations of the women. In both wards children help women in their occupations by purchasing supplies and delivering or selling goods. But in Kurawa, given the nature of women's occupations, these are not necessarily daily activities. In Kofar Mazugal, women work with perishable ingredients and rely on child labour on a daily basis.

Women's pursuit of various types of trade and the level of their investment is thus related to the availability of children between the ages of five and fourteen years. Women's individual occupational histories show changes in activities to be correlated with the birth, growth, and fostering of children. There is no evidence that the need for children in trade is related to decisions about bearing children — for there are many other social and cultural pressures which foster the ideal of high fertility, but the practice of fostering, common in Kano as in many parts of West Africa (see E. Goody 1969, 1971; Oppong 1965; Schildkrout 1973), is clearly correlated with women's economic investments as well as with their child-bearing histories.

Because of their heavy involvement in trade, the incomes of the women in Kofar Mazugal are considerably higher than those in Kurawa. A preliminary survey of data on 83 women indicates that incomes are generally three times higher in Kofar Mazugal. Due to the centrality of marriage in defining female status, these variations in income do not directly alter a woman's socio-economic position. However, high income can facilitate mobility out of one marriage and into a more successful one. Within marriage, there is little conjugal pooling of resources (in either ward), but the extent to which a woman uses her income to feed and clothe her family does depend on the husband's income. Ideally, Hausa husbands provide housing, at least one meal per day, at least one new set of clothes per year for each wife and child, and educational and medical expenses.

Women's income is used to help with subsistence if necessary; if this is not necessary it is reinvested in business, used to purchase luxury items, or invested in gift exchange (*biki*) with other women. The *raison d'être* for some women working for income at all, however, is the expense involved in their children's marriages, much of which is borne by women themselves.

### Marriage

Marriage is the most important *rite de passage* in the life of a Hausa person, male or female.<sup>6</sup> First marriage marks the transition to full adult status. The ideal age of marriage for girls is just before puberty, in other words, as soon as the girl is reproductively mature. Most girls are married at about fourteen, but many are married younger, even at age ten. With western education beginning to change the nature of childhood, a small minority of girls delay their marriage until late teens. Boys marry later, usually not until they are economically productive. For boys, there is a long transition period from childhood to adulthood, during which time new occupational skills are learned. Marriage symbolizes the attainment of adult status for the man, but the ability to be economically productive is the necessary condition for this status change. Thus, wealthier men marry younger. For girls, there is no transition period between childhood and adulthood: marriage and reproductive capacity are in themselves marks of maturity, and as noted earlier, a woman's non-domestic economic roles are irrelevant in defining her status as an adult. In fact, since girls participate fully in housework and in women's income-producing activities from a very young age, and also sometimes carry on small businesses of their own as children (see Schildkrout 1978: 128), there is no transition period in which adult economic roles, distinct from the economic roles performed in childhood, are learned. For boys, who grow up in the sphere of women, initiation into adulthood requires a transition period in which masculine productive roles are learned. Many of these require the acquisition of skills that differ from those acquired in the course of childhood work.

The expenses entailed in getting married, especially for first marriages, are considerable for the families of both bride and groom. Both girls and boys are expected, except in the wealthiest families, to contribute to their marriage expenses, but boys even more so than girls.

Bridewealth, dowry and what J. Goody (1973) refers to as indirect dowry are all involved in the long series of gift exchanges between spouses and their families. The groom must give the bride gifts during

courtship; a sum of money is paid to the bride's family when the marriage arrangements are finalized; a formal payment is made to legalize the marriage under Islamic law; and large quantities of cosmetics and clothing are given to the bride during the course of the betrothal and ceremony. The bride's family must reciprocate with a dowry consisting of household goods, provided mostly by the bride, her mother and other female relatives, and furniture and linens, provided by her father. After the marriage and at the birth of each child, but especially after the first birth, the bride's family gives the couple a gift, known as *gara*, consisting of food-stuffs and cash, part of which is distributed to the groom's family. In total, these expenses often far surpass a year's income for any of the parties concerned, and they vary greatly depending upon the wealth of the families involved.

For women, the major part of the marriage expense is entailed in the purchase of that part of the dowry known as *kayan daki*, literally, "things of the room". *Kayan daki* consists of enamel, brass, and glass bowls; pots and platters of many size, shapes, and designs; tea-sets and ornamental glassware; and cooking utensils. All of this is conspicuously displayed in the bride's room and is a sign of the status of the bride's family. In case of divorce, the bride keeps these things. She may sell them if necessary (very occasionally women sell part of their *kayan daki* to raise business capital) and they are eventually passed down to her daughters, although all marriages also require the purchase of new *kayan daki*. In the past, *kayan daki* consisted of brass bowls and calabashes. With the general increase in cash and manufactured goods, the perceived need for large quantities of enamel bowls and glassware has increased. Bashir (1972) reports that poor women will borrow bowls from others to save face at their daughters' marriages, for during the ceremony many women visit and inspect the quantity and quality of a girl's dowry. They do the same thing with the gifts of cosmetics and clothing from the groom. Among women with some western education, the custom of *kayan daki* has not ceased, but the content is changing. There are fewer glass trinkets and enamel bowls, and more electric appliances and china dishes.

In Kofar Mazugal the cost of *kayan daki* is met mainly through the activities of the female children themselves. The income brought in by street trading, or *talla*, except in the poorest families where part of it may be used for food or clothing, is saved for the purchase of *kayan daki*. Men in Kofar Mazugal are generally supportive of their wives' trading activities, often helping them procure supplies or credit. They do not see street trading as a violation of purdah,

since women do not enter purdah until after marriage. Most of the young girls in Kofar Mazugal spend between four and eight hours a day engaged in street trading. The profit they earn is kept by their parent or guardian for their marriage, and even before a spouse is selected, the mother uses this income to purchase *kayan daki*. This process may take several years. Girls supplement their earnings from street trading with money they get as gifts from suitors; and delaying the final choice of a husband can be a way of accumulating money for dowry.

If street trading is so important in accumulating dowry, the question arises as to how this expense is met in Kurawa, where most girls do not do *talla*, and where women, who still must bear a large part of their daughter's marriage expenses, have lower incomes. As I have noted, their lower incomes are related to the absence of children — children who are in school, who could otherwise help in their income-producing activities, and to their reliance on low-income occupations such as embroidery or hair-plaiting. Part of the answer to the question of how Kurawa women meet these expenses lies in western education itself, for at present, among those who are not resistant to western education for women, the expenses are often met by the grooms, indirectly, through the larger courting gifts they make to prospective brides. It is common for civil servants, and for businessmen who have some appreciation of the advantages to be gained by acquiring literacy in English, to want to marry women with some western education. While the girls are still in school, suitors give them significant gifts in cash which go towards the purchase of dowry. Men often want to marry women with some western education because of a general sense of the value of education — more prevalent in some sections of the population than in others, or because they feel the educated wife may help them in business. But very few of the men who desire educated wives expect the women to work outside of their homes after marriage. Despite the willingness of some to send their daughters to primary school, in very few cases have expectations of women's roles after marriage changed. Western education thus can be seen as an economic asset for girls, comparable to street trading, within the traditional marriage system and within the traditional definition of female roles. Compared to street trading, it is an economic activity for the same end, the accumulation of dowry, but utilizing different means. Seen in this way, the significance of the income differential between women in the two wards fades. True, women in Kurawa have lower incomes without the help of their daughters to trade; yet since their daughters are engaged in other activities —

i.e. school attendance, which also lead to the accumulation of dowry, the necessity of high incomes is reduced.

In searching for an explanation of the different attitudes towards street trading and education for women, we run into difficulty if we start by examining peoples' attitudes to these alternate activities. By those opposed to one or the other activity, the same explanation is given: both western education and street trading are said to lead to "immorality". Parents fear that their daughters will "be spoiled" in either case. Fears about the loss of virginity before a girl's first marriage, and fears about pre-marital pregnancy are great, and these are the most frequent explanations for opposition to either activity: street trading or western school. The early age of marriage for girls is explained in the same way: it is a means of ensuring that the girl will not risk losing a husband by waiting too long, until she is "spoiled". A frequent complaint of educators in the north is the common withdrawal of girls from school for marriage. On the other hand, for advocates of either school attendance or street trading, these activities are seen as means of attracting husbands and accumulating dowry. Except in the wealthiest families where marriages are often arranged, it is important for a young girl to be seen in public to attract suitors.

### **The Work of Boys**

Up to this point, I have dwelt primarily on the income-producing economic activities of women and girls, and the ways in which these activities relate to the expense of marriage. As we have seen, with girls, different children pursue different types of activities, the main dichotomy being between those who attend school and those who do not. All girls, whether in school or engaged in street trading, also engage in a large variety of domestic chores, including child care, shopping, errand running, delivering messages for women in purdah, escorting women when they go out, sweeping, and helping with food preparation. Besides these activities, some engage in street trading, and others do not: this being a function of income (a minority of girls in the very poorest families engage in street trading for subsistence) and of the value orientation of the parents regarding western education.

Among boys, children can also be categorized according to different work roles, but there is, as well, a temporal categorization which is not relevant in the case of girls. Young boys help in domestic work, including child care, shopping, delivering messages, cleaning house, and washing clothes. Less often than girls — usually when girls are unavailable, they help with food preparation and

escorting women outside the house. All of these activities, whether done by boys or girls, like the housework of women, must be considered "economic". Were family members not to perform these tasks, outside help would have to be hired. And, in fact, in wealthier Hausa families, some of these tasks are performed by hired help including washmen and housemaids.

There are fewer boys than girls who do not attend primary school. The majority of these are the *almajirai*, Qur'anic students, who spend all of their time studying the *Qur'an* with a particular malam or teacher. Many of them come from rural areas and stay in Kano during the dry season, returning home to help with farmwork when the rains appear. While they are in town, these boys are usually self-supporting.<sup>7</sup> Some support themselves through begging, a not unprofitable job given the Islamic injunction to give alms, through odd jobs such as cleaning gutters or portering, by embroidering caps, or by doing *talla*, for a commission or for subsistence. Other boys who do not attend primary school include crippled children, who beg, or children whose parents adamantly oppose western education. These children are either in Qur'anic school full time, or are apprentices to their fathers or to other men in particular trades. Until these boys are old enough to be useful as apprentices, they may help their mothers by performing *talla*. For most boys there are several changes in work roles before adulthood: domestic tasks, within the female domain, dominate early childhood; school attendance or apprenticeship in a "male" occupation dominate the period after puberty and before marriage.

### Conclusion

In looking at variations in the roles of women and children in urban Kano, I have noted that these variations fall into a pattern, corresponding to residence in particular wards. The categorization of wards according to men's occupations has long been noted (see Paden 1973), but the corresponding variation in the roles of women and children has not been studied. The variations in male occupational roles can easily be traced back through history, to the point where what are today simply occupational roles formerly corresponded to ethnic and cultural differences. But today the cultural differences have virtually disappeared: certainly they have disappeared in terms of the way in which the position of women is defined in the society as a whole.

Islamic ideology, with its acceptance of male dominance, polygamy, and seclusion in marriage dominates the attitude toward women in both wards. Yet the conceptualization of women's and

children's (particularly girls') economic roles in the two wards is clearly different. These differences are related to the different traditions of men's work. Thus, beneath or within a homogeneous religious ideology there exist different "cultures of work", resulting from varying historical experiences. Today these historical experiences are reflected in different attitudes about the relationship between time, labour, income, and aspects of personal status including age and sex roles. Consequently, purdah has a different expression for the wives of civil servants claiming aristocratic background than it does for the wives of traders or butchers, regardless of their incomes, and regardless of the ubiquitous enforcement of seclusion. Children's roles also differ according to the differing ways purdah is interpreted, for in order to enforce purdah, and at the same time allow women to trade, children must participate directly in these trading activities as they do in Kofar Mazugal. But these economic activities on the part of both women and children, geared as they are to the marriage system, are understood not as occupations but as a means towards the realization of Islamic and Hausa ideals regarding marriage and the family. In the same way, western education is accepted for women not as a harbinger of a new definition of femininity but as an alternate means to a traditional end.

The definition of female status, based as it is on sexuality and the reproductive role of women, takes little account of variations in the lives of women within purdah. But as I have shown, these variations are considerable, even though they do little to alter the status of women *vis-à-vis* men, that is, in the socio-political structure of the society as a whole. In looking at the variations in women's economic activities, I have noted that the income from women's occupations is always kept separate from the household budget: housework and income-producing activities are clearly conceptualized as separate domains of female activity, even in those instances where the actual work — food preparation, for example — is identical. Because the incomes of some women, like those in Kurawa, are lower than the incomes of others, some women are economically more dependent upon their husbands than others. In this sense, one could argue that although the ideal of purdah is ubiquitous, it is more strictly enforced in those wards where female occupations are limited, in particular where street trading among young girls is prohibited and, ironically, where western education for women has been accepted. But as we have seen, these differences are negated by the impossibility of women doing little with their income other than investing it right back into the marriage system.

Purdah is said to be a sign of the high economic status of the husband since it indicates his ability to support his family without his wife needing to work. When this refers to agricultural work in a rural context, the connection between female employment and seclusion has a different meaning than it does in an urban context. Thus many writers (Smith, M.G. 1954; Hill 1972; Barkow 1972) have noted that at the end of farm slavery in Hausaland, rural women embraced purdah as a means of freeing themselves from arduous farm labour and as means of allowing them to pursue cash-generating trading occupations. In an urban context the relationship between purdah, the economic status of husbands, and the economic activities of wives is more complicated, since in any case, the arduous work of agricultural production is not an option. As I have shown, in urban Kano, purdah takes many forms. In all wards, many families are only able to adopt purdah because children work and help secluded women perform household tasks which necessitate communication with the outside world. In some wards, such as Kofar Mazugal, women actively trade, with the result that they are even more dependent on their children. In other wards, such as Kurawa, women are somewhat less dependent on their children but more dependent, financially, on their husbands. Thus purdah may cut across class lines if one judges this by examining the economic status of the men whose wives are in seclusion. But it does this by increasing the economic differentiation among women and children, including their access to education and the amount of work they perform.

Looked at from the point of view of the economy as a whole, women and children perform a very large variety of labour roles which tend to be overlooked. As women's work moves away from agricultural production — where its significance has also long been underestimated — it tends to be less and less recognized as work. Thus, we have the common stereotype of women in purdah, like housewives the world over, as being women who do not work. Children's work, crucial as it may be in commodity distribution and in the domestic economy, is often seen as education rather than work. In a sense, women and children can be said to do work, but not to have occupations. Their economic roles are not the primary means of defining their persistently sub-ordinate social positions. This may account, as well, for the typically low status evaluation in most societies of certain types of work including food preparation, child care, and petty commodity production and distribution.



## Notes

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2. Wards are administrative units of the *birni* or old city of Kano. There are at present 132 wards.
3. This does not necessarily imply emotional dependence. The structure of Hausa marriage and the great separation of male and female domains leads to a high degree of emotional independence among Hausa women *vis-à-vis* men.
4. See Schildkrout (1978) for a more detailed discussion.
5. In Hausa, both Arabic school and western school are known as *makaranta*, distinguished as *makarantar Arabia* and *makarantar boko*. This dualism in the educational system of the north is a result of the imposition of the colonial system on a highly developed traditional system, and the preservation of the latter. Attempts are being made to expand and unify the system. For the history of education in the north, see Hiskett (1975), Hubbard (1975), Ogunsola (1974), and Fafunwa (1974).
6. For boys, circumcision, performed at about age 6, is also very important.
7. In rural areas, *almajirai* work on the farms of their malams, or teachers.

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