

# **Legacies of Colonialism and Islam for Hausa Women: An Historical Analysis, 1804-1960**

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper looks at the effects of Islamization and colonialism on women in Hausaland. Beginning with the jihad and subsequent Islamic government of 'dan Fodio, I examine the changes impacting Hausa women in and outside of the Caliphate he established. Women inside of the Caliphate were increasingly pushed out of public life and relegated to the domestic space. Islamic law was widely established, and large-scale slave production became key to the economy of the Caliphate. In contrast, Hausa women outside of the Caliphate were better able to maintain historical positions of authority in political and religious realms. As the French and British colonized Hausaland, the partition they made corresponded roughly with those Hausas inside and outside of the Caliphate. The British colonized the Caliphate through a system of indirect rule, which reinforced many of the Caliphate's ways of governance. The British did, however, abolish slavery and impose a new legal system, both of which had significant effects on Hausa women in Nigeria. The French colonized the northern Hausa kingdoms, which had resisted the Caliphate's rule. Through patriarchal French colonial policies, Hausa women in Niger found they could no longer exercise the political and religious authority that they historically had held. The literature on Hausa women in Niger is considerably less well developed than it is for Hausa women in Nigeria. This paper serves as an inquiry into the types of questions that need to be explored in future research on gender issues in Nigerien Hausaland

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## LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM AND ISLAM FOR HAUSA WOMEN: AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: 1804 TO 1960

### Introduction

The Hausa people make up one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups on the African continent. Today, Hausas live primarily in the countries of Niger and Nigeria, although one can find significant Hausa populations throughout Africa. As in so many other regions of the world, European colonizers imposed new borders and governing structures on Hausaland that significantly altered the course of history for these people. Hausaland was divided into two parts, with the northern fringes incorporated by France into the colony of Niger and the larger southern portion claimed by Britain as a part of its colony of Nigeria (see map, Appendix A). Hausas only made up a portion of the population of these new colonies, however. Nigerien Hausas shared the colony with Zerma, Songhay, Fulani, Tamajeq, Kanuri and several other groups, while Nigeria contained hundreds of ethno-linguistic groups.

The experience of these two regions of Hausaland has been quite distinct – not only during colonialism, but leading up to that period as well. The multilayered and diverse history of the region will be examined here, concentrating on the period since increased Islamization during the jihads of Shehu Usman ‘dan Fodio to the end of the colonial period. This period of 1804 to 1960 saw significant changes for the positioning of Hausa women, and this paper focuses on how Islam and colonial regimes served as important factors to bring about these changes. The heritage of both colonialism and Islam is a testimony to the complex web of relations in this region of the world, making it difficult to speak of “Hausa women’s experience” in a general way.

Hausaland has long been a place of creation, exchange, and conflict – not only internally, but also with other regions of the world. This deep and dynamic history is seen in the various Hausa social structures, cosmologies, and identities that have emerged and changed over time. Seeing the complexities of these processes exposes the inadequacy of narrow colonial definitions of modernity and civilization (i.e. becoming more like Europe). Indeed, Hausa people have long been formulating their own ideas about what it means to be modern and civilized, drawing on their roots in the old Hausa kingdoms, centuries of trade and exchange with other regions of Africa, a heritage of Fulani rule, significant contact with other regions of the Muslim world, European colonialism, and continued interaction with many regions of the globe. Looking specifically at the ways in which women’s positioning in society has changed throughout this history, is particularly crucial to investigate. It illuminates the ways in which religious and political discourse, law, and practice can affect social change in a gender stratified way. While Hausa women have struggled to define their places in society, they have also found themselves defined in ways that increasingly relegated them to the domestic space and out of public life. As this paper moves through many of the significant social changes related to Islam and colonialism in Hausaland from 1804 to 1960, it will become evident that emerging formulations of Hausa modernities resulted in diverse and complex changes in the positioning of Hausa women.

In examining the literature on Hausa women during this period, a few important points become evident. First, the literature on Hausa women in Northern Nigeria is much more developed than it is for Niger. Few scholars have focused on the gender dimensions among Nigerien Hausa communities. Second, the literature on Nigerian Hausas concerning Islam and colonialism, in general, is much more voluminous than for Nigeriens. This disparity may reflect the significantly larger population in Nigeria. Nevertheless, as a result, I draw on different types of sources for

discussing these two sections of Hausaland. The sections of this paper focusing on Nigeria draw from a literature that, for the most part, directly addresses gender. Concerning Niger, however, I pull mostly from a broader literature on Islam, French West Africa, and analyses of Niger, which gives little attention to gender. Examining these literatures alongside one another demonstrates the diverse and complex histories of women in Hausaland. Moreover, this comparison provides a frame work for exploring why gaps in the Nigerien literature exist. By critically reflecting on these different literatures, this paper aims to assess what has been written on gender in Nigerien Hausaland and where important questions remain to be answered.

### **Extending the Historical Lens: The Status of Women in Pre-Jihad Hausaland**

Written, oral, and archeological records have allowed historians to offer some description of the period before Islam began to become more widespread in Hausaland – before the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. One such record is the Hausa legend that accounts for the origins of the original seven Hausa states (Callaway 1987). This legend also gives significant clues as to the positions women might have held at the time. It is the story of a man from Baghdad named Bayajidda and a queen named Daura (one of seventeen queens who ruled Daura, Nigeria). They married and had six children, who together with their father founded the seven original Hausa states. According to Barbara Callaway's (1987) analysis, this marked a shift from matrilineal to patrilineal succession and descent patterns somewhere in the period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Callaway (1987:5-6) further argues that women's titles and public positions began to decline after this time, coinciding with the gradual rise of Islam. The details are not clear from the literature what all of the factors were in this gradual and early move towards male leadership. Nevertheless, it seems that women did continue to play important roles in political and religious leadership for some time after that.

For example, the celebrated queen Aminu of Zazzau (Zaria) ruled in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century (Callaway 1987:8; Mack 1991:110), and Tawa of Gobir ruled in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Callaway 1987:9). Heidi Nast (1996) has done extensive research on the history of the royal palace in Kano around 1500, finding that there existed important public positions for women as tax collectors, market administrators, and religious leaders through the *bori* spirit possession cult. The *bori* spirit possession cult formerly served as a state religion in parts of Hausaland before influences of Islamization and colonialism served to change its status (Dunbar 1991:76; Masquelier 2001). Beverly Mack (1991) has argued that, even after women started to disappear from public roles, the continuation of women's royal titles reflects women's continued, but covert, influence in the Hausa kingdoms.

The period of approximately 1500 to 1700 marked the rise of Islam in many of the Hausa states, and King Muhammadu Rumfa of Kano (1463-1499) played a critical role in its emergence. Influenced by Muslim missionaries from North Africa and Medina, Rumfa began incorporating Islamic practices into his government (Callaway and Creevey 1994:11; Christelow 2000:379). During this time, women were prevented from directly participating in government (Nast 1996:54). Callaway and Creevey (1994:12) write, "By the end of the reign of Rumfa, women of high social status were secluded, and a very orthodox form of Islam had been firmly established." Shari'a (Islamic) law also was established as a way of legitimizing rulers and as a status system that distinguished Muslims from non-Muslims (the latter were able to be enslaved and heavily taxed) (Christelow 2000:379). This precedent of removing women from many public positions, secluding women, and

introducing Shari'a law marks the beginning of substantial changes in Hausa women's status in many of the Hausa states.

Although much of the information gleaned from historical records and discussed here informs us about the lives of aristocrats, one can speculate that these changes had repercussions for women of all socioeconomic classes. As mentioned above, aristocratic women were slowly removed from public positions of power that they had once held. Muslim identity and the seclusion of women began to become associated with positions of wealth and privilege (non-slave status). Also, as Shari'a law became more important in certain regions of Hausaland, it is possible that women of lower classes gained certain rights (e.g. inheritance rights) that they may not have known before. However, women would not have attained equal rights with men concerning these issues. Furthermore, Rumfa's rule saw the increase in the state's use of slaves (Nast 1996:54). These developments, key issues that emerge again and again throughout this paper, are crucial to understanding the positioning of women in the period 1804-1960.

One problem in reconstructing early Hausa history is that many of the sources speak to the more highly centralized Hausa states rather than the more rural and decentralized areas of Hausaland. The information discussed above regarding Bayanjidda, Daura, Aminu, and Rumfa is all set in Hausa states of what is now Nigeria. Considerably fewer sources discuss women in more remote areas of Hausaland, including present day Niger.

Niger has, at several points, served as a less populated region in the north of Hausaland where people have sought refuge from the more centralized Hausa states. For example, the *Sarauniya* (queen) fleeing the Hausa state of Daura in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century apparently led a group of Hausas to settle in the Arewa region of Niger (Masquelier 2001:33). This trend continues later, as well, when many Hausas fled the jihads of southern Hausaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, settling in what is today Niger.<sup>i</sup> An estimated one-quarter of Niger remained un-Islamized until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Triaud 1981:12). In some ways, Niger has been a repository of certain pre-Islamic Hausa ways of life that have since disappeared in Nigeria. This will become even more evident in the next period, as the differences in women's status inside and outside of the Sokoto Caliphate are discussed.

### **The Jihad: Women Inside and Outside of the Sokoto Caliphate**

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century marked a dramatic change in the nature of government for much of Hausaland. Leading up to this period, Islamic scholars in Hausaland had begun to voice disapproval of the *bori* spirit possession cult, women's dress, and public interaction between the sexes (Callaway and Creevey 1994:12). Out of this context, scholar Shehu Usman 'dan Fodio emerged. 'dan Fodio led a jihad from 1804 to 1812 throughout much of Hausaland and established the Sokoto Caliphate (see map, Appendix B). The establishment of this new regime brought about substantial changes in Hausaland. First, in the areas that came under the control of the Sokoto Caliphate, power shifted from the Hausas to Fulanis, 'dan Fodio's own ethnic group. 'dan Fodio also sought to establish an Islamic government and Shari'a law throughout his new empire (Callaway 1987:13). While not the only issues that concerned 'dan Fodio and his followers, Barbara Cooper remarks, "The identity of those following 'dan Fodio came increasingly to coalesce around issues and conflicts related to gender and dress" (1998:24). Indeed, when 'dan Fodio came to power, his policies meant even more significant changes for women. For instance, it was deemed inappropriate for women to hold public office, and they were increasingly secluded in their homes.

Free Muslim women's status became associated with seclusion and veiling (Cooper 1998:24). After the jihads, women began disappearing from agricultural work, as this type of work was associated with slave status (Callaway and Creevey 1994:191). 'dan Fodio did, however, endorse education for women, exemplified by the education of his own daughter, Nana Asma'u. Furthermore, Callaway and Creevey suggest that, through the widespread establishment of Shari'a law, common women who may have had no rights in the past did begin to have more protections (1994:13). They do not, however, specify what these rights and protections were at this time. This same change was mentioned above regarding Kano under King Rumfa, but Shari'a became even more widespread during the time of the Sokoto Caliphate. However, Mack (1992:96) argues that for slaves at this time, only men benefited from Shari'a law, in terms of such things as property and marriage rights. Thus, while women of the upper classes lost power and privilege, it can be argued that increasingly common women at this time may have gained some rights and protections as a result of Shari'a law, at least in principle.

The issue of slavery is crucial to women's status under the Sokoto Caliphate. Lovejoy (1988) explains that the Caliphate strategically employed slavery to incorporate and acculturate women from outside of the empire. Slaves were used as concubines, or as labor in large-scale production in agriculture, mining, crafts, and commerce. As many free women entered into seclusion, production became more and more reliant on slave labor, and slavery expanded in the Caliphate during this period (Cooper 1994:64).

Not all of the Hausa kingdoms, however, were conquered or incorporated by 'dan Fodio into his Caliphate. The five kingdoms outside of the Sokoto Caliphate were the Katsinawa in Maradi, the Zazzawa in Abuja, the Gobirawa in Tibiri, the Daurawa in Zango, and the powerful kingdom of Damagaram, also referred to as Zinder (Miles 1994:65). Of these five kingdoms, three are located in present-day Niger. In fact, Finn Fuglestad argues that the jihad could be seen as "the starting point of the history of Nigerien Hausaland proper" (1983:24). I will now look at Hausas outside of the Caliphate in these northern regions that would later become part of Niger. As many who fled the jihads (including royalty) went to these northern kingdoms, an important part of Hausa identity in this region in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century became associated with resisting the hegemony and cultural practices of the Sokoto Caliphate. Thus, veiling and secluding women did not become widespread in the region now known as Niger during this period (Cooper 1994:67). Free women continued to be an important part of agricultural production in these areas, and some of the positions and institutions for women that had been eliminated or marginalized in the Sokoto Caliphate continued in the Niger region.

For example, the pre-Islamic institutions of *bori* and *karuwanci* have remained widespread in Niger up until the present. In contrast, *bori* met with greater resistance in the Sokoto Caliphate and was later outlawed in Nigeria during the colonial period (Cooper 1998:28). *Bori* is largely composed of women, and women have played significant leadership roles in the cult throughout its history (Dunbar 1991:76; Echard 1991; Masquelier 2001). The *Inna* (also known as *Iya*, *Magaram*, and *Magajiya* in various parts of Hausaland) is a woman, appointed by the king, who serves as an authority over women, particularly *bori* adepts (Nicolas 1969). *Karuwanci* (translated as prostitution or courtesanship) is the name given to the institution where a group of single women can stay and find protection under an older woman, titled the *Magajiya*; it also continues today in Niger (Cooper 1997:27; Dunbar 1991:76). Women in *karuwanci* offer sexual services as a means of income (Cooper 1997:172).

In contrast to the Sokoto Caliphate, other parts of Hausaland during this same period continued to link *bori* and *karuwanci* to the state, offering certain women positions of power and authority. However, this cannot necessarily be said of all of Hausaland outside of the Caliphate. Glew writes that, at around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in the region of Zinder, the king (influenced by scholars in Northern Nigeria) sought to eliminate *bori* and other local practices. It seems that these practices were seen by these Muslim leaders to be incompatible with Islam. Until this time, *bori* was practiced prominently in Zinder (Glew 1998). While the exact positioning of *bori* and *karuwanci* in all parts of Hausaland during this period is difficult to assess, in general it can be said that they underwent less change and remained more aligned with state interests in the Niger region than in the Sokoto Caliphate.

Outside of the Sokoto Caliphate, Islam also took a different form. It was more tolerant and syncretic than in the Caliphate (Cooper 1998:29) and was not practiced by a significant portion of the population (Masquelier 2001; Triaud 1981:12). For example, most of the longstanding residents of Maradi were either not Muslims, or they practiced a type of Islam more akin to the West African Sufi brotherhoods than to ‘dan Fodio’s reformist Islam. Moreover, those who arrived after fleeing the jihad were not interested in certain Islamic practices of the Caliphate, such as seclusion of women (Cooper 1994:64). Thus, while Islamic influences were present to a certain extent in this region of Hausaland to the north of the Caliphate, there was not the same attempt to Islamize the state and population, as was happening in the Sokoto Caliphate. Hausa women outside of the Caliphate were able to move about relatively freely, participate in agricultural production, maintain a few politically powerful positions, and practice *bori* religion openly.

The nature of slavery was also different in Hausaland outside of the Caliphate. Regions such as Maradi and Adar in present-day Niger did not practice large-scale agricultural slavery. Cooper (1994) writes that in Maradi, captured slaves were usually held for ransom. If slaves were kept, they were usually women who worked alongside free women in household and agricultural work. However, in other regions, such as Damagaram, the use of slaves more closely resembled that of the Sokoto Caliphate (Cooper 1994). Some slaves participated extensively alongside free household members in agriculture, commerce, and industry in Damagaram. Many slaves were also a part of the large state slave bureaucracy that developed in this kingdom (Dunbar 1977).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Hausaland encountered two new hegemonic forces from Europe, both interested in colonizing this land as a part of their expansive world empires. France moved east across the Sahel, invading the northern edges of Hausaland, while Britain conquered the southern portion of Hausaland, including the Sokoto Caliphate. Colonialism was, of course, another major social change in the lives of Hausa people. The differing colonial histories of what came to be known as Niger and Nigeria added another layer to the already complex and dynamic history of Hausaland, producing various social positionings of Hausa women.

## **Colonialism in Hausaland**

### ***Nigeria***

The British and the French made several treaties in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century before deciding how to divide Hausaland between themselves. In the end, the partition roughly corresponded with the already existing divisions between the Sokoto Caliphate and the northern kingdoms outside of the Caliphate such as Damagaram, Maradi, and Tibiri (Miles 1994). Thus, the Sokoto Caliphate and

other smaller southern Hausa-speaking areas came under British control and were incorporated into a new protectorate in 1903 (Callaway 1987:16). The combination of the Sokoto Caliphate and British colonial rule impacted the status of Nigerian Hausa women in ways quite different from those of Hausa women in Niger.

As has been seen in the previous section, women in the Sokoto Caliphate were already politically, religiously, legally, and economically marginalized when the British were colonizing Nigeria around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The first colonial governor, Lord Lugard, developed the British strategy of indirect rule, which depended upon indigenous leaders and customs to manage the colony's daily operations (Miles 1994:95). While the British were firmly in control, they also tried to present themselves as respectful of indigenous customs and Islam (Miles 2000:211).

Murray Last divides the Nigerian colonial period into three parts. The first extended from 1903 to 1916, and is characterized as a period attempting to reconcile the needs of the British with those of indigenous rulers. In the second period, from 1916 to 1932, the Native Administration became more routinized and significant effort was put into maintaining the state. Finally, from 1933 to 1953, the powers of emirs and their Native Administrations expanded (Last 1997:71). In essence, the presence of the British solidified and expanded the institutions and powers of the Sokoto Caliphate, while also adding an extra layer of colonial control and law to it. The stability brought by the British facilitated the spread of the Caliphate's power and, with it, the spread of Islam (Callaway and Creevey 1994:14). The British instituted some significant reforms, as well. Some of these had substantial effects on women, but overall, the British were unconcerned with the rights and status of women (Callaway 1987:16).

The legal system provides important insights into the status and rights of women during this period. For example, the Native Courts Proclamation of 1906 allowed the British to authorize Islamic courts (Callaway and Creevey 1994:150). Local Muslim judges (*al'kali*) were appointed and supervised by indigenous leaders (Christelow 2000:382). The *al'kali* tended to deal with cases involving relationships (i.e. marriage and divorce) and commercial affairs, and women more frequently were dealt with here rather than at the judicial council led by the emir (Christelow 1991:131). Miles writes, "Side by side with a British-style legal system for criminal law, Islamic courts had wide jurisdiction in private and family law" (2000:211). As has been noted in other studies of British colonial legal systems (Ali 2000; Chanock 1998), most issues affecting women tended to be relegated to customary law – an attempt by British and indigenous rulers to fossilize formerly more fluid and unwritten laws. In most cases, these laws did not protect women's interests. For example, in Nigeria, Islamic law offered women a smaller portion of inheritance than men and gave them no child custody rights in divorce after the child reached a certain age (Callaway and Creevey 1994).

Although it can be argued that the continued use of Islamic law in the Sokoto Caliphate allowed women certain legal rights in terms of properties and marriage, it is questionable how much women actually tapped into these rights (Lovejoy 1988). In examining the court registers of 1905-06 in Northern Nigeria, Lovejoy found little evidence of women's testimonies. He writes, "Courts discriminated against women; indeed the testimony of women was accepted only through male intermediaries....The bits and pieces that reveal the attitudes of women are filtered through male eyes" (1988:253). The legal discrimination that women suffered did not seem to bother Governor Lugard, however. He writes in his *Political Memoranda*, "Generally speaking, the legal status of a woman under the Maliki [Islamic] Law is satisfactory. She may hold real and personal property,

contract debts, and bequeath her property on her own account, and has much latitude in the choice of a husband” (Lugard 1906:96).

One of the most significant British laws to impact women was the outlawing of slavery in Nigeria. After April 1, 1901, every child was born of free status (Lugard 1906:228). In addition, those who were born before this date could be made free through self or third-party redemption. Obviously, these policies affected both men and women at the time, but the ways in which men and women could transition from slave to free status played out quite differently, which is described below. Lovejoy (1988) states that the concern of the British was to abolish slavery in general, not any concern for women in particular.

In their book *Slow Death for Slavery*, Lovejoy and Hogendorn (1993) argue that the importance that Lugard granted to the Islamic courts was key to his plan for dealing with slavery in a state where slavery was technically illegal. While slavery was abolished in the colonial courts, it was not in the Islamic courts. The Islamic courts would therefore regulate slavery, which continued to be an important part of the economy. In this regulation, a clear gender division emerged in how men and women were affected by these courts and laws. British policy on slavery looked to the Islamic practice of self-redemption or third-party redemption to free slaves. This tended to benefit male slaves, however (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993). As Lovejoy and Hogendorn (1993:98) write:

Women were treated differently on the assumption that their cases were variations on questions of matrimony and their fates tied to that of husbands and masters. Emancipation through ransom was not, therefore, intended to apply to women, although to a limited degree it did so.

With the gradual abolition of slavery in the colony, the line differentiating concubines and wives was blurred (Lovejoy 1988). Redemptive marriages, in which a man would buy a woman out of slavery to become his wife (concubine), began to take place. These frequent and disguised slave sales were ignored by the British (Christelow 1991:135). The cost of redemption was about equal to the price of a female slave before the slave trade ended (Lovejoy 1988:257). So while slavery was outlawed, redemptive marriages served to maintain women’s subordinate positions – with many women trapped in a fuzzy gray status somewhere between marriage and slavery. Yet, male slaves who were able to obtain their freedom often entered into sharecropping arrangements or trading activities (Ferdnance 1998). Thus, men were the ones who primarily benefited from self and third-party redemptions in that they were more often able to gain their freedom and move on to personal economic opportunities.

The abolition of slavery also disrupted the class divisions that had arisen in the Sokoto Caliphate. Until this time, free women had been associated with seclusion and veiling, while slave women were associated with agricultural work. Now, with the end of slavery, spaces were needed for these newly freed women. As freed women became unofficial concubines or wives in polygynous marriages, some may have chosen seclusion as a way of marking their free status (Cooper 1994:73). Callaway and Creevey (1994:99) write:

One consequence of the end of slavery and seclusion of women is that female labor disappeared from what became the agricultural sector. To this day, very few Hausa women are involved in either small- or large-scale agricultural activities.



It should be noted, however, that this is not the case for *all* Hausa women, but rather for those living with the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria. Nevertheless, as women entered into seclusion, they also found it difficult, in most cases, to enter into the emerging colonial economy (Callaway and Creevey 1994:191).

The history of Islamic education in Nigeria and ‘dan Fodio’s emphasis on educating women deserves some mention, as well. As was a trend in British colonial policy, Christian missionaries were discouraged from coming into predominately Muslim areas, such as Hausaland, to set up schools, and the British themselves did not establish many government schools (Miles 1994:228). Thus, the Hausas continued to rely on their own systems of Islamic education. As late as the 1950s, no girls were recorded as attending non-Muslim schools in Northern Nigeria (Callaway and Creevey 1994:59). I have not found an accurate estimate of the numbers of girls receiving Islamic educations; however, certainly there were well-educated Muslim women during the colonial period, some of who held important positions as educators and spiritual leaders (Dunbar 2000:400-1; Hutson 1999). Thus, even as women lost power and status with the delegitimization of the *bori* spirit possession cult in the Sokoto Caliphate, a few women were finding ways into relatively important positions in Islamic religious institutions.

While this brief description does not do justice to the complexities of the colonialism and Islamization of Nigeria in the colonial period, it touches on some of the major points of interest concerning women’s status and rights. The Sokoto Caliphate was not the only area of Hausaland colonized by the British, but it was indeed the largest and most powerful. Through the implementation of indirect rule under the British, the institutions of the Caliphate were solidified and expanded; but they were also influenced by important policies of the British, such as those concerning slave emancipation, colonial law, and education. However, Islamic principles of the Caliphate spread even further throughout Hausaland during this period, relegating most women to the domestic sphere. Women largely disappeared from agriculture, politics, and public life. According to Islamic (customary) law, they were marginalized in the courts and not granted equal rights with men. Some women, however, were able to receive education in Islamic schools and gain some status in the religious realm. This, in brief, was the legacy left for Nigerian Hausa women by the Sokoto Caliphate and the British. These key issues concerning the positioning of Hausa women in Nigeria will serve as points of reference to compare and contrast with Hausa women in Niger.

## *Niger*

The Hausa in Niger underwent quite a different colonial experience with the French than the Hausa in Nigeria did under the British. Their experience living outside the Sokoto Caliphate, discussed above, resulted in a substantially different situation for women on the eve of France’s arrival. Subsequently, in addition to these differences was another layer of French interference, resulting in a period of significant social change.

In contrast to the literature on colonial Nigerian Hausaland, very little of the literature on Nigerien Hausaland directly addresses gender during this period. Given these constraints, this section of the paper examines Islam, indigenous authorities, and the French in Niger and West Africa, generally. Drawing from the literature on Hausa women in Nigeria discussed above, this section also poses a number of important questions for exploring the ways in which Islam and colonialism affected women’s positioning in Nigerien Hausaland. For example, what was the relationship of the colonial regime to indigenous rulers in Niger? What was the relationship between French and Islamic

powers in Niger? What kinds of legal practices and types of governance emerged from these relationships? To what extent were women included in or excluded from access to economic resources and political/religious power during this time and why? How did slave emancipation affect women's status in Niger? Finally, what kinds of education were available to women during this period?

Before Niger officially became a French colony in 1922, it had been under French control as a military territory since the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Fuglestad 1983:6; Kanya-Forstner 1989; Manning 1998:75). Engaged in and committed to a larger process of colonial conquest in Africa, France really began to focus on the territory that would become Niger in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Military forces were ordered in, and several missions were sent out, including the Voulet-Chanoine mission toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. By 1900, Niger became a defined territory, at least on paper, and by 1908, most of its regions were under French control. Many Nigeriens did resist the French colonization to varying degrees in these early days, although the Hausas tended more toward passive resistance – neither collaborating nor actively resisting. By 1910, the French decided to reduce the size of their military in Niger to 1,000 men and move toward control through governing policies (Fuglestad 1983).

Unlike Nigeria under Britain's Lord Lugard, the French attempted to implement a system of direct rule in their colonies of West Africa. Centralization and assimilation were key ruling strategies. As such, the French, unlike the British, were uninterested in recognizing or trying to work with already existing powers and authorities. Rather, they sought to control and replace existing structures as much as possible. In the end, however, the French did not have adequate resources to truly implement direct rule, and in some ways their strategy of governance ended up better resembling indirect rather than direct rule (Cooper 1998:31; Fuglestad 1983:85).

In their attempt to colonize the peoples of Niger, the French deposed and replaced indigenous leaders. For example, in 1922 the French removed the king of Zinder and replaced him with King Mustapha. At the same time, though, they also significantly reduced the powers of the king (Fuglestad 1983:77; Glew 1997:65-6). Until 1922, Niger was governed by a lieutenant-colonel or colonel called the *Commissaire*. At the local level, authority was granted to "traditional" chiefs (Fuglestad 1983:80). In the selection of African administrators in the colonial period, however, a French education became increasingly more important than affiliation with the "traditional" ruling class. Fuglestad (1983) cites Schachter-Morgenthau, who argues that as early as the years between the world wars, these French educated Africans were replacing chiefs as intermediaries for the French; however, Fuglestad questions how well received these intermediaries actually were at the local level (1983:121).<sup>ii</sup> African administrators from other regions of French West Africa and a few French educated Nigeriens (mostly non-Hausas) were able to fill Niger's administrative positions (Fuglestad 1983:121). As a result, a new class of *fonctionnaires*, who were educated in French and assimilated in French ways, began to emerge. Interestingly, this administrative class did not emerge in Northern Nigeria to the extent that it did in French West Africa, as British-style education in Hausaland was minimal and indigenous institutions and structures were supported by the British.

Differences in British and French colonization also extended to the religious-political realm. In France, there was rising conviction of the importance of separation between church and state, a belief they imposed on Niger (Triaud 2000:170). Niger's French-backed secular state obviously differed substantially from the British-supported Sokoto Caliphate in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, the French tended to appoint political authorities, while overlooking religious ones. Concerning

French intervention in the years 1905-06 in Niger, Fuglestad writes, “In regions where a dual institutional structure had come into being, the ‘political’ chief was appointed, and the religious chiefs completely overlooked” (1983:67).

Historically, political and religious authority had been significantly intertwined in Hausaland, with women as important figures in the state *bori* religion (Masquelier 2001:188) and with Islamic teachers also playing important political roles, as in the Zinder kingdom (Glew 1997:66). As religion and politics became polarized in Niger through policies of French interference, Hausa women in the colonial period found that their positions in political and religious domains were coming to have less prestige and power. Furthermore, there was no attempt to include women as French-educated intermediaries or *fonctionnaires* (Cooper 1998:33). We will return to education in Niger again shortly, but first it is important to examine France’s relationship with Islam in her West African colonies, particularly in Niger.

Broadly speaking, the question of what to do with the Islamic institutions and powers of French West Africa complicated France’s colonial policies. Jean-Louis Triaud (2000) defines four phases that mark shifting attitudes of the French toward Islam in West Africa. During the period of conquest before 1905, the French focused on simply understanding Islam and attempted to identify the good and bad/dangerous factions within it. In the period of 1905 to 1914, which Triaud coins “the path to war,” the French considered Islam as suspect and dangerous. Yet, they felt that this “Black Islam” was recoverable and able to be set aright via assimilation and civilization. Thirdly, in the period between the two World Wars, the French viewed Islam less fearfully, with the idea that it could be domesticated in a “secular struggle” between “animism” and Islam. Finally, in the colonial period after 1945, there was a renewed fear of Islam by the French, centered on West Africa’s ties to other parts of the Muslim world (Triaud 2000).

Several French administrators and thinkers in West Africa were key in directing colonial policy regarding Islam throughout these periods. Among them was the first colonial governor of Niger, J. Brevié, author of *Islamisme contre “Naturisme” au Soudan français* (1923). He, along with Maurice Delafosse, advocated “animism/naturism” over Islam in French West Africa. These ideas, tied to social evolutionary theory, argued that black Africans should abandon Islam as they were not at the correct point of evolution for it. Brevié advocated that black Africans would do better to resist Islam and instead move forward on the path to French civilization. As a part of this, Brevié opposed French *medersas* in West Africa – schools attempting to combine French and Islamic education (Brenner 2001:154-6). In some cases, Islam was viewed as somewhere on the path between “barbarism” and “progress.” In other cases, it was viewed as an evolutionary dead end, from which no progress could be made (Triaud 2000:171-2).

Eventually, however, as Islam spread in scope and power during the *pax française*, the French found themselves cooperating with Islamic leaders in West Africa, despite continued opposition by certain French politicians. Some political authority was given by the French to Islamic leaders, creating a group of *marabout-fonctionnaires* (Stewart 1997:56; Triaud 2000:181). In Niger, however, Islamic Sufi brotherhoods did not develop as centralized organizations, like they did in other parts of West Africa, including Nigeria (Glew 1998:135). As a result, a class of *marabout-fonctionnaires* did not emerge in Niger. However, as discussed earlier, a new class of *fonctionnaires* and French-educated professionals was created by educating selected young men in French-style schools. In addition, there was not the mixing of religion with Western secular education in Niger that existed in Nigeria (Miles 1994:230). It would be important to investigate further the effects that Brevié’s anti-

*medersas* stance actually had on education while he was governor of Niger. Nevertheless, upward social mobility in Niger has come to be associated with Western-style education and jobs (Miles 1994:171).

Fuglestad writes that the French motivation for building schools in Niger was to produce candidates for minor administrative posts (1983:120). A look at the numbers of enrolled students, however, demonstrates that the French invested little effort and few resources into education in Niger. In 1921-22, there were only ten primary school teachers in Niger, none of whom were Nigerien. Six hundred and seventy four students were attending French schools at this time, and it is likely that the majority of them were not Hausas.<sup>iii</sup> By the 1930s, the number of French *fonctionnaires* numbered, at most, a few hundred, most of who were Zerma or Songhay (the groups who would come to dominate the Nigerien government post-independence). From this time forward, however, school enrollment increased, eventually numbering 28,020 out of a national population of three million around the time of independence in 1960. Furthermore, those Nigerien students who were to progress beyond the primary level had to be sent to the École Normale William Ponty in Senegal (Fuglestad 1983). Hausas played a marginal role in this emerging French education system. Women, however, were completely excluded from the system and did not start receiving Western-style educations until after independence (Cooper 1998:33).

Fuglestad (1983) also argues that during the colonial period, Islam moved from being a religion of the elite, ruling, and merchant communities to being a dominant religion of the people of Niger. However, he also notes that this was a syncretic Islam that mixed with already existing religious beliefs and practices in the region (Fuglestad 1983:118), and so was quite different from the reformist Islam of ‘dan Fodio and his descendants. Although vulgarized during this time, Islam was not a source of national unity or national identity in Niger until after independence (Masquelier 2001:41; Miles 1994:252; Triaud 1981). Toward the end of the colonial period, Islam was still more widespread in Nigerian Hausaland than Nigerien Hausaland. Taking these differences into account, it follows that many of the issues that arose for Hausa women in Niger were quite different from Hausa women in Nigeria.

During most of the colonial period, Nigerien Hausa women generally did not participate in a type of Islam that required seclusion or veiling. Rather, women were excluded from participation in politics and public life as a result of the imposition of French rule and education. However, toward the end of the colonial period, and even more so after independence, Islamic influences from Northern Nigeria became more prevalent in Niger. As a result, female seclusion and veiling became associated more with class status than religiosity (Cooper 1994:77). Importantly, the nature of Islam and the relationship of Nigeriens to Northern Nigerian Muslims varied from region to region during the colonial period. Yet overall, Hausa women remained unsecluded in Niger during this time. This raises important questions regarding the degree to which Islamic education and religious authority were accessible to Nigerien Hausa women. Moreover, it raises questions about the affiliations and paths of exchange between Muslims in and outside of Niger during this period and how these influenced discourses on women’s place in society. Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered in this paper; however, two issues with important consequences for Hausa women in Niger remain to be examined – abolition of slavery and colonial law.

In 1906, the French government in West Africa issued a *circulaire* announcing that slavery was not compatible with French rule (Fuglestad 1983:68). This meant different things in different regions of Niger, so it is hard to gauge the effects of slave emancipation on the country as a whole. Barbara

Cooper (cf. 1994, 1997, 1998), however, is perhaps the only scholar who has done extensive and published research on what this meant for Hausa women, particularly in the Maradi region of Niger. Because (as described in the previous section on precolonial Niger) slavery was less widespread and of a different nature in Niger than Nigeria, the abolition of slavery had different consequences in each place. Most Hausa women of free-status in Niger did not seclude themselves, so there was no move for newly freed slave women to try to enter into seclusion to mark their new status. Women continued to be involved in agricultural and household work; however, after slavery was abolished, these tasks became more heavily dependant on wife labor. Quoting a French administrator, Cooper writes, “The entire burden of slavery, once abolition is complete, will fall directly onto the shoulders of indigenous women, who had no protections and limited means of supporting themselves” (1994:69). As in Nigeria, Hausa women in Niger also found themselves in polygynous marriages that blurred the lines between slave and wife status. And, as with the British in Nigeria, the French administration did not recognize this as problematic. However, in parts of Niger (influenced by Northern Nigeria) during the latter part of the colonial period, Hausa women in polygynous marriages with wealthy traders began practicing seclusion and veiling as a way of marking their class status (Cooper 1997, 1998).

In a fashion similar to Britain, France tried to define, codify, and implement a system of customary law in her colonies. Superficially, customary law appeared to encapsulate an already existing indigenous system; however, scholars have argued that a whole new type of legal practice emerged as a result of the dialectic and negotiations between the French and local elites (Groff 1991; Roberts and Mann 1991). Regarding French customary law in Senegal, Robinson writes “The concern for establishing custom emerged from administrators preoccupied with centralization, control, and a strong paternalistic and interventionist approach to their African subjects” (1992:237). This customary law that developed was part of a complex legal practice that the French tried to implement as a part of its system of colonial rule.

In 1904, the *indigénat* was established in Niger – a set of legal provisions that allowed any *sujet* (Nigerien) to be tried by any local French administrator in the *cercle* (district) courts. In these courts, native assessors, under the jurisdiction of a *Commandant*, were used to advise on customary law. In the end, however, the average African found him/herself powerless in this setting (Fuglestad 1983). Charlick (1991:36) writes that under the *indigénat* system, Africans were denied basic civil and legal rights, and subjected to arbitrary arrests and forced labor. After WWII, the *indigénat* was abolished by the colonial government (Cooper 1997:16).

Cooper argues that Hausa people tended to have a bad opinion of French law due to the *indigénat*; thus, other sources of mediation were often used. The French did not eliminate or replace them. She writes:

Rather than reducing law to one codified form, colonial intrusion in fact contributed to the uncertainty and instability of judicial understandings of marriage by generating new loci of dispute resolution and by recognizing Maliki law, the Napoleonic code, and uncoded *justice indigène* all as potential discursive resources for defining local practice [1997:39].

In fact, one can pose the question, as Lovejoy and Hogendorn (1993) do, as to whether these other courts and legal practices were key to the French administration’s attempts to regulate slavery or other issues deemed illegal under French law. No one seems to have framed this question as

poignantly for Niger as Lovejoy and Hogendorn do for Nigeria. In addition, the shifting and complex stances on colonial law reflect France's general struggle, discussed above, with how to deal with Islam and "animism/naturism" in its colonies. Christelow mentions the trend at times to promote customary law in the colonies as a hindrance to Islamic powers and institutions (2000:381). Even though this was the case, Islamic law was still used in Niger, although to a much lesser extent than in Nigeria.

In addition, too narrow a focus on court records and laws in the colonial period can give a skewed understanding of the kinds of mediation strategies practiced in Niger Hausaland. Less formal and unrecorded methods were often used instead of the courts (Cooper 1997:21). In addition, Nigerien Hausa women had options that were unavailable to Hausa women in Nigeria. For example, the position for a royal woman to serve as *Iya* (discussed above in the section on the jihad) survived in parts of Niger, with the role of mediating rural marriage disputes (Cooper 1997:25).

In sum, the French colonial regime in Hausaland directly interfered with and refashioned government, law, and the status of religions to a much greater extent than did the British. Women, who had held positions of authority and power before the arrival of the French found themselves marginalized, as political authority was assumed to be vested in men, and religious and political authority were assumed to be separate. Religious authority, which some women had previously held in the *bori* spirit possession cult in connection with the state, was ignored by the French. Women continued to hold onto some titles and positions in the aristocracy and in *bori*, although not to the extent that they had in the precolonial period. Women did not have much of a chance of competing with men, either for the new *fonctionnaire* or other state positions that required French education, since women were not enrolled in these types of schools. With the emancipation of slaves and multifaceted legal stances that could be drawn on concerning women's rights and grievances, many women found themselves in ambiguous polygynous marriages that positioned them somewhere between slave and wife status. Hausa women in Niger, however, continued to work in agriculture and move about outside of the home, unlike their counterparts in Nigeria. Only in the later part of the colonial period did a trend begin for Nigerien Hausa women to practice seclusion and veiling. In general, Islam remained a less potent force in bringing about significant changes for women's status in Niger than in Nigeria. Nigerien Hausa women owe much more to French colonial policies than Islamic powers and institutions in seeing a shift in their status during the colonial period.

However, many questions remain to be explored for Hausa women in colonial Niger. For example, regarding educational institutions and subsequent new class formations of Islamic or French educated elites, how did French West African policies toward Islam actually play out on the ground in Niger? To what extent did Islamic institutions and organizations offer women opportunities for education and religious authority? What more can be known about the relationships and overlap of elites among the aristocrats, religious leaders, and *fonctionnaires*, and how women increasingly were excluded from these positions of power? How did the abolition of slavery affect women in regions of Niger outside of Maradi, particularly Zinder, where there had been a large slave bureaucracy? And finally, in what ways did women, as they found themselves increasingly marginalized from positions of power, access more informal economic and legal practices during this period? Indeed, many more questions can be asked in thinking about the need to address gender in the literature on Nigerien Hausaland.

## **The Legacy of Colonialism and Islam for the Positioning of Hausa Women**

In 1960, when both Niger and Nigeria gained independence from their colonizers, Hausa women on each side of the border were in quite different positions, in quite different societies. Indeed, while they shared a common language and common history at certain points, Hausa women also have had their own unique experiences. Even within Niger or Nigeria, women's experiences varied depending on their social location, class, religion, etc. Nevertheless, by the end of the colonial era, Hausa women as a group, in both Niger and Nigeria, were marginalized from political, religious, economic, and legal power. Women in both newly independent countries were left to struggle to re-enter these realms and make their interests known. Yet, the struggles, of course, were for the most part between different actors, in different contexts.

Women in Nigeria were left with the legacy of reformist Islam incorporated into the governing structures, which stemmed from the Sokoto Caliphate and were strengthened by British indirect rule. Women continued to be secluded after independence and discouraged from entering public and political spaces. Concerning contemporary Nigeria, Callaway and Creevey (1994:193) write:

It is not likely that in the near future the ideal of sexual equality in such matters as inheritance, employment, divorce, free choice in marriage, or freedom of association and movement will be accepted – or even for that matter, granted legitimacy as matters to be publicly addressed. At present, such issues are defined as matters of religious law, not public policy.

Nigerian Hausa women have found themselves in an ambiguous position between the constitutional law of the country of Nigeria and Shari'a law of particular northern states. Nigeria's constitution has a clause exempting from its human rights clauses matters concerning Islamic personal law (Callaway and Creevey 1994:150). Thus, women can be subjected to discriminatory practices of Shari'a law, even when the constitution provides them with equal rights and protections. The tendency to define women's issues (such things as inheritance and marriage) as religious, rather than political or legal, seriously disadvantage them in legal and political realms. These legal and political battles over Islamic law reflect the complexities and difficulties of uniting a nation in which a large portion, but not all, of the people carry the heritage of an Islamic state. In addition, women continue to be economically marginalized, both as a result of seclusion and lack of formal education. Women have had a hard time entering into the global economy as a result. However, many women are involved in small business endeavors from within their homes, such as cooking and selling foodstuffs. A few have been able to find employment outside the home, as well (Coles 1991; Frishman 1991). Within the religious realm, however, more women have found the opportunity for education, since education for women is, at least in principle, an important value in the Islamic tradition of 'dan Fodio and Nana Asma'u. Some women even have gone on to become Islamic teachers in Nigeria. And, without denying their identity as Muslims, some women have founded organizations, such as FOMWAN (Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria), to improve women's position in society (Callaway and Creevey 1994:156).

Hausa women in Niger also have struggled to regain political, economic, legal, and religious power in their postcolonial state. They did not, however, have a heritage of Islamic rule to contend with, as in the Sokoto Caliphate. They had inherited a secular state in which the French, during their years of colonial rule, vested authority in men. Fortunately, the French did not have the resources to implement truly their vision of direct rule, nor to succeed in "civilizing" Niger. As a result, women

did retain some of their institutions and positions in Hausaland, though these pre-colonial aristocrats and institutions also were challenged by the new French-educated elite, who competed for power in the independence era.

As a strong sense of Islamic identity has emerged in Niger following independence, the Hausa have drawn on religious teachings and movements in Nigerian Hausaland and beyond. New religious movements in Niger (such as Izala) have competed with local discourses to define women's proper roles in society. As a result of these new influences, many women have taken to veiling and seclusion as a sign of economic status and respectability (Cooper 1997; Masquelier 1999). Presently, some Hausa women in Niger are receiving Islamic and/or French educations, which can lead to positions of some status and power in the country. However, most women remain illiterate, economically dependent, and politically marginalized. Institutions in which women have historically found positions of power and authority, such as *karuwanci* and the *bori* spirit possession cult, are being threatened by reformist Islamic movements presently moving into Niger.

## Conclusion

Hausa women have indeed both shared in and diverged in their historical experiences and present identities. The events that took place in Hausaland between 1804 and 1960 ushered in a time of enormous social change, in which women's positioning in society was significantly altered, regardless of region. Inside the Sokoto Caliphate, as the slave class expanded, women began marking their status as slave or free. Those not subjected to slave work were socially differentiated by veiling and seclusion. Women of power and privilege increasingly moved from public to domestic spaces. With the gradual abolition of slavery, the slave class started to diminish; thus, former slaves could enter into polygynous marriages, in which their seclusion marked their free status. Furthermore, slave women could be redeemed by men wanting to make them unofficial concubines. British support of the Sokoto Caliphate under colonial rule further perpetuated the kinds of patriarchal and discriminatory laws practiced in the Shari'a courts, which often were inaccessible to women anyway. Women were excluded from Western education and politics, although they could find some opportunities for education and authority within the Muslim religious realm.

Niger had been able to retain some of the institutions and positions for women that had existed before the intensified Islamization of Northern Nigeria. As many fled to Niger from 'dan Fodio's jihads, they maintained a stance of resistance to the Sokoto Caliphate. Hausas in Niger did not, for the most part, practice wife seclusion or veiling. As the sort of large-scale agricultural slavery that was practiced in the Sokoto Caliphate was not practiced in most of Nigerien Hausaland (with the exception of Zinder), there was not the impetus to mark women's class status through seclusion and veiling. Nigerien Hausa women continued to move about more freely than their counterparts in Nigeria and to maintain some authority in political and religious life (particularly in the *bori* cult). With the arrival of the French, however, women became more marginalized, as the French ignored female authority in politics and religion. French indecisiveness over what position to take regarding Islam led them to educate Nigeriens in French schools, rather than through Islamic education. Their attempts to educate a new elite class of rulers to serve as intermediaries and civil servants in the colonial government precluded women from participating, however. With the abolition of slavery in Niger, many women found their labor exploited through polygynous marriages. Yet, throughout the colonial period, Hausa women in Niger did maintain some titles and positions in the religious, judicial, and political realms, which carry over to the present. Since independence, however, Hausa



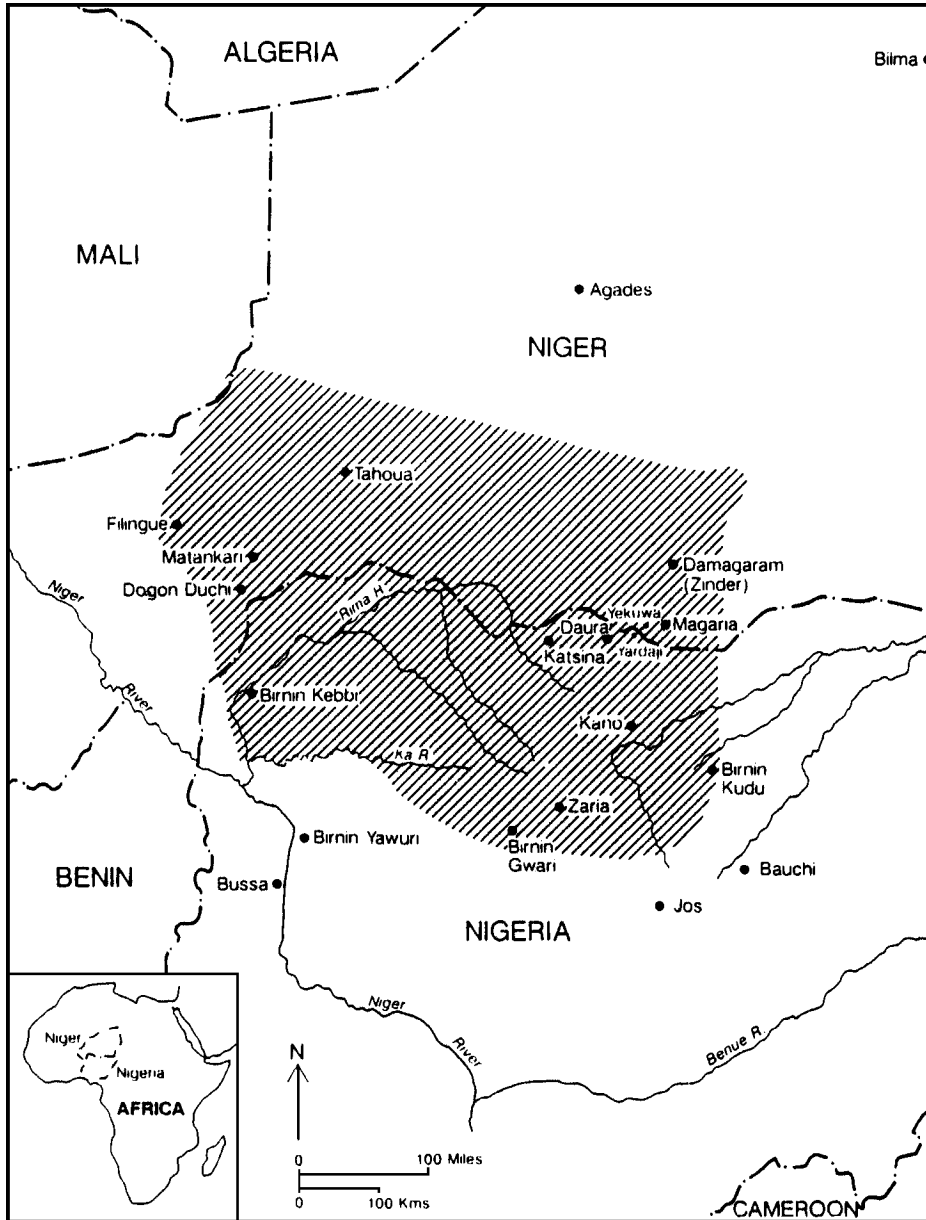
women have faced continuing challenges to receive education, participate in state and local politics, and deal with increasing social pressure to practice seclusion and veiling.

Much work remains in order to understand how Islam and colonialism have impacted the positioning of women in Nigerian Hausaland. Many questions have been raised in this paper, and many more questions will emerge as scholars pursue these issues further. Examining the more voluminous literature on gender in Nigerian Hausaland during the period 1804 to 1960 has been useful for two important reasons. First, it provides a valuable framework for asking similar questions about the positioning of Hausa women in Niger, since Hausas do share common histories and patterns of exchange in many respects. Secondly, it serves as a point of contrast to Nigerian Hausa women who have found their own unique experiences, identities, and positionings in society.

As the world seems to become more and more connected, Hausas have not seen the end of intense social change. Women have new forces to contend with, such as the global economy and new religious movements, on top of the historical legacies they have inherited. More layers are being added to the complexities of the positioning of Hausa women in their societies and world. They will continue to work with the pieces of their heritage and their visions for tomorrow to create their own modernities in Hausaland. From these legacies of colonialism and Islam, one finds plural and diverse Hausa women negotiating their identities and place in society.

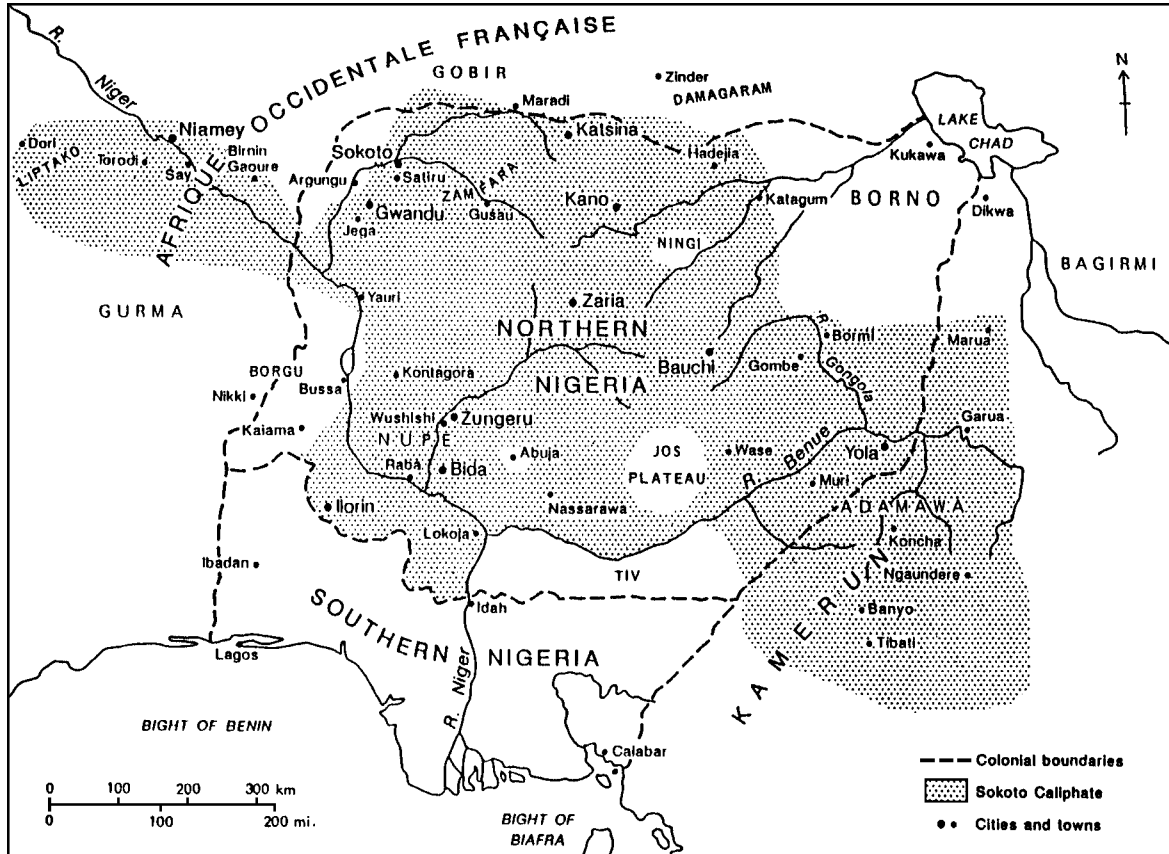
**Appendix A: Map of Hausaland**

(Taken from William F.S. Miles' *Hausaland Divided: Colonialism and Independence in Nigeria and Niger*, p. 2)



**Appendix B: Map Comparing Sokoto Caliphate and Colonial Borders**

(Taken from Lovejoy and Hogendorn's *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936*, p. 3)



Map 1 Sokoto Caliphate: French, British, and German spheres

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<sup>i</sup> The jihads here refer to a specific time in history in which a large section of the southern part of Hausaland was conquered by Usman 'dan Fodio to establish the Sokoto Caliphate.

<sup>ii</sup> It is important to note, though, that these two groups of intermediaries were not necessarily mutually exclusive. A significant portion of the few Nigeriens who did receive a French education in the colonial period were also from aristocratic backgrounds (Cooper 1997:112).

<sup>iii</sup> While Hausa people are the largest ethno-linguistic group in Niger, they were not in the majority when it came to being educated and incorporated into the colonial government as administrators. Other ethno-linguistic groups smaller in number gained more political power than Hausas in the colonial government. This trend continued as well in the post-colonial government.