

Towards a political history of youth in Muslim northern Nigeria 1750-2000

Murray Last

University College London

Abstract

Muslim “youth” have come to power in northern Nigeria quite dramatically on at least four occasions over the last two hundred years. First, the Sokoto jihad of 1804-8; then at the time of the British colonial take-over, ca.1900-10; next, in the 1950s, with the advent of party politics as Independence was being prepared for; and finally, most recently ca. 1997 to the present day, when local government councils and the enforcement of shari’a law are being largely run by ‘the young’. There might seem to be a pattern to this - every forty years or so - as yesterday’s youth, finally grown old, are replaced at last by tomorrow’s young (with inherited power passing first from brother to brother before going from father to son; there was, incidentally, a major generational change ‘on schedule’ in 1845-55). But it’s not, it seems, as simple as this.

‘Youth’ in Hausaland is not just biological: it’s a style of behaviour, of action; it’s a matter of status too - and defined in contrast to the proper deportment of the ‘mature’ or ‘adult’, of elders and authority. It affects men more than women, if only because men in a Muslim society are more often in the public domain. Furthermore, seniority plays a very important part in everyday culture: even men’s names may indicate their birth order (from one to nine, but nine is rare!); recently an election victor has offered his newly won governorship to an opponent who was his senior (the senior declined). Potential conflict between the young and the old is (or was) prevented by maintaining spatial separation: the young withdraw to the edges - of the house, the town, the emirate - before eventually returning to take over the centre.

The question today is whether all this has changed: whether effectively the ‘old’ have been removed permanently from power; or (to put it differently) do the old have to behave like the ‘young’ in order to exercise power? Have the instability, the violence, the pursuit of wealth - associated with a ‘young state’ - so become the norm that the disorder will persist, preventing today’s young holding on to power and turning, as other youths-in-power did before them, into a generation of the ‘mature’ and re-asserting in their turn the old-style Muslim values that gave Hausa culture its underlying stability at the core of society? In this paper, the past will be asked how? and why? - since part of the answer may lie in where historians look, on what particular spaces they focus their gaze, even on what demographic data they can muster. But other parts of the answer might lie in military government, in the ‘oil doom’ and the current politico-cultural skew that sudden access to such an unparalleled ‘tap’ of unearned money has given rise to.

Towards a political history of youth in Muslim northern Nigeria 1750-2000

MURRAY LAST
University College London

Northern Nigeria would be considered by most people, I suggest, as a 'traditional' gerontocratic society (if not a patriarchy), with wealth, authority and legal control vested in the senior man of the household and his senior wife. Only at prayer or in the mosque is society egalitarian (and even then not for women); individuals are valued differently otherwise. Similarly, the norm is for the young, if they disagree with the old, not to confront an elder; they should simply move away. Strangers to Hausa society are apt to call it 'feudal'. Yet at certain conjunctures over the last two centuries some young men have successfully ousted the old from positions of power. Despite the 'gerontocratic norm', these young men are revered in the communal memory, at least in retrospect; the old are considered to have failed the societies they led then. Hence the failure of the old can be as significant an issue as the success of the young.

In this brief essay I will look at three of these conjunctures in the belief that they illustrate rather distinct logics within this otherwise gerontocratic society. Although a core argument of this paper is that the political role of youth is nothing new, in fact one might counter-argue that it is the nature of today's politics that's fundamentally different in that the young then were tools in the hands of elders, whereas today the young are both mastermind and tool. Indeed one could go further and add that today an elder if he wishes to be politically effective in contemporary politics, has to act like a youth: he has to be seen doing things, and heard saying things, that normally no elder would conceivably do and say. Such violence and volume, such apparent cheating and lies, however necessary they may be for current politicking, remain antithetical to being 'an elder'.

But first let me outline what age has meant in Hausa society recently. The data are based on my experiences in urban Sokoto, Zaria and Kano as well as in deep-rural southern Katsina during the last forty years (1961-2003), first as a young man (and student), then as a man growing old but not always behaving - so I was told - as an old man should.

AGE IN HAUSA SOCIETY

Age, *biological* age, is central to social awareness, so central and taken-for-granted that it scarcely needs overt expression. Seniority of brother over brother, sister over sister, is strict; there's even seniority between twins. Optimally, in a marriage, the husband should be, say, ten years his wife's senior so that the relationship mimics father-daughter rather than brother-sister bonds; the authority of the husband is 'generational' [hence, on marriage a woman moves, for her care and control, from the hand of one father into the hands of another]. In childhood, elder brothers and sisters exercise discipline over their younger siblings; it is they who may administer even a beating. Children of co-wives share a common ranking by birth order, however varied their mother's statuses; in a Palace, the son of a concubine, if he's his father's first-born son, is the preferred heir to his father's throne (the very lack of maternal kin is seen as an advantage), though the senior wife's first-born may try and make claims based on his maternal kin (who may well be the ruler's first-cousins). Thus, even though annual birthdays are never celebrated, individuals' biological age-ranking - as an important part of social knowledge - is widely known.

Secondly, Hausa society (as is commonplace elsewhere) is broadly divided into *yara*, the young, and *dattijai*, the elders (the extremely old/senile are a different category, as are the very young, the under-seven year olds). The line that divides the two categories is based partly on age, partly on behaviour and character. You can behave like a *dattijo* when quite young (in your early 20s) but it's not until the mid-30s or early 40s that men really become *dattijai*. They may mark it by taking a second wife at this point.

Finally, *yara* include all those of low status, whatever their biological age. Slaves, for example, or free-born servants remain *yara*, especially in a large, powerful household; you are a ‘son of the house’. But *yara* of a royal house may be of higher status than an ordinary free man; the latter’s greater age, though, might protect him in a dispute. In a large family it is possible for an uncle to be younger than his nephew, in which case age can sometimes trump generation. Senior women can be *dattijai*; a senior wife has an authority over junior wives, as has the senior concubine over other concubines - seniority matters practically, as junior wives do certain chores for the group. But seniority here is by the order in which you married the husband and not by biological age.

The implication is that *dattijai* make the decisions (often collectively, either as brothers or with advice), and the young carry them out. Elders are expected to meet and discuss matters regularly - in the afternoon or evening, the younger elders gathering in the house or at the door of a senior elder who’s known to be wise and alert (and not a ‘witch’ [*mai dodo*] or in any way sinister). Elders thus mediate disputes or find ways of solving them; their role is to maintain the harmony of the house or the local community both socially and spiritually - literally, as they engage with ancestors and with spirits.

Hence if the young take decisions on their own, let alone reject their elders’ advice, it is a kind of rebellion (*fitna*). ‘Rebellion’ is not as uncommon as it might seem: it takes the form of moving away - by a wife, it’s temporary separation [*yaji*] leading to possible divorce; by an adult son, it’s to move out and start a new household of his own on a distinct site (not necessarily far away, as he’ll build on his own or some kinsman’s field or buy some plot); by a younger boy, it’s to live with an uncle or another friendly adult (boys often select such a friendly adult as a kind of ‘patron’). Finally, young people might leave home for the town or big city, and only re-make contact many years later by re-visiting his father’s house. But whoever is initiating it, there’s rarely a confrontation by the junior.

A key point is that “junior” status is temporary, except for slaves, and that there are always people junior to you (unless you are the last wife or the last child, and then you’re a ‘favourite’). You become an adult by having a dependent: a boy becomes a man when he takes a wife; a girl becomes a woman when she has a baby. A *dattijo* has a whole household (*gida*) dependent upon him; it is hard to imagine a *dattijo* living alone - such a man would be simply “old” (*tsoho*). Rebellion by the young, therefore, is merely a premature attempt to move up-status, to escape one’s temporary dependent status sooner than expected. But such independence doesn’t, by itself, make you a *dattijo* - far from it: you may simply be considered a *dan iska*, a ‘child of the wind’, unattached, always in motion. By contrast, a *dattijo* is stable, centred on his house; he rarely moves around (he may well not go even to market), and often is not seen. But these days, when household labour is scarce and hired hands are in short supply, he may well do some light farming on his fields beside the house.

In this context, then, it is the *yara* who are active in politics, in arguments and conflicts; it is they who travel and trade, who migrate for seasonal work, who flock to marketplaces and court girls, or contest elections. Hence an older man who wishes to remain a political activist has in effect to behave like a ‘youth’, or at least as a ‘commander of youths’ (and such a commander [*amir*; *sarki*] still counts as a ‘youth’). Traditionally in Hausa communities there was an assembly of youths that mimicked the adult title system and the manners of elders’ institutions (including courts). It was ‘fun’ (*wasa*) and not a serious challenge to elders, but *dattijai* still sometimes carry into old age the ‘play’ title they had as a youth. Though such youth assemblies (*kallonkowa*; *fada*) have died out as formal occasions in most places, there often is a local organisation of the young ... nowadays it’s the football team or club (these exist in both urban and rural areas), or a registered ‘association’ for local or social development, or even a religiously based vigilante group (*hisba*); similarly there were urban ‘ward’ gangs that fought against other ‘wards’, in almost ritual aggression, sometimes quite bloodily.

In short, there are the social structures which make it easy for the young of a locality to act collectively - even to disarm or kill a dangerously violent madman or to beat to death a thief caught red-handed in the marketplace. Nor is it difficult, if you have the right connections, to raise a crowd of youth from villages in the area, a crowd who could act as ‘party supporters’ and demonstrate, or even riot and loot

(their 'fee' being the loot they can gather, but they risk being wounded or even dying in the conflict). There aren't (at least not now) 'talking drums' to raise the alarm; it used to be word of mouth until last autumn (2002) when for the first time a riot was 'raised' through the use of text messages. This was in Kaduna, a large city of young workers away-from-home, where, thanks to two competing southern African companies, mobile phones are a new phenomenon among the young (before then, they were an elite possession limited to senior government officials).

YOUTH ACTIVISM 1750-2000

On at least three occasions in the last 200 years in what is now northern Nigeria youths have collectively acted as the transformative element in society. I am sure there were earlier occasions, but the evidence is less detailed. There will have been occasions, too, when action by youths was defeated or aborted before it grew powerful; some of these are known but the details remain obscure.

i. 1804-8

The first of these 'power inversions' was the Sokoto *jihad* which was fought across a series of emirates between 1804 and 1808. In this *jihad*, there were two distinct sets of young men involved: those under the spiritual leadership of a Shaikh (the title used for a serious Muslim scholar ca. 40 years old or more); these were mainly his own professional students and young converts to Islam (often runaway slaves) who took refuge around him. Such students were not armed nor trained in weaponry and were meant to be outside war, like a 'caste'. The other set of young men were independent youths from Fulani pastoralist families who had lost their cattle (there had been epizootics, for example, south of Borno as well as around Gobir, it seems). Individual Fulani youths had long gravitated towards Hausa courts (as at Kano) as mercenaries and would-be palace retainers, in order to earn a livelihood outside the pastoralist economy. Ca. 1800 these military-minded youth owed allegiance to no one but seem to have been willing now to serve as Fulani under Muslim Fulani leadership. But they had a will of their own: on at least one occasion, when stopped from taking the booty of war when on campaign, they threatened the life of their own Muslim commander, the Shaikh's son Muhammad Bello.

In the *jihad* of 1804-8 in Sokoto, the fighting was sparked off by young hotheads or 'hooligans' (*sufaha*, in a contemporary's phrase) living at the Muslim community of the Shaikh 'Uthman; they attacked a passing column of government troops to rescue some fellow Muslim prisoners. As the war developed and the Muslim students (keen but poorly trained soldiers that they were) found martyrdom, the *jihad* army came to be dominated by the young military-minded Fulani on whom it was hard to enforce the original ideals and discipline of Islamic *jihad*. The senior shaikhs stepped aside, many older scholars retired to Gwandu, away from Sokoto which was the main camp for the war. The commanders left in charge were men in their late twenties and early thirties; they were 'youth', not shaikhs. Once the *jihad* was successful and a new state was formed (ca. 1812), these young commanders took territorial commands, and governed their emirates for the next thirty years. In time, then, the caliphate became ruled by 'elders', and political control passed back from the young to the old. In the period 1845-55 many of these old rulers died, creating a crisis. By and large, succession passed to other elders, not to the young, but during the crisis there was political and religious turbulence in many areas, with a major emigration eastwards by young men and their families. That is, 'rebellious' young moved away.

A second means for the young to escape their elders' control within this new *jihadi* state was to set up a frontier fort (*ribat*) or even a small emirate from which they could nominally continue to wage *jihad* and raid their pagan neighbours for slaves; merchants camped close behind raiding armies to re-cycle their spoils of war (ransoms were one source of useful revenue). Young princes who misbehaved at home in the centre could therefore be despatched to the frontier and expect to do very well for themselves. These frontier zones, then, constituted a very different world from that of the centre. The centre was dominated by scholars and by a formal Islamic culture in which military activity was of low status and more the *métier* of slaves, mercenaries and the common man. The frontier, by contrast, was less concerned with Islam: pagan neighbours were not converted to the faith, let alone absorbed into Hausa manners and culture. Instead, they were kept as a reservoir, a 'farm' providing a crop of

captives, property or other payments which sustained the Muslim frontier elite. Today the relationship is sanctified by the term *amana* (peace agreement; but it's not the formal *sulh* of Islamic law); *amana* is a new reading on what was a relationship of exploitation, a euphemism that reflects the new politics. Had the frontier elite wanted their neighbours to convert to Islam there is little doubt that many, if not most, of the young would have done so. If that had happened, there would have been no northern Christians today, and a major contentious element in contemporary Nigerian politics would never have come into existence. In short, the 'youth culture' of the Sokoto Caliphate's frontier regions has shaped today's politics, while the formal ideologies of the elders who formed the Caliphate's core remain the 'myth' that sustains a common regional identity.

ii. 1903

The second turning-point relates to the conquest, a century ago this year, of the northern emirates by the British-led forces. De facto, the British officers deposed most of the elderly (or not so elderly) emirs that remained (some emirs emigrated eastwards rather than remain under Christian over-rule), and appointed younger men in their places. British colonialism was effectively a government by the young: not only were the British officials themselves young men but the 'native administrations' they set up were staffed by young men. Distaste for serving under Christians led many senior emirate officials to retire or else to act as simply nominal heads of a bureaucratic department.

Again, the young who refused to collaborate with the new system or to live under it emigrated, eastwards to the Sudan where they came under a version of Christian rule but they saw themselves as just 'passing through', as 'permanent pilgrims' rather than as colonial subjects. The emigration was a hard, prolonged trek; only the relatively young and fit (and their wives, many of whom gave birth en route) could survive the journey. By moving away, these young 'rebels' did not have to confront their elders' acquiescence in Christian rule. And again, those other young men who decided to collaborate with the new administrators and stayed put, grew old in their jobs, so that once again, forty years on, the northern emirates were ruled by elders, senior emirs and their councillors and district heads - only the British officials remained relatively young, being regularly rotated and retired at an early age.

The change in regime, however much a notional 'colonial caliphate' sustained the image of continuity, required very different ways of administration: offices and office-hours, careful book-keeping, the beginnings of a formal bureaucracy. It involved new styles of doing justice, within the framework of a modified shari'a law. It involved writing Hausa not in Arabic but roman script, using 'Arabic' numerals (and not the numerals Arabs use) and new methods of mathematics. And there were new modes of transport, new notions of space and time.

Initially much of the British side of the administration was run by English-speaking Christian clerks from southern Nigeria, whereas the 'Native Authority' side required young Hausa men to learn the new skills and everyday methods. It was an enormous transformation from the manners of the pre-colonial palace administration with its arabic correspondence, its slaves and servants and its more personalised fiscal administration. The new training opened up, in addition, huge fields of new knowledge ... world geography and history, astronomy, the sciences - of medicine, agriculture, botany, zoology. It was 'mind-blowing' for some, who read and talked to teachers and discussed with fellow students. In short, the new world was a young man's world. Alongside it was another world, of increased interest in sufism and brotherhoods (the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya mainly), and an extension of Quranic (primary) education to groups of children and categories (such as ex-slaves) who'd not had access to it before.

Finally, there were the new careers for the former military class - the young princes, the royal slaves and the various retainers who in the past had been used to raiding and training for war on the frontier. With their type of war now banned (and the new army not recruited from the old warrior class), the young princes were put into local administration, as district and village heads now posted out to the areas they administered: they resided in the countryside, not in the capital any more. There they had

new work to do: collecting tax, measuring land, maintaining peace (there was brigandage, and the roads were not always safe for traders).

Effectively, then, early colonial rule empowered the young, giving them both new authority and new knowledge, and disempowered the old except insofar as the old still carried the morality and integrity of the once independent Islamic state. I do not mean to suggest that the newly powerful young did not behave as good Muslims; rather, their faith was so integral to their identity that they could safely engage with the new ideas. Very few converted to Christianity (a few in Zaria did so where there was a mission; elsewhere in the Muslim north the missions were banned).

The stability of the colonial regime over fifty years meant that this cadre of youth grew old in their jobs, and in time recreated a kind of gerontocracy. The Native Authorities recruited the young, of course, and trained them, but seniority was re-affirmed along with the hierarchy of emirs, title-holders and councillors. It was this colonial gerontocracy that a new cohort of the young challenged, not in the name of youth-power but anticolonialism.

iii. 1950s

The third turning-point is the young's rebellion against these elders, in the late 1940s and 1950s. In the political parties, formed to unite progressives demanding independence from Britain, were the new young, the school-teachers and others with 'modern' education. The young's opportunity came with the world-wide movement against colonial regimes - but first they had to topple the powerful Native Authority system which had been in control for some fifty years. Leaders of these political parties were not necessarily so young in years but they had to behave with some of the stridency of the young, talking over-much at public rallies and making jokes in a way no elder would. Politics was a young man's occupation, a trade that brought an income (and travel); it involved telling lies, it might often involve violence. It is this identification of politics with youth - and the low status it has in many people's eyes - that has remained until today. Once again, forty years on, there are old men at the top of the system - as president, ministers, senators - but the behaviour of most of them isn't really that of an elder, not least in their pursuit of worldly wealth and their display of affluence.

The most remarkable consequence of this identification of modern politics with the young was the election of the chairmen for the Local Government Areas. These LGAs had a huge monthly income, direct from the oil account of central government, and with it considerable power. Yet almost without exception it was young men in their twenties, some unmarried and with at most some secondary education, who took control and were in a position to order around their social seniors, the emir or district head in their locality. Some such senior men were deliberately humiliated in public. Elsewhere in Nigeria the LGA posts were won by middle-aged men, often leaders within their communities; but in the far north it was wholly different. The image of a 'feudal' north could scarcely have been further from the truth. Elections as a process are archetypically 'young' in style and in operation; for an older man to contest against youth would itself be demeaning, whilst the abuse and lies he would be subjected to would be humiliating. Better to support a youth as his 'front' man. But where, in one case I know, that has happened, the winning youth has turned his back on his patron and taken all the money, month upon month, to share it out among some of his young mates for their personal spending.

When it is a military and not a civilian regime that is in power, the issue is plainer still. Military men are by definition 'youths' in style if not always in age; even Generals, particularly Generals actively in power, are not elders. Many of them retire into civilian life (and are very rich on pensions at full pay), some seek traditional titles and convert themselves in this way into elders; by these means they can build up an informal political constituency and seek to influence selection processes and policies. But once they are elders they cease to be 'politicians'.

The new young of the 1950s came from a milieu different from those of the early colonial period. In the 1950s they were also from provincial, even rural backgrounds that had been able to use the widening school system to escape the limits of their background. Furthermore, they tended to know

English and functioned politically on a wider plane, responding to trends globally as well as to trends (and tensions) within Nigeria as a whole; theirs was a world of radios and newspapers, and relatively easy travel within the country. Numerically, they formed a much larger cadre, with its factions and alliances. Not only was the scale new; so too were the actual processes of debate and angry argumentation.

Most importantly perhaps theirs was a world where freedom, national independence beckoned. Whereas the young of 1910 had a colonially shaped career ahead of them, the young of 1950 could expect to control their own destinies and that of their region or country; and that destiny included such new ideas as 'democracy' and 'modernity' as against the old, stable authoritarianism of their elders' regime. The element of excitement and drive (as well as the thrill of political risk-taking) is evident in the writings of the time.

IN CONCLUSION

One question we need to discuss is: how far are today's politics simply a continuation of the 1950s? In one sense, the language of elections, democracy, rights, justice are common to both the 1950s and the 2000s. But I'd suggest that a significant element of each of the three 'power inversions' described - 1804-8, 1903, 1950s - had been the need to recreate a stable regime, albeit in a new radical style, whether *jihadi* idealism, colonial bureaucratic efficiency or modern self-government. What is new, then, is not the role of youth in taking control at moments of deeply structural change, but the way no stability has (yet) ensued from contemporary changes. It is as if frequent, easy change is now part of the system itself; and the young therefore have retained, as never before, an integral, continuing part in bringing about these many, varied changes.

A major factor in promoting this change-based system is the existence of a single source of 'unearned' wealth: Nigeria's massive oil-revenue. Competition for access, if only briefly, to this revenue legitimates almost any means to achieve temporary political change. Since this wealth is privatisable (and rarely recovered by one's successors), any group within Nigeria would be mad not to compete for access: it'll determine the status of one's descendants (as 'elite' or proletariat) for generations to come, quite apart from any current pleasure such wealth might bring personally. Furthermore, once you have had access for a while, letting others have a period of access is more acceptable. Interestingly, the huge oil-revenue has not led to investing in a stable system of government or institutions that might distribute more evenly the benefits of such a massive national income.

The fact that the primary object of politics today is the acquisition of wealth (and not, say, the creation of stable or effective institutions whether local or central) confirms to people that it is appropriately a young man's pursuit. Even for a young man, what is bizarre about this oil-derived wealth at the Local Government level, is that it requires no work except at the hectic period of politicking at election time. After that, it is the spending (on himself and his friends) that constitutes the Local Government Chairman's work. It's hard to see this as 'politics' in the conventional sense. It's person-centred politics. If he cannot accumulate and invest his windfall wealth, his road to being a national *dattijo* is in jeopardy.

To close, I will summarise some of the different logics I see as underlying the three power inversions I have mentioned here.

[a] Islam, unlike traditional religion, empowers the young and gives them a special expertise and experience (especially if they are part of sufi *daira* as Shaikh 'Uthman's students were). Certain readings of Islam require them to take power in the face of oppression (*zulm*). In the case of the Sokoto *jihad*, the Muslim reformers largely lost control of the movement, and compromises proved necessary; it was these compromises that persistently provoked sections of radical Muslim youth into 'moving away', either on pilgrimage east or to sectarian communes in the deep countryside. This politico-religious protest has re-surfaced regularly over the last two centuries; in a quietist form, it is

seen in much-increased piety [fasting, prayers, Qur'an-reading] in ordinary households, whereas more overtly it has been manifested in student protest and pressure groups, some more vocal [as are the Yan Izala still], some violent [as were the Yan Tatsine].

[b] 1903 saw an externally generated opportunity to reject the oppressive aspects of the Caliphal regime that were giving rise to some vicious civil wars, to the extent that the Christian conquest was, paradoxically perhaps, seen by some Muslims as part of Allah's will for reforming his Muslim community. But the major item was the establishment of a wholly new institution, the Native Authority, that gave the young a range of roles; the NA was stable and predictable in its operation, and it offered its young employees a certain independence vis à vis their traditional elders in the countryside or (less so) in the city. The new education [*boko*] empowered the 1903 generation as reformist Islam had done the century before.

[c] 1950s saw, once again, an externally articulated and legitimated rationale for the young to take over the existing political structures; and, once again, the young were offered both an entirely new institution - the political party - and the novel idea of an organised opposition to those ruling locally. The ability of the young not only to have their voice heard but also to contest elections as an organised group was essential to the political credibility of the young as an active political category. The fact that this system was cut short, when it might have achieved a degree of stability, by a coup by *young* army officers (of the rank of major and captain; all alien to the 'north'), suggests that the regular pattern of quasi-caliphal organisation came to an end after some 160 years. The army regimes have since systematically broken up what foci of power there were in the old caliphal system, so that there are no alternative stable institutions with power. In the face of such a policy, the emirs have largely abdicated any active political function though some retain considerable grass-roots authority out of a popular sense of tradition.

[d] In all this, it is interesting how important have been external stimuli, whether Fulbe or British or southern Nigerian, to the coming-to-the-fore of politically active youth in northern Nigeria; and how important, too, has been the creation, usually via outside inspiration, of new institutions (or the destruction of old institutions) to the viability of youth politics being stable enough to transform itself into an administration. Though there is a rough temporal pattern to change in northern Nigeria - approximately every forty to fifty years, as if it was 'generational' - there are clearly other decisive factors at work. The traditional transmission of power and authority from elder to younger brother before it passes to a son sets up a pattern, as well as an ultimate frustration among the young, that people can 'read' and treat as legitimating periodically the radical change in which the young, at last, oust the old.

[e] A final, early item in this political history of youth. Until the mid-18th century throughout the west African sahel Islamic specialists, whether scholars, their students or the new breed of sufis, constituted an unarmed, non-violent caste sitting aloof from warfare while a political aristocracy monopolised militarism as a warrior caste (there were also other castes - craftmen, slaves, as well as merchants). The various movements we know under the general label of *jihad* in 18th-19th century west Africa converted this Muslim 'caste' into warriors and political leaders, displacing (or sometimes absorbing) the existing warrior caste. What happened, however, in Hausaland was that, instead of caste, it was biological age that became the criterion of differentiation. The new 'warrior caste' were the young, whilst the elders took on the role of the 'caste' of Islamic specialists. Growing up could thus mean moving from one 'caste' to another. But it's not quite as simple as this, as there remained (and remain) among the young a cadre of men training to be professional scholars; some are militant, but many are not. Broadly speaking, however, it is this caste-like formalisation of 'youth' and 'elders' that has begun to fall apart just as, 200 years ago, did the demarcation between 'Muslim' and warrior. Both were major, structural shifts - powerful, new political ideas - that weren't confined to a single area or to single culture. So, for comparison's sake, are other political histories of youth possible?