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College Scholars Project

Work, Agriculture, and the Rise of Female House Seclusion in Post-Colonial Hausaland.

Introduction: Women, Power, and *Kulle*.[1]

With this paper I hope to explore the relationship between the seclusion of married women among the Hausa of northern Nigeria and southern Niger and the economic changes that occurred in these regions after colonialism. This study will have two main goals. The first will be to suggest a link between the introduction of a capitalist/cash economy by the British and the French and the rapid spread of wife seclusion during the same period. The second will be to examine women's economic activity within seclusion and the ways in which such activity paradoxically both affirms and challenges the patriarchal hegemony that enables their seclusion. More specifically, I hope to show how the practice of secluding married women may be understood, in part, as the result of a reshaping of public space into "male" space, which is also economic space. I hold to the idea that to fully understand house seclusion one must evaluate the religious, cultural, and gender aspects of the practice. However, I believe that a study of the change in economic roles in Hausaland[2], specifically the changes that occurred in agriculture at the same time that seclusion was gaining momentum as a cultural practice, may help us account for its rapid expansion among the Hausa within the last century.

If house seclusion is evaluated in terms of its effects, one of which is the

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[1] Hausa term for the seclusion of married women. Three major types of Kulle exist in varying forms of severity. They are discussed in detail in the following pages.

[2] Hausaland is the geographic area of Southern Nigeria and Northern Niger that contains the bulk of the Hausa ethnic group. Though at periods ostensibly united, the term Hausaland did not necessarily mark a political entity but, literally, the region the Hausa ethnic/linguistic group inhabited. The British and French divided Hausaland roughly in the middle when forming the separate colonies of Niger and Nigeria (Miles 1994).

limiting of women's access to economic autonomy, then one might reasonably question if it were not, in part, adopted for specifically this purpose. If this is the case, then one must also examine the persistence of women's economic activity (women continue to sell goods produced in the home in street markets run by their children) in two ways. In as much as such activity enables women to gain a degree of economic autonomy it must be seen as a counterhegemonic force that undermines the economic barriers raised by seclusion. Yet, in as much as such activity finances the household (which seclusion can render expensive since tasks that might have otherwise been performed by the wife must be hired done) it also subsidizes the very institution it purports to undermine.

An exhaustive study of the ideas that I introduced above is beyond the scope of this project. As such I would like to state now the perimeters and limitations of the study which follows. I have divided my treatment of the topic into two sections. The first is a research project that deals with a survey of the published literature on house seclusion. I do not posit that the survey is a complete review of all published literature on house seclusion, but I do believe I treat many of the main texts. Working from the bibliographies of the most recent articles I found published on seclusion, I evaluate what seem to be the most widely discussed authors. My emphasis in this section is on the factors-- religious, economic, and political-- that influenced the rise of house seclusion within the last century.

In the second part I include a discussion of my own observations of a small, rural Hausa village in southern Niger. While in Niger I worked with a Caucasian American woman who had been sent by the Peace Corps into Dadun

Serki as a "Women's Community Coordinator." In this capacity, she had been instructed to assist women in developing social and economic programs that would enable them to gain a greater degree of autonomy. I cannot over emphasize the overtly "western" nature of this project, both in goals and in practices. It was through watching how such projects reshaped the lives of the participants involved that I was confirmed in the idea suggested to me by my previous reading, namely that the adoption of certain colonial practices often viewed by the west as "liberatory' can paradoxically strengthen other existing cultural practices that westerners see as "oppressive." While I believe my observations may be used to enhance my discussion of house seclusion, I can in no way propose that one small village in southern Niger can speak for all of Hausaland. In evaluating the rise of house seclusion in a particular area, factors as diverse as the height of the watertable and the distance of the village from major markets must be considered, since Hausa women are often responsible for procuring supplies for cooking, even while strictly secluded. Obviously in a region as economically and culturally diverse as Hausaland (which comprises farming villages of less than a hundred as well as Kano city of several million, and stretches over a vast territory in both Niger and Nigeria) cannot be summed up neatly in one small village. At the same time I believe that my observations are not entirely diminished by the limited scope of my study, and at the very least suggest issues that further—more exhaustive—studies may find helpful.

Part I

Background: Settings and Systems

Anyone familiar with the study of Islam in Hausaland will be familiar with the

term *Kulle*. Translated directly from the Hausa *Kulle* means "to lock," but in colloquial use it has come to refer widely to the practice of wife seclusion that is almost ubiquitous in Northern Nigeria, and present in varying degrees throughout the rest of Hausaland. Though *Kulle* is practiced in some form or other throughout the Islamic world, this paper is concerned with its occurrence in Hausaland where, surprisingly, within less than a century it went from being a highly specific (the wives of Malams[3] and chiefs) to a nearly ubiquitous practice (Callaway 1984, p 432). Most of the literature on *Kulle* is focused on Kano and Northern Nigeria, where some scholars estimate that nearly 90 percent of married women practice *Kullen Tsari* (literally: "lock seclusion") in which movements are restricted to escorted nighttime visits to other women or to important occasions such as naming ceremonies, funerals, and weddings.

Niger, however, is a different story altogether. Although the village where I stayed is only fifty kilometers from Kano, no more than a small per cent of the women were practicing *Kulle* in any form. Questioning a dozen or more Peace Corps volunteers posted in villages around Niger, I found that most were familiar with the practice, but had not encountered many households where wives were secluded. Much of the introductory labor for this paper will be to explore why such profound differences in practice exist within the same ethnic group. I want to return to Niger momentarily. However, because most

[3] The term Malam in Hausa refers to an Islamic religious leader.

of the published literature on seclusion is focused on Nigeria an introductory analysis of the theories regarding the rise of *Kulle* must begin there.

Kulle and the Male Gendering of Public Space

Kulle is most widely understood as a religious practice. As such, most proponents of *Kulle* refer to Islamic law for their legitimization. They turn to verses such as the one found in Sura IV of the Qur'an which states:

> Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the others, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. The guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them (Qur'an 4:34).

More to the point is verse 33:33 which reads: "Stay in your homes and do not display your finery as women used to do in the days of ignorance."

The ambiguity of such verses often leads to various--often antagonistic--interpretations of *Kulle*. In Hausaland *Kulle* is most often interpreted in three ways. *Kullen Tsari*, as I have already mentioned, restricts the movement of married women to occasional, escorted participation in important ceremonies, and then only after dark. *Kullen Dinga* (literally "lock keep on doing") forbids any outside movement at all and is usually restricted to the wives of prominent politicians or religious leaders. On the opposite extreme, *Kullen Zuchi* is practiced by relatively few women (in northern Nigeria) within the class of educated elites. Translated as "lock of the heart" it allows for free movement

of women who are entrusted to practice proper morality on their own (Reynolds 1992, 3). For the rest of the paper when I refer to *Kulle* I am referring to *Kullen Tsari or Kullen Dinga,* the practices which literally restrict women's movement outside of the compound.

Interpretations of seclusion can range therefore from completely restricted mobility to simply restricted dress, or at the most lenient extreme, "restrictions" which are manifested as simply the encouragement of good thoughts and actions. The freedom of interpretation which the Qu'ran allows on the point of seclusion explains the existence of widely divergent practices in different Islamic countries which are, ideally, subject to the exact same laws. However, it does not explain why such different interpretations are brought about in a particular culture, or why one culture would choose one interpretation over another. Thus the rise of house seclusion in northern Nigeria, and its comparative absence in Niger, cannot be completely understood through an Islamic framework. One must look to cultural analysis to fill in the gaps left by an entirely religious explanation.

To the degree that scholarship on *Kulle* approaches the subject of origins and the evolution of the institution it falls into two main interpretive frameworks. The first, made popular by M.G. Smith in 1954, is the Piety/ Prestige argument which explains the adoption of *Kulle* as a response to

growing class consciousness due to the abolition of slavery[4]. *Kulle*, understood through this paradigm, functioned in order to distinguish married free women from slave women, both married and single, (who were forced to work in the fields), as well as to express Islamic piety (which in some circles acquired a commodified status at least as prestigious as wealth).

Feminist scholars have often been unsatisfied with this explanation which de-emphasizes the patriarchal structure of both Hausa culture and Islam. Of greater interest to such scholars, such as Barbara Cooper and Barbara Callaway who have written extensively on the subject, is the structural nature of the institution, and the way in which the stratification of gender roles and the existence of a male dominated hierarchy have effected the spread of *Kulle*. Conceivably, Smith's explanation could be read as gender neutral, with women voluntarily choosing to enter *Kulle* to express their families' wealth and piety, and to distinguish themselves from ordinary laborers. Without denying the viability of this explanation for some situations, it is important to convey the lack of choice which characterizes most women's experience with *Kulle* - a subject I turn to later.

In addition to elucidating the tenets of these two major theories, the main thrust of this work will be to explore the relationship of gender roles to economic productivity -- a relationship I feel is crucial to understanding the rapid spread of

[4] According to Hill, slavery was never outlawed outright. Several bans were placed on slave trading and

Kulle in the years following colonialism. In the paradigm I propose, *Kulle* served as a tool for the male gendering of agriculture specifically, and public space more generally, as the colonial introduction of cash crops and cash economy rendered farming an increasingly lucrative enterprise. This sharp masculinization of public space not only left women disassociated from the means of economic autonomy, but was perhaps adopted, at least in part, specifically for this purpose.

One of the greatest challenges for any study of *Kulle* in Northern Nigeria is to account for its rise in the last century. Barbara Callaway wrote in 1984 that over "95 percent of the women in Kano city live in Purdah[5] (seclusion) (431)." And Polly Hill, in her study, *Rural Hausa*, reiterates Callaway's figures stating: "virtually all women of child-bearing age in the gari...are in full Muslim seclusion (1972 22-23)." These figures are exceptional for anyone familiar with reports from travelers, anthropologists, and colonial workers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jonathan Reynolds asserts that, "Primary sources, such as traveler's accounts and popular stories establish a pre-expansion baseline" and draws upon Polly Hill's excerpt from the journal of British traveler C.H. Robinson who visited Nigeria in the late 1800's (Reynolds 4). On the subject of *Kulle* Robinson wrote: "with the exception of [the wives of] the king and one or two of his chief ministers, [the women] are not kept in seclusion, but are allowed to go

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raiding beginning in 1901. She estimates that slavery "died a natural death" about 1930.

about as they please (Hill 1972, 259)." His account suggests that wife seclusion was highly specific to certain public figures. Issues of class are not even involved at this point, as it is not the upper classes which practice seclusion, but only prominent figures. Hill locates the expansion of *Kulle* at an even later date, writing in 1972 that "only fifty years before" *Kulle* was restricted to wives of Malams (ibid)."

Pinpointing more exact dates for the expansion of *Kulle* would be useful for a more precise evaluation of its causes, but for this study it suffices to reiterate that within the last century it has gone from being a highly specific to a nearly ubiquitous practice. Therefore scholars who attempt to account for the expansion of *Kulle* must consider the social changes of Nigeria within the last century. For M.G. Smith the pivotal issue is the abolition of slavery by the British. He states,

> With the abolition of slavery under British rule, women formerly of slave status withdrew from the farms and as far as possible from wood-gathering as an assertion of their new legal status as free persons, and in imitation of the traditional role of free Hausa women. Linked with this development is the spread of Purdah-type marriages throughout the rural areas of Hausaland in recent years, for the seclusion of wives is closely connected with their refusal, whenever possible, either to farm or gather sylvan produce, and their preference for the more rewarding trade and craft activities which they can carry out in the leisure time at home (Smith 22, cited in Callaway 1984).

For Smith the abolition of slavery enabled women who were formally forced to

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[5] *Purdah* is an Islamic/Arabic term for seclusion. *Kulle* is Hausa.

labor in the fields to marry and, in their imitation of free Hausa women, withdraw into the more respectable life of seclusion. Such an analysis is partially convincing, especially in that it corresponds to the oft-cited disdain most Muslim Hausa--male and female--seem to have for free women's agricultural work. As early as 1896 Robinson documented that: "farm work is not becoming for a wife you know, she is free, you may not put her to hoe grass as a slave (Callaway 1987, 59)." Smith's thesis seems useful, in one sense, for explaining this fact of women's absence from the agricultural space in 1990's Hausaland, especially in light of women's dominance in this arena in closely related societies. In the Sokoto caliphate, one of the world's largest slave holding societies, where it is estimated that anywhere from one third to one half (Hill 1976, 397) of the inhabitants were slaves before colonialism began in earnest in the 1890's, it is assumed that the abundance of slave labor would allow for free women to disassociate themselves from agriculture in a way that women in other Muslim communities nearby[6] could not. Because the water table is high enough in Nigeria to allow for most compounds to have their own wells, and the donkey was widespread as a beast of burden, women "did not have to play this role as they do in so many other peasant societies" and there was virtually no physical reason for women to remain unsecluded (Callaway 1987, 59). The argument, then, is that slave women, now free from agricultural

[6] I later review an article by Jean Allman in which she deals with female agricultural laborers in Ghana., as well as an article in which Gina Porter addresses the issue of seclusion and agricultural labor in Borno. Also, southern Niger was not the sight of large slave holding farms because of the harsher climate, more

obligations[7], are inspired by class consciousness and Islamic piety to enter into seclusion.

Smith's thesis, though, is highly problematic in many ways. First, it best explains why women are not involved in agriculture, but it does not really describe why the alternative to agriculture is seclusion. It seems that women could withdraw from agriculture in other ways than seclusion, and references to other African groups, such as the Kanuri in Borno, where Muslim women have a pronounced role in the market, strengthen this position (Porter 488). Second, it assumes that all free women before the dissolution of slavery were in seclusion. As previous sources indicate, only the wives of Malams and political leaders were practicing *Kulle*. Primary documents which detail the lives of free women in the pre-colonial period would be useful at this point, but most are silent on this issue. However, it seems that if most free women were not in seclusion, as Robinson and others indicate, then the dissolution of slavery would hardly trigger a wholesale expansion of *Kulle* based on class-consciousness. It is highly likely that slave women would try to imitate free women, yet it is not clear that a requisite characteristic of free women was *Kulle*.

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hostile to large-scale farming.

[7] Again, the law that abolished slave trading in 1901 did not abolish slave holding. Slave holding, as Hill suggests, died of its own accord about thirty years later. I assume Smith refers to this period of slavery's diminishing importance as the period in which slave women were freed. Without the ability to buy, sell, or trade slaves, one might hypothesize that slaves could more easily escape without the fear of being resold. In addition, the slave system was more related to our notions of sharecropping than of slavery, many slaves bought their own land and their freedom with their portion of the returns from the small sections of land allotted to them (Hill 1972, 200).

I return to these problematic aspects of Smith's thesis momentarily, for now, though, it is important to point out the largest gap in Smith's primarily economic account of the rise of *Kulle*; namely, the lack of attention to gender relations in Hausa culture, and his inability to account for the lack of choice most women feel in regard to *Kulle*. As I have already mentioned, Smith paints the picture of women gracefully retreating into *Kulle* for a much sought after rest from the drudgery of agricultural labor. Callaway and others point out how this explanation ignores the subordination of women in Hausaland. In her article "Socialization and Seclusion of Hausa Women," Callaway expounds upon the social subordination of women which makes *Kulle* seem inevitable. Such socialization begins at a very young age and involves a complex interworking of direct signs, such as when girls are told: "no matter what you do you are going to someone else's house," or: "you are a woman and you are under someone else's authority," and culturally encoded signifiers, such as when young girls are trained to act as little women and taught to speak softly, cover their heads, and sit modestly (1984, 435-36). Callaway is explicit about this process, writing:

> Thus, in childhood little girls are rigidly sex-stereotyped and taught 'appropriate' behavior which is, in fact, counter to human dignity, They are made to feel that they are inherently inferior, that they are but temporary residents in their own homes, and that they will always 'belong' to somebody, and hence are not entitled to equal status or treatment, either in society or in law (ibid).

Again drawing upon Callaway we find,

> As an institution, wife seclusion is most prevalent in poorer countries and seems to be particularly accommodated by societies characterized by a fairly rigid social structure based on highly differentiated, hierarchically ordered ascriptive roles. In Hausa society, hierarchical relationships establish patterns of social distance and psychological subservience between social classes within the society and between men and women. Placing women in their "proper" place is an essential component of the sense of order, The social world is segregated between men and women's spheres, and deep seated religious beliefs regarding basic human nature sanction this segregation (Callaway 1987, 56).

Authors who emphasize this structural nature of *Kulle* are left with a dilemma of their own. Unless they assert that this gender disparity is a recent phenomena, they are left to account for why *Kulle* would just become widespread within the last century. Before, free women were allowed to "go about as they pleased." Usually such authors turn again to Smith's Piety/Prestige theory stressing economics, augmenting it to give proper attention to women's subordinate socialization (Callaway 1984, 1987, Polly Hill 1972). Even so, Callaway's structural argument does not wholly apply to the situation of Northern Nigeria. Far from being one of the poorest countries, Nigeria actually has a comparatively high GNP, at least in relation to its neighbors. In fact, it seems that the influx of wealth, and the introduction of a cash economy by the British, must be somehow related to the spread of *Kulle*, as they occurred simultaneously.[8] The

[8] Different authors give different dates for the introduction of a cash economy. For Portor the pivitol issue is the introduction of groundnuts which began around 1900. Oluwasanmi indicates that the cash economy

absence of *Kulle* in areas in Niger which are culturally similar to Nigeria--both are Hausa and Muslim, both dominated by patriarchal hierarchy--only reinforces this correlation. Again, we must turn to economics for a more exhaustive explanation, and one which takes into account the lack of choice women have in relation to seclusion.

Gina Porter, in a much more recent economic evaluation of the rise of *Kulle*, seems to solve some of the problems of Smith's original thesis, while still relying on his explanation of the expansion of *Kulle* as a class-conscious retreat from slavery. She explains how Hausaland became the center of the groundnut production in the British colonial empire and thus provided inhabitants with enough money to hire field laborers, releasing women from the necessity of field work. The fact that groundnut production requires a great deal of labor in the shelling of nuts and can be done from in the compounds furthers the viability of *Kulle* (488). In the same line of reasoning, Porter speculates that the collapse of slavery created a surplus of labor which left women, both free and slave, in a situation where their productive capacity would be devalued. Such a devaluation would make it easy to sweep women into lives of seclusion, especially if existing Islamic norms and patriarchal social structures already sanctioned such a move.

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arrived with the British even before the 1890 agreement with France that divided West Africa between the French and the British. At any rate, the change to a cash economy began with the colonial influence around the turn of the century and was flourishing by the time the British and French left the area in the 1950's.

Obviously many cultural factors must be considered. However, as Smith's and Porter's evaluation of *Kulle* indicates, women's relationship to agriculture appears to be a fundamental factor influencing the spread of *Kulle*. Certainly there appears to be a link between the fact that seclusion is more widely practiced in Hausaland, where women are agriculturally marginal, than in other areas such as Borno and Ghana, which have similar Islamic cultures, but where women have a large role in agricultural production. Seclusion seems to be hinged then, at least on one level, on the male gendering of agriculture. Even Smith's thesis was grounded in an analysis of agricultural roles. Yet Smith's theory that women wanted to distance themselves from agriculture due to class-consciousness only goes so far. The introduction of cash crops made agriculture the most profitable domain at the time. We must at least question if issues of pride and class-consciousness would have overridden the desire for the wealth and affluence that cash crops could have provided. Several other theories might be useful at this point. For one, I posit that the structural argument that Callaway presents may be used to explain how a male hegemony would attempt to reduce women's presence in agriculture, as it would represent female access to cash economy and thus reduce their dependence on men.

Agriculture, Capitalism and the Introduction of *Kulle*

Kulle also showed a rapid expansion during this same period.

Women's role in agriculture in relation to *Kulle* has been given little attention in the literature on *Kulle* because it is commonly assumed that Hausa women do not want to be involved in agriculture, or that agriculture has always been a male domain. Sources such as Staudinger stated in 1889, as Polly Hill puts it, "without further elaboration, that farming was men's not women's work (1972, 335). Callaway writes that "Early writers establish that a prohibition against 'free women' working in the fields is long-standing. For the past eight decades, commentators on the scene in Nigerian Hausaland have noted it with interest (1887, 59)." She reviews the accounts of several travelers and ethnographers from the late eighteenth century until 1960 and then concludes, "Hausa women in Nigeria simply do not farm (59-60)."

However, contrary to these assertions Hill acknowledges that "the question of the extent to which free women cultivated the gandu farms is quite obscure," and goes on to point out how Baba of Karo[9](Mary Smith 1954, p41 quoted in Hill 1972) relates that all members of her family were involved in farming operations. Hill's assertion, and the example of the famous study Baba of Karo, problematize the assumption that free women were absent from the agricultural production Whatever the case may have been for free women (which is actually quite

[9] Baba of Karo is a well known study of one rural Hausa woman's life conducted by Mary Smith when she accompanied her husband M.G. Smith to Nigeria, where he was also doing ethnographic research on the Hausa. It was published in 1954.

important to most *Kulle* theorists since Smith's thesis is dependent upon free women not working in fields) it is *certain* that slave women were agricultural laborers. M.G. Smith clearly makes this assertion. (M.G. Smith 1955, 22-24) Therefore, the division of labor in agriculture was clearly not entirely gender based in the pre-colonial period [10] The mystery surrounding the actual agricultural position of free women may always remain for lack of primary sources, however, our uncertainty on this point makes it clear that we cannot simply ignore the implications of a male gendering of the agricultural domain, or assume that such a gendering has always existed. With this in mind, the idea that slave women--who had previously been agriculturally involved-- would voluntarily flee agriculture as soon as it became profitable is called into question, especially as the non-agricultural status of free women (whom the slaves would supposedly try to emulate) is challenged by sources such as Baba. Further, as mentioned earlier, whether or not free women worked in the fields, all were certainly not in seclusion. Emulating free women, then, might involve the withdrawal from agriculture--but not the embrace of the institution of *Kulle*. Perhaps for a better explanation of the rise of *Kulle*, then, we should, as Michel Foucault suggested in his study of prisons in Europe, *Discipline and Punish*, look to the effects of the rise of house seclusion, rather than its "causes." One effect has undoubtedly been to limit women in the public space--space made increasingly valuable by capitalism, cash crops, and the

[10] Miles defines the Pre-Colonial period as the period before the 1890 agreement between France and

cash economy--where they would have the possibility for financial independence.

Certainly, female independence has been the result of increased agriculture value in areas of Borno, (Porter 490), where population shortages precluded the institution of *Kulle* as women were needed to work in the fields. The increased value of their labor, Porter speculates, "may well account for the spirit of independence, associated with a high divorce rate [initiated by the women], exhibited by many Borno women (Ibid)." Atempts to limit women's economic autonomy after the introduction of cash crops made such autonomy possible would not be without precedent in the Muslim world. Jean Allman reveals how in post-colonial Ghana there were periods where all unmarried women were rounded up and arrested until someone agreed to marry them. Allman asserts that this attack on "spinsters" (her word) was an attempt to curb women's economic independence represented by their increasing ability to support themselves outside of marriage with their agricultural skills (Allman 1993). While Ghana and Borno are not direct cultural correlates to Northern Nigeria, the research of Allman and Porter reveals a necessity to consider the importance of agriculture roles, especially after the introduction of cash crops, to issues of autonomy and independence. Primary documents reporting the curbing of women's agricultural involvement would strengthen this argument, but even in the absence of such documents, such a theory can be useful in explaining discrepancies in the dominant accounts of the rise of

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Britain dividing the territories of West Africa (Miles 1994, introduction).

Kulle.

It is my contention that this sudden adoption of house seclusion was not only the natural result of cultural and religious patriarchal structures which were allowed to assert themselves with greater force after the dissolution of slavery, though these certainly came into play, nor of women and men attempting to define their new class/religious status, though again, this was inevitably a factor. I think one should explore the possibility that Kulle is at least partially the result of the introduction of a capitalist/cash economy that privileged public space, both for agriculture and trade. The influx of wealth from such an economy would not only provide the *means* for seclusion, but the *impetus* as well, as limiting women's access to this wealth would become fundamental to maintaining patriarchal dominance. It is for this reason that *Kulle*, which sharply genders public (male) and private space (female), becomes rampant after the introduction of cash crops and continues to thrive even after agriculture has faded in economic importance. The gendering of agriculture labor and the introduction of *Kulle* was in fact, a broader gendering of public labor and public space--and must be considered as such if the dilemma of its rise in the modern period is to be properly understood.

In conclusion, I do not want to take too narrow a view of the rise of *Kulle* in Northern Nigeria. My attempt to provide an economic paradigm which accounts for the spread and rise of *Kulle* was not meant to supplant other theories, but to complement them. In reality it was a variety of influences which

led to the adoption of *Kulle*. A cultural phenomena of this sort is necessarily complex. In addition, the cultural differences between Niger and Nigeria are greater than economic. Although less in evidence now due to recent economic and social hardships, the seventies found Nigeria in a moment of increased nationalist sentiment. It is possible that such nationalism might lead to the adoption of practices such as *Kulle,* as Islamic nationalists would be seeking to strengthen cultural practices which distinguish themselves from other nations, practices such as *Kulle* which are often perceived as uniquely Nigerian. Similarly, Reynolds emphasizes that Nigeria has many large competing ethnic and religious groups. The Muslim's close proximity to Christians and "pagans," for example, might fuel the instigation of practices such as seclusion which visibly demonstrate one's Islamic commitment. With such religious diversity, visible signs of one religious orientation would be valuable (Reynolds 1992). And finally one cannot ignore a well documented trend in Northern Nigeria towards a more "Islamist" (read fundamentalist[11]) interpretation of Islam. These factors, which are not so acutely present in Niger, must undoubtedly account for differences in seclusion between the two nations.

At the same time, however, it is not only important to note the differences between the disparate theories, but also how they may overlap. I hypothesize that a cash economy not only brought with it the means for seclusion, with an

[11] By fundamentalist I am referring to the idea that Muslims must adhere to a literal interpretation of the

increase in production, but may have been responsible for an entire paradigm shift in which the individual, as entrepreneur and worker, is praised and aggrandized. Kulle is this light could be seen as expressing a wife's and her husband's singular devotion, as well as their wealth. For this reason, a reading of the correlation between *Kulle* and capitalism is especially seductive. While one must emphasize that Nigeria is far from fully embracing the rugged individualism of the west, it is possible to see the changes brought about by industrialization played out on the Nigeria concept of self. Consider the following description of this process by a Nigerian economist:

> The first important effect is on the gradual change of the traditional value system, beliefs and religion. The introduction of the monetary economy....replaced the trade by barter type of economy which traditional Nigeria was used to.

Then later he states:

> Industrialization has resulted in individualism unknown to traditional Nigeria. Group consciousness which was characteristic of Nigeria is being replaced by the desire of independence and the assertion of individual right and freedom that is now most evident (Damachi107).

The expansion, therefore, of a paradigm which emphasizes the individual may be seen to have facilitated the importance of issues of prestige and piety (for both

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Qur'an that purports to govern not only private religious life but public life as well.

men and women).

Finally, it is obvious that the reasons for the rise of *Kulle* are varied. However, pointing out the correlation between the advent of the capitalist/cash economy, the male gendering of public space, and *Kulle* provides a useful paradigm for interpreting not only the institution itself, but women's activities within it.

Part II: Personal Study, Dadun Serki, *Kulle,* and Women's Continuing Economic Roles.

Understanding the rise of *Kulle* as a result of the introduction of a capitalist/cash economy goes a long way toward explaining the differences between the way Kulle is practiced in Niger and the way it is practiced in Nigeria, though again, it is not, by any means, an exhaustive theory. As I mentioned previously, there is a great difference in numbers between the adherents of *Kulle* in northern Nigeria and their linguistic and cultural kin just fifty km away in Niger. In Dadun Serki, a small village just seven km outside of Zinder, Niger's second largest city, I found only two secluded women. Within the village there were more than 250 women who were married or of marriageable age. Of the two who were secluded, one was allowed to carry the water from the central well to her compound twice a day. She was the first wife

of the chief's brother. (The chief's wives were not secluded). The other was the first wife of a prominent businessman in the town, the owner of one of the two tanneries that represented Dadun Serki's main industry. Within Zinder, married women were tellers at both the post office and banks. They also operated their own stands at the market. There seemed to be little prohibition of their movement.

Again, there are probably many explanations for the comparative absence of seclusion in Niger. In fact, in the case of Dadun Serki, almost all the issues raised before seem to fit. Dadun Serki has not been subject to the same type of Islamic revivalism that characterizes Nigerian Hausaland. There is not a surplus of labor, so women are still needed to gather firewood and tend small vegetable gardens (although, importantly, they are not allowed to tend the millet fields, which are the main food supply, or the groundnuts, which are the main source of agricultural income.) The water table is low, so the village only has one central well. And beasts of burden are also not very prevalent. In addition, the French were a lot less "lenient" on local customs than the British, and some of the prevailing Hausa gender-structure inequities were eroded by the French, who allowed women to attend school and take some government positions.

However, certainly one of the most astonishing differences is that of the economy. Nigeria reaping the windfall of the oil boom of the 1970's has developed into a much more capitalistic society. This means the flow of capital

into Nigeria has created an economy in which the primary aim of labor is no longer subsistence farming. The Nigerian is more likely to work for an industry and receive wages that he then uses to purchases necessities such as food, clothing, and housing. On the other hand, where Nigeria is ranked as one of the more wealthy West African countries, Niger is perhaps its poorest. Classified by the Peace Corps as one of four Fourth World countries, Niger has, among other things, the highest infant mortality rate in the world. Additionally, the general lack of capital has hampered the growth of a market economy. Markets, of the traditional type scattered throughout all of West Africa, are prevalent in Niger, but there is still a great degree of bartering (products for products) which occurs. Niger is hardly a cash economy, and Dadun Serki, a village in the extreme east, where the climate is harsher and the growing season much shorter, there is little movement of currency at all.

It is not my intention to provide an exhaustive account of the economy of Dadun Serki. However, some background is in order so that my terms become clear when I speak, for example, of a pre-cash economy. Such an economy is not one entirely without monetary exchange, and does not preclude capitalist endeavors such as store ownership, or buying low and selling high. I consider Dadun Serki to be a pre-cash economy for the simple fact that the day to day needs of the villagers are not satisfied through monetary purchases, and the majority of the labor is subsistence labor. In other words, one's labor is

rarely available for hire. Also, the land is commonly owned by the chief of the village. It cannot be sold or transferred without his permission. He grants farming plots to certain individuals, and also allocates housing resources. Houses are built with very few "purchasable" products, such as concrete and lumber, and can be, if one is industrious enough, constructed entirely of mud bricks. The wealth one speaks of when referring to building a house is usually just the land, which must be granted by the chief, and the labor, which must either be purchased (which is rare) or exchanged for other labor. Food is grown by individual families and stored for personal consumption. Cloth for making clothing, cooking utensils, bowls, and decorative items may be purchased, but this is often done with the exchange of goods.

Yet Dadun Serki is not impervious to the modern world. Children speak of leaving the village to become *fonctionnaires*, paid workers with the government. More and more, positions in which one's labor is sold for money are positions which command respect and honor in the village. Peace Corps projects meant to generate capital, such as livestock loans and community banks, are flourishing. Children make slingshots that they sell in the market in order to buy Coca-Cola, a product for which one cannot barter. There is one table store (literally the size of a small school desk) for flour and sugar and matches. And finally, there are two small tanneries which are, in name, communally held. In other words, the money goes to the chief who, in turn, assures that the village has money for such

expenses as maintaining the well, common vegetable gardens, or building a new Peace Corps volunteer house (which are built from concrete and other "purchasable" products). However, the smallest of these tanneries is, in fact, owned by the chief's first cousin, who is less communalist than capitalist oriented, and expresses his personal wealth with the finest clothing and the only automobile. And, of course, not out of character, he is married to one of the two secluded wives.

On first glance such a village, with only two women practicing *Kullen Tsari*, would seem to offer little to the analysis of house seclusion. I turn to it because, first, I think that it is representative of what is occurring elsewhere in Niger in regards to *Kulle*, and second, because of the limited number of participants I was able to more closely research the institution, the women's activities within it, and their general position in the village. If one is to make the case, as I have attempted, that the rise of house seclusion is, at least in part, hinged upon the development of a male-gendered cash economy, then a village that existed in the very infancy of such an economy would provide a opportunity to explore the beginnings of the institution. For example, I consider it of real significance that one of the women in seclusion was the wife of a prominent business owner.

At the same time, Dadun Serki compounds the problems of associating the rise of a cash economy with the rise of Kulle, in as much as, far from being

excluded, women seemed to be major participants in the blossoming trade-for-money industries. The general attitude toward women and economics was progressive. Women in the village were proud of the fact that they could handle their own households and they seemed to embrace money-making ideas introduced by the Peace Corps. They were supported in these endeavors by the rest of the village. They had begun making peanut butter with western recipes and selling it to expatriates living in Zinder, and they had started a women's caucus in which each women contributed money weekly that others were allowed to borrow for small capitalist endeavors such as buying the peanuts for the peanut butter, or young livestock that could then be fattened and sold at market. This is to say that though the community was still a pre-cash community, largely supported by subsistence farming, the roots of a Western style capitalism seemed to be blossoming (largely with the help and influence of outside sources, such as the Peace Corps). Women were right in the throes of it, carving their own small niches--and, for the most part, avoiding seclusion. A women's economy even seemed to thrive within seclusion, something repeatedly pointed out by feminist theorists such as Hill, Callaway, and Creevy. One of the secluded women was one of the biggest purveyors of this new peanut butter in the Zinder market.

I want to address this apparent contradiction. In fact, there are two. If the patriarchal nature of Hausa culture, which was still evident in Dadun Serki,

responded to women's economic independence by circumscribing it through seclusion, how does one explain the thriving women's market economy of Dadun Serki and the comparative absence of seclusion? Secondly, if women are allowed to participate in the economy even within seclusion, through the selling of home-manufactured goods at the market, how can seclusion be truly linked to women's economic suppression?

The first question can be answered on several levels. First, I have already provided a list of reasons why Niger, and Dadun Serki in particular, is fundamentally less prone to seclusion than Nigeria. Issues of water table, Islamic fervor, and required women's subsistence work were already explained. In addition, the type of economic endeavors I spoke of earlier do not represent a full fledged cash economy, or a move into an individual/labor oriented market. For the most part, the income produced from market activities went to supporting the household. The new peanut butter trade did not bring many new dresses to Dadun Serki, it brought more goats for milk, or chickens, or dowries for daughters, etc. Only in the most extreme cases were luxury goods, such as an automobile, purchased. Thus, Dadun Serki did not seem to have experienced a shift from a community in which subsistence labor was shared by many, to that of an individualistic, labor-for-hire community. It is my contention that such a paradigm shift is a key factor in the rise of house seclusion elsewhere in Hausaland, and its abscence in Dadun Serki explains, in part, the relative

absence of seclusion.

Secondly, Dadun Serki provides the perfect example for displaying how often misogynist cultural practices (as they may be termed in the West) are not always consciously malevolent--which is to say, they shouldn't be read as conscious, direct conspiracies by men to limit the power of women. Most often, as with house seclusion, they are more subtly rooted in other cultural practices or beliefs. Although this was not the case in Ghana where women were flatly thrown in jail for being economically independent (Allman 1993), it was more than likely the case with house seclusion. Women were not dragged from their profitable peanut-fields kicking and screaming into the house. The change was the result of an entire paradigm-shift, one in which women, in more cases than not, had also been socialized to accept.

Having said that, it is also important to point out that such a paradigm-shift has real consequences. For instance, while I was visiting my friend in Dadun Serki she was in the midst of a moral crisis concerning her work in the village. She had been brought in as a "Woman's Community Coordinator" and had founded many of the projects that I have mentioned. They were specifically designed to provide women with capital in order than they might feel more empowered to make their own decisions (it should be pointed out how conspicuously Western the entire program was, both in goals and methods, and represented an intrusion into the cultural practice of the village). However, the

project had many unwanted side effects. Some of the original women had been forced to leave the women's caucus by their husbands, who had complained that they were becoming too "strong-headed." In addition, one of her closest friends in the village had been subject to several beatings by her husband which he had attributed directly to her attitude, that he claimed had changed since her involvement in the market projects started by the Peace Corps. One must not extrapolate too much from these examples, however, they do make clear how entrenched patriarchal resistance in Hausaland may be to any expression of women's independence, economic or otherwise. In such a light, the rise of *Kulle* as an institution meant to limit such independence is an idea less fantastic or conspiratorial than before.

Drawing the association between the rise of a male-dominated cash economy and the parallel expansion of house seclusion raises another question. Most pressing is how to account for women's work within such an analysis. One thing is certain, women did not *retire* into their compounds. As in Dadun Serki, where one of the secluded women (the wife of the chief's brother) was heavily involved in the sale of peanut butter, such is the case throughout Hausaland. These "honeycomb" markets, as Polly Hill describes them flourish in areas where seclusion is prevalent. Women are far from idle within their compounds, and as research shows, they have founded entire mini-markets administered through their pre-teen children in the streets. The women not only were primary

producers for such markets, but consumers as well. Consider the description of one such market:

> The households in the honeycomb market are linked by children who shop on behalf of their mothers and help determine what the prices will be on any given day; the women are highly competitive with each other. Women buy snacks for themselves and their children as well as cooked food for men, and men too buy snacks and meals throughout the day (Callaway 64).

For most scholarss considering *Kulle,* this powerful expression of women's economic power within seclusion undermines any connection between the limiting of women's economic power and the rise of house seclusion. In fact, some propose that women may come to value this market so highly that seclusion is rendered more desirable than mobility. They reason that, if secluded, the women are prevented from doing mundane tasks, such as fetching the water or the firewood, which the husband must hire done. The women are then left with free time to pursue their own interests. Their argument is well thought out, for in Islamic law, women are allowed to keep the products of their own labor. The husband alone is responsible for the upkeep of the household.

However, such a reading does not take into account that house seclusion is not an entirely Islamic institution. *Kulle* also results, as previously mentioned, from an ingrained imbalance in gender roles prevalent in patriarchal Hausa culture. In my discussion of Callaway on page I gave several examples of how

women were socialized to believe they were inferior to men. Inevitably this patriarchy clashes with any religious law that might attempt to reiterate women's autonomy. Consider this statement from Polly Hill from a chapter entitled "Seventeen Rich Men" in her 1977 book *Population, Prosperity, and Poverty:*

> [M]any wives who are active house-traders do make significant contributions to household expenses, especially when they are middle aged.....Accordingly rich husbands are particularly apt to benefit from the increased earning power of their growing number of wives as they get older (158).

The above statement is significant in two different ways. Primarily it displays how women's labor within seclusion actually subsidizes the seclusion itself. Although it is not wrong to read such trade as an expression of women's economic autonomy, for women often use their proceeds to support themselves after a divorce, or to make up the dowry for a marriage after divorce (268, Hill 1972), it would be a mistake to ignore how smoothly such economic expression fits within the structure it has been credited with undermining. In *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century* Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack comment upon how "many Hausa men cannot afford to keep their wives secluded without the income provided by women's industry (237)." Furthermore, as Hill's quote suggests, many men may actually marry more wives in order to increase their wealth. Through women's economic activity, seclusion is transformed from the

expensive institution that it might appear to be into an often profitable enterprise for the husband, as well as the wife.

Conclusion; theory and practice

In this paper I hoped to cover ground that I thought had been ignored by many scholars writing about *Kulle,* namely the connection between the circumscription of women's participation in public space and the changes that were occurring in that space at the very time women were being expelled. In addition, I wanted to point out how colonialism functioned in line with existing religious and cultural practices to produce what is usually treated as an entirely indigenous institution. In fact, in many cases *Kulle* is not simply Hausa, or Nigerian, it is the result of an amalgamation of existing religious and patriarchal cultural practices with western principles which privilege the individual. Understanding *Kulle* in this light, we can better see how women's continuing economic participation in the market economy not only deconstructs, or challenges, their expulsion from public space, it paradoxically, reaffirms it.

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