Islamic Networks and Urban Capitalism: An Instance of Articulation from Northern Nigeria.
Monsieur Paul M. Lubeck

Résumé
Etude comparative de la situation des étudiants des écoles coraniques de Kano, avant la période coloniale, pendant cette période et de nos jours, montrant comment une institution précapitaliste réagit à l’introduction et à l’évolution du capitalisme, et s’articule aux institutions capitalistes de façon imprévisible et souvent contradictoire. Cette catégorie sociale, recrutée dans la paysannerie, s’est développée au xixe siècle, à la suite de l’établissement de l’empire de Sokoto ; le capitalisme colonial marchand (arachide) a utilisé ses membres comme travailleurs temporaires ; de nos jours, ils constituent une proportion importante de la main-d’œuvre industrielle non qualifiée, les emplois supérieurs étant réservés aux bénéficiaires d’une éducation de type moderne, généralement citadins. Un des résultats de cette situation est que les conflits sociaux du secteur industrialisé s’expriment souvent en termes de valeurs précapitalistes.

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The Muslim cities of Northern Nigeria possess a long-standing urban tradition that originates in the pre-Islamic period and extends to the Islamic, colonial and nationalist period. As Muslim cities, they possess uniquely Islamic institutions which integrate and order urban society; and, equally important, link the city’s communities to peasant communities in the countryside. One of the most enduring rural-urban linkages is found in the peripatetic Koranic school networks which socialize and educate peasant students into Muslim society. Though they are informally organized, Koranic schools form a distinct institution within the Muslim cities of Northern Nigeria, as well as within other West African Muslim centers, through which tens if not hundreds of thousands of students pass during any given year.¹

One object of this paper is to analyze the working and functions of this institution in the city of Kano during three distinct periods: the first period of interest is the nineteenth century when Islamization, urban growth and state policy both sustained and encouraged the flow of rural-born Koranic students from the countryside to the city. The second period corresponds to colonial rule when mercantile capitalism and the groundnut export economy linked Kano to the capitalist world economy; despite this linkage I emphasize that capitalist development was limited to trade, credit and, to some degree, consumption. The third period, that is to say the contemporary era, really begins during the post-Civil War period which, of course, was immediately followed by the petroleum boom; the petroleum economy and the war mark the transition from a groundnut economy, governed by mercantile capital, to a semi-industrial economy.

* L’article que nous publions ici (présenté comme communication à la conférence de l’African Studies Association, à Philadelphie, en octobre 1980) permet de saisir les effets différenciés du développement capitaliste, la formation sociale et les formes idéologiques de contestation et d’organisation. Écrit plusieurs mois avant les événements de décembre 1980, ce texte met en lumière la nature et le rôle des mar- chés de la force de travail dans le déclenchement des réactions millénaristes. A ce titre, il contribue aussi à la révision de théories trop centrées sur le seul facteur idéologique. — CEA.

¹. On Koranic education, see CHAMBERLIN 1975 and PADEN 1974.

Cahiers d’Études africaines, 81-83, XXI-r-3, pp. 67-78.
economy in which state revenues from petroleum have stimulated industrial investment and state services, expanded wage labor, accelerated the rate of inflation and thus raised the value of basic commodities such as food, housing and other objects of subsistence.

With these three periods outlined schematically, let us turn to the theoretical problem that urban Islamic networks address. By choosing to focus on these networks and associated institutions during these historical periods, I intend to show how a precapitalist institution with a precapitalist function and supported by essentially precapitalist communities is modified by and, in turn, reacts to capitalist development during the contemporary period. When describing the relationship between Islamic networks and the capitalist institutions of more recent origin, I intend to show how precapitalist institutions articulate with capitalist ones, in very unpredictable ways and often with contradictory outcomes. By the term ‘articulation’ I am referring to the coexistence of institutions, ideologies and social practices arising from precapitalist and capitalist modes of production that interrelate in such a way as to influence the logical development of each other. Assuming that capitalism is dominant and advancing at the expense of precapitalist institutions, then one may think of precapitalist institutions as constraining capitalist development in other situations. Most importantly, I shall argue that it is impossible to understand urban social life in Kano without taking into account the articulation of capitalist and precapitalist institutions.

Let us examine one precapitalist institution over the long term so as to comprehend how Koranic school networks articulate within a contemporary Muslim city.

Koranic Schools and Islamic Networks in Nineteenth-Century Kano

While Islamic networks in the peripatetic tradition predate the jihad of Usman dan Fodio (1804), it is convenient to begin with the era of the Sokoto caliphate because, as in a Muslim empire, Islamic networks and Koranic schools were integral to the expansion, reproduction and ideological integration of the precapitalist social formation. The dominant class, an urban resident office-holding Muslim aristocracy, legitimated its domination and exploitation of the peasantry through the ideology of Muslim law. Whatever position one might take on the relationship of nineteenth-century practice to the ideals of the shari‘a, it is certain that the leaders of the jihad encouraged the expansion of Islamic learning and scholarship. For the peasantry, moreover, Islamic learning offered, together with trade, one of the few routes for achieving upward mobility, as a mallam, as a scribe or as a minor official in the state's patrimonial bureaucracy.

But it was for economic and ecological reasons that the peripatetic
tradition took the form of seasonal migration of youths from the countryside to the urban centers of commerce and handicraft industry. Situated in a harsh environment where rainfall was uncertain and, even when abundant, fell only during four months of the year, the peripatetic tradition related positively to the needs and risks of the household economy. At harvest time, and especially among the rural Hausa, grain is put aside and conserved to feed active farming members of the household during the next rainy season. To fail to do so would risk the survival of the household. Children and youths, while of critical importance during the periods of planting and harvesting, become a drain on household grain supplies during the months following harvest and up until the rains of the planting season. Given this ecological constraint, the tradition of the peripatetic mallam offered a positive economic benefit in that it lowered the household’s risk of famine and even enhanced the skills of the child, while formally serving the ideological goal of expanding and deepening the knowledge and practice of Islam.

Children and youths wandering with a mallam are said by parents to obtain the discipline and isolation believed necessary for success in Islamic scholarship. Although a mallam might take his dependents to rural areas and have them farm for him, many also migrated to the cities and centers of commerce located on the trade routes of the Sokoto caliphate. Here the practice called for youths and children to beg for alms in the more affluent centers of the Muslim state, to study the Koran or more advanced texts and, at the same time, to engage in productive labor either for their mallam or for wages as in the case of the indigo dyeing industry. According to Shea (1975), the latter industry often required infusions of labor in order to dye cloth for a passing caravan whose demand exceeded a merchant’s standing supply. Because Koranic students were strangers to the trade communities, they were ideally suited for casual wage labor in the export-oriented cloth trade that was a pillar of Kano’s economy during the nineteenth century. Shea even notes an instance where a Kano mallam built dye pits in the city expressly for Koranic students to support themselves during their dry season migration.

Within the confines of the precapitalist Muslim social formation, therefore, the peripatetic tradition worked in harmony with the ecological constraints, the ideological goals and the economic needs of the precapitalist urban society. More importantly, the ethics and status-honor norms of the precapitalist society necessitated that Koranic students receive alms in the form of food and shelter. Given the relief from peasant grain consumption which Koranic migration from rural to urban areas necessarily entailed, the institution of Koranic schools was actually a form of redistribution of wealth from the more affluent urban dwellers to the sons of rural dwellers under the norms of Islamic charity. Further, wandering Koranic students also learned valuable craft and commercial skills during their urban sojourns and many probably were absorbed into
the households of their urban patrons. In return for feeding, housing and sometimes clothing the students of a mallam, the head of the household could take advantage of his scholarly and ritual services. Usually, the peripatetic mallam lived in the entryroom of an urban compound, thus the term was coined mallamin tsoro (lit.: ‘entryway mallam’). Sons often carried on the relationship that had been established between their father and a patron.

Rural-urban linkages thus reduced the domination of the city over the countryside, and new ideas both religious and secular were disseminated from urban centers to the countryside. To conclude, Islamic and Koranic networks functioned to integrate both ideologically and socially separated rural and urban areas of the precapitalist social formation. In reproducing the ideological and political conditions for the maintenance of the Muslim social formation, the peripatetic Koranic school network reduced the burdens of a peasantry leading a precarious existence within a harsh and uncertain environment. Koranic students residing in urban areas not only were the recipients of urban charity and social redistribution, but they also provided an additional source of labor for craft and commercial enterprises. Finally, it is noteworthy that peripatetic Koranic schools thrived because, being positively integrated into the economic needs of the urban economy, they were supported by the dominant class that controlled the state.

Koranic Networks, Colonial Rule and Mercantile Capitalism

Colonial rule did not interfere with Islamic practice in the Sokoto caliphate. In fact, indirect rule created an alliance between a faction of the Muslim aristocracy and the colonial state in which foreign trading firms, acting through layers of agents, linked the pre-existing peasant household and market sectors to the capitalist world economy. In this sense, merchant capitalism, though subordinated to industrial capitalism located in Western Europe, was grafted onto the pre-existing peasant economy. Because neither white settlers, mining capital nor foreign plantations accompanied British overrule, capitalism did not completely penetrate the rural economy, except through trade, credit and new items of consumption. In urban centers such as Kano, foreign firms employed seasonal wage laborers only during the evacuation of peasant-produced staples such as groundnuts and cotton. Hence, capitalism at the level of production, either in agriculture, mining or industry, was not introduced to any significant degree during the colonial period. As a result, a backward, colonial form of capitalism was articulated onto a precapitalist social formation. This process strengthened the technical domination of the ruling class over the peasantry; reinforced and even extended the influence of Islamic institutions, in part as a result of Muslim resis-
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Islamic Networks during the Period of Semi-Industrial Capitalism

Prior to the years 1974-75 when the effects of the petroleum revenues accelerated capitalist growth, state centralization and inflated the prices of the means of subsistence, Koranic students continued to relate harmoniously to the urban economy and were even absorbed into Kano's industrial labor force. It is noteworthy that among those Hausa and Fulani workers enumerated in an industrial survey during 1971, 13.8 percent, responding to an open-ended question, stated that they had initially migrated to Kano in order to pursue Koranic studies. Clearly, much of the historical pattern of seasonal peripatetic migration from the rural areas to urban Kano did continue, and articulated first to the urban labor market and, from there, to the industries stimulated by the production needs arising from the Nigerian Civil War.

If one examines the daily life of Koranic students, one discovers that...
they rise early in the morning to pray and study their lessons until mid-morning. Then it is customary for students to pursue casual labor or handicrafts. The latter involve diverse activities such as making multicolored and distinctly Muslim caps, sewing buttons on garments for their *mallam*, dyeing cloth in the traditional style or, for older students, repairing dried mud houses during the dry season. Within the public markets, the Islamic institutional influence on the bazaar economy traditionally allows Koranic students to carry packages for shoppers. To support the students, therefore, is a form of almsgiving for the Muslim shopper. Examples abound of the way in which students, especially during the dry season, fulfill the need for casual labor in the Muslim cities of Northern Nigeria. On a more permanent basis, the seclusion of married women leaves to children the task of transporting raw materials and finished products from one household to another and from the households to the market: women who do not have suitable children often rely on Koranic students for these services.

It is also of interest to note that the status of Koranic student exists as an objective category in the minds of those youths who migrate to cities purely for economic reasons. This was apparent when I interviewed several factory workers regarding their adjustment to the city. Youths who were new to the city and who lacked patronage or other support actually assumed the status of Koranic student in order to subsist on the alms distributed in the evening to students who chanted Koranic verses in front of each household. In this sense, the status of Koranic student functions as a precapitalist subsistence institution, a kind of socially defined level of subsistence that assures minimal survival for youths migrating to the city. Moreover, the fact that this subsistence institution is Islamic means that it resists the penetration of capitalism better than most precapitalist institutions.

Given the introduction of capitalist production in the form of import-substitution industries during the late fifties and the sixties, how do Koranic networks relate to the urban labor market and to industrial wage labor? Of course, the stated origins and purpose of both activities are opposed: on the one hand, Koranic students seek casual wage labor in order to pursue Islamic learning and thus reproduce, as much as is historically possible, the precapitalist institutions that gave rise to Islamic society. And on the other hand, the labor market acts to allocate labor mostly to factories, whose ultimate purpose is to accumulate capital and to expand capitalist industrialization. Curiously, the two activities — Koranic schooling and industrial wage labor — are both harmonious and antagonistic to each other. Interviews with industrial workers indicate that, having carried packages to the market or participated in casual labor, Koranic students gradually become absorbed into the urban labor market. Oftentimes, factory managers recruit temporary industrial labor at public markets or at transportation centers where a large and competitive
pool of labor is readily available. It is at such sites that the two institutions socially intersect (i.e. articulate) in such a way that Koranic school students are absorbed into the industrial labor force. Still other Koranic students *cum* industrial workers state that they freely chose to enter industrial labor because they wanted to acquire new objects of consumption, or because they wished to marry and needed a steady income to support their wives.

In several previous papers I have shown how Koranic students and *mailam* form a distinct status group that is interwoven within an emerging industrial proletariat. At times, this status group resisted forms of industrial discipline that contradict the ritual obligations required of Muslims, such as correct prayer-time. In several instances, Muslim resistance to the discipline of capitalist production, though in origin and purpose seeking to fulfill a precapitalist ritual obligation, actually strengthened working class solidarity and even stimulated the formation of trade unions. Furthermore, a rigorous statistical analysis showed that there was a moderate to strong correlation between participation in Islamic institutions — Koranic schools and Islamic brotherhoods — and support for working-class struggle and for working-class organizations. In this instance, a precapitalist institution articulates within a class formed by capitalism in such a way as to support class conflict on the part of Muslim workers. In all instances, moreover, the more a worker participated in Muslim institutions, the more likely he was to demand respect for his 'rights', to resist proletarianization and the domination of supervisors, and to agree with the statement that 'Islam agreed with striking for a fair reason'. I mention this in passing for, although it does not directly concern the subject of this paper, it provides further evidence that specifies the outcomes of the articulation of capitalist and precapitalist institutions.

To summarize, prior to the petroleum boom, Koranic school networks articulated with the urban labor market and within the industrial working class in both contradictory and complementary ways. Most students passed through the urban labor market but returned to their rural areas when the rains signaled the onset of the planting season. For these students, precapitalist institutions continued to function for they relieved the peasant household of feeding marginally productive members and maintained the ideological conditions upon which the reproduction of the Muslim Hausa-speaking household depended. Nevertheless, although rural-urban linkages were maintained, cities continued to grow and receive a disproportionate share of investment and amenities, and it seems that, over the last decade, a larger proportion of seasonal Koranic school migrants remained in the city. Moreover, even if youths did not

2. References to work on this subject can be found in Lubeck 1977, 1978, 1980, and *fthcg*. 
stay beyond the rainy season, dry season Koranic networks did initiate them to the advantages and amenities of urban life and thus stimulated interest in permanent migration to cities such as Kano. Therefore, one may observe how the precapitalist institution of the peripatetic Koranic school, by introducing them to peripheral capitalist urban processes, erodes the commitment of youths to village life and precapitalist peasant methods of production. Finally, as rural incomes were eroded by natural causes such as groundnut diseases and drought as well as by the systematic neglect of the rural sector by state planners, Koranic students grew in numbers, and they came to be labeled as vagabonds and street urchins by the urban dwellers. Hence, by the time of the onset of the petroleum boom, Koranic students had become a large floating population, a social category whose experience reflected many of the tensions inherent in Nigerian peripheral capitalist development, but who nevertheless was maintained by the subsistence ethic and the norms of Islamic charity held by urban dwellers.

Urban Growth during the Petroleum Boom: Strains in Koranic Networks

The magnitude of change brought into the Nigerian economy by the rise in petroleum prices during the decade of the seventies can be gauged from the following statistics: in 1970, total federal revenues including earnings from all export commodities amounted to approximately one billion dollars; by 1980 that figure was approaching 24 billion dollars. What were the consequences of this massive infusion of wealth as mediated by state institutions for a Northern Muslim city such as Kano? To begin with, one must understand that the influx of revenue occurred at the same time as a severe drought, so that the balance of rural-urban relations was undermined by both natural and socio-economic factors. Let us first take the effects of petroleum revenue: state infrastructural projects, private industrial investments, conservative real estate investments by the petty bourgeoisie, and a rapid rise in economic activity by state agencies, international firms and banks and local capitalists created a previously unimaginable demand for unskilled wage labor. At the same time, high urban wages exerted pressure on agrarian labor markets so that food production declined both from drought and from the effects of the urban-centered petroleum boom. The distribution of petroleum revenue was most uneven so that it increased the inequality of wealth in Kano as compared to an earlier period. New standards of internationalized capitalist consumption replaced earlier, more restrained forms of consumption. Greater residential segregation along class lines appeared, with the affluent living in recently built modern cement houses in new high income areas, while the poor were often forced by rising rents and
the process of ‘gentrification’ to move to peripheral areas of the city, usually constructed of traditional materials.

The inflation rate, which varied between 20 and 50 percent during the latter years of the decade, presented the greatest threat to the subsistence ethic and the precapitalist institutions which maintained Koranic students in urban centers. Let us examine the cost of food, which is the most important single need of a seasonal or permanent Koranic student. In November of 1971 a measure of millet cost 0.17 naira, a beer-bottle of groundnut oil cost 0.25 naira and a kilo of beef cost 0.93 naira. By November of 1978 the respective prices had risen to 1.10, 1.25 and 2.50 naira. Food was no longer cheap relative to urban wages. The enormous demand for food, the introduction of new tastes for imported foods such as rice and white flour and the widespread practice of hoarding and speculating in foodstuffs undermined the institutional conditions that allowed the precapitalist subsistence ethic to articulate relatively harmoniously with mercantile capitalism. Most importantly, the petroleum boom fostered a deepening of capitalist development in Kano in that a class of entrepreneurs emerged to distribute and, to some degree, produce goods to be consumed by urban wage earners who were themselves a product of the petroleum boom, e.g. wage goods.

Besides food, the harmonious functioning of the peripatetic Koranic school institution requires that housing be provided for mallam and their students. While shelter was still available, the congestion in the lower-class residential areas produced widespread overcrowding and exerted a visible strain on the Koranic school subsistence ethic. Housing construction, moreover, underwent changes that affected Koranic students. First, rather than constructing a traditionally-styled compound which afforded more space for mallamin tsoro and their students, entrepreneurs constructed multi-story compounds in which every space was built up for leasing to wage-earning tenants. Secondly, middle-class housing, constructed of modern cement blocks and in modern European style, often replaced traditional mud-constructed compounds. Not only did this innovation tend to discourage Koranic students, but the move away from traditional materials to cement block and even the use of cement plastering of mud buildings eliminated casual laboring opportunities for students. Here the rise in the cost of wage labor altered construction practices away from labor intensive traditional techniques toward modern cement block construction which did not require yearly mud plastering by unskilled laborers. Finally, the price of urban land increased enormously during this period. Whereas one could purchase a housing plot in a working-class area outside the old city for two to three hundred naira during 1970, by 1978 the price had risen to over seven thousand naira. One immediate effect of land inflation is that lower-

3: En 1980, 1 naira = 1.87 dollar.
class *mallam* will encounter great difficulty in purchasing land for housing their students, and further, that the tradition of making charitable grants of land for a mosque and school will become more costly for the benefactors. All of these factors tend to undermine the material conditions upon which the peripatetic Koranic school rested.

The petroleum boom has enabled the federal state to initiate an ambitious program of Universal Primary Education (UPE). Prior to this program there was little state investment in primary school education in Northern Nigeria except in urban centers. For example, in the early years of the seventies less than ten percent of Kano state primary school-aged children attended primary school. Moreover, most of this enrollment was in urban centers, while the degree of primary school enrollment in rural areas was negligible. One of the certain effects of this program will be to accelerate the rural drift which has already overburdened urban services and strained the subsistence institutions sustaining peripatetic Koranic schools. Yet, in the case of UPE, a more important social change has occurred which will affect both the wandering *mallam* and his Koranic students. There is sound evidence to confirm that even illiterate factory workers recognize that the route to prosperity for their sons passes through the modern educational system. Even in 1972, for example, both the workers and residents of Tudun Wada, where I conducted fieldwork, recognized that western education is critical to the advancement of their children in modern Nigeria. To be sure, parents state that they will continue to send their sons to Koranic school in the evening. Yet the virtual monopoly over education still enjoyed by the *mallam* is certainly threatened by this change. Of course, *mallam* and Koranic education will not disappear. Nevertheless, the status of the *mallam* and the Koranic student, rooted as they are in the reproduction of a precapitalist Muslim state, will gradually be displaced by modern education, English literacy and a status system based on modern education. Until now industries were forced to recruit uneducated workers, which included Koranic students, but, with the supply of primary school-leavers on the rise, it is certain that primary school education will become a minimum standard for employment, as it has already become in Southern Nigerian cities. Hence, both the introduction of western education and stricter educational standards on the part of factory recruiters will contribute to the marginalization and status displacement of peripatetic *mallam* and their Koranic students.

If one turns to the rural areas which supply youths to the peripatetic Koranic schools, the fact that western education is necessary for success in modern Nigeria is still to be recognized. Instead, I expect that, for ecological and economic reasons, parents will continue to send sons to be educated in the Muslim tradition. Thus, while those engaged in the most advanced sector from the point of view of capitalist production are altering their children’s education in order to cope with new realities, those isolated from these changes in the rural areas will continue to repro-
duce the historical ideal of the precapitalist society. Oftentimes the reproduction of this historical ideal is a conscious act of resistance against the gradual penetration of these areas by state and market-sponsored capitalist institutions (i.e. capitalist farming, urban spatial encroachment on peasant lands, state and World Bank sponsored irrigation schemes and state policies that undermine the rural economy).

The Articulation of Islam and Capitalism: From Harmony to Crisis

Finally, I want to leave the reader with some informed speculations about the consequences that might result from the undermining of the precapitalist subsistence ethic and the institutional basis of the peripatetic Koranic school. To be sure, the flow of Koranic students and peripatetic mallam will continue from the countryside to cities such as Kano. But, at the same time, both the material conditions that sustained them and the status-honor accorded them will be reduced by the social and economic forces associated with the penetration of capitalism at all levels of Kano society. Here it is likely that the relatively harmonious articulation of a precapitalist Muslim institution to an urban capitalist society will undergo severe strains and that, as a result, these tensions will be refracted into the urban social milieu in which the peripatetic mallam subsist and from which they draw their social strength.

One can therefore expect archaic forms of protest undertaken by mallam who might publicly denounce the existing political authorities for failing to support the Koranic education as Islamic tradition requires. One such protest occurred in front of a Friday mosque during November 1972. Here one observes that the classic elements of urban protest are present: the deepening of capitalist social relations which has undermined standards of consumption and of what Thompson (1971) has termed the ‘moral economy’ of the popular classes; a publicly understood precapitalist ideology (i.e. Islam, with a tradition of wandering, puritanical mallam denouncing the corruption of existing authorities); and a new set of educational needs which undermines the status of mallam and which promises to render them socially marginal vis-à-vis the new capitalist order. Remember that these social conditions exist in a situation where rural-urban imbalances of such a scale were previously unknown and where new accumulations of visible wealth cannot be accounted for by legitimate means of income. Under such conditions, therefore, the relationship of this precapitalist institution to emerging forms of capitalism in Kano will probably cease to articulate harmoniously.

Furthermore, in addition to archaic forms of protest, one can expect the tension between the precapitalist and capitalist institutions to combine with other forms of social grievances, so that precapitalist and capitalist forms of urban protest will coexist within the same popular
movement. Again, the latter is a speculation, but the tension generated by rapid petroleum growth in other Muslim societies certainly supports the possibility of such an outcome.

Santa Cruz, Merrill College, University of California.

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