CHAPTER 11

Muslim women scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Morocco to Nigeria

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This chapter began as a comparative study of Muslim women's traditional education in the Maghrib, stretching geographically to include Morocco and northern Nigeria, reflecting long historical connections. The reason for interest in this topic was the demonstrated linkages between historic Mauritania (including much of contemporary southern Morocco) and the Islamic intellectual communities of northern Nigeria, indicated in a letter written by nineteenth-century Nana Asma'u in Nigeria to a Mauritanian scholar, with whom she was evidently well acquainted.[1] These connections were made by members of the Sufi Qadiriyya brotherhood in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[2] Sufi devotees were constantly going to and fro between Hausaland and Cairo or Fez and bringing back accounts of wonderful visions experienced by saintly personalities in the metropolises. 'Uthman dan Fodio (the Shehu) had cordial relations with Shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kunti, the leader of a Sufi community centred around Timbuktu, who also had visions.'[3] People in contemporary Fez know the Fodio family and easily speak of their many written works, while the Tijaniyya brotherhood brings many from Nigeria to Morocco.[4] Nigeria is also connected to Morocco through the Sufi Tijaniyya brotherhood, a more recent moving force in Nigerian experience. Many Tijani adherents in northern Nigeria make pilgrimages to Fez, where al-Tijani's tomb is in the medina.[5]

Underlying these connections is the significance of northern Nigeria in contemporary times as a formidable Islamic region, constituting half of the continent's most populous country. Through sheer numbers alone, Nigerian Muslim women are important to any discussion of Islam in Africa. In a comparative context, the pursuits of women scholars in northern Nigeria are very similar to those of women scholars in Morocco in terms of structure and intention. What remains to be studied are the particular works that are used by Moroccan women in pursuing a course of higher education within the framework of traditional Islamic education.

Opposite: A page from 'So verily…', one of Nana Asma'u's poems, written when her brother, Muhammad Bello, to whom she was very close, left for battle in 1822.

Islamic education in the Maghrib

Recent studies affirm previous perspectives on women's activist roles in the region, especially with regard to education.[6] Mauritanian women's responsibility for educating young children echoes the situation of nineteenth-century Muslim women in northern Nigeria.[7] It remains the same for contemporary families in northern Nigeria, tempered by the addition of daily education outside the home, divided into Islamic and non-Islamic formal education.[8] In addition to providing fundamental education for children they raise, Muslim women in both regions have long been known as teachers of adults in both regions, and significant scholars in their own right. Mauritanian women appear to have kept pace with those of the Fodio family in northern Nigeria in terms of educating both young and old, and producing sufficient numbers of their own scholarly works to generate materials that became part of a growing canon of works for scholars who followed.[9] Thus, the attempt to uncover a canon of works used by Muslim women scholars in the Maghrib requires an overview of traditional materials commonly studied in an Islamic education system, as well as attention to works produced by these women as mnemonic aids in their own teaching professions.

The Qur'an is the foundation of both Islamic thought and literacy. It is impossible to imagine Islamic education without the memorisation of the Qur'an, which begins a Muslim child's education. Islamic education continues to the equivalent of the west's postgraduate level through a complex programme of courses including a wide range of topics like the natural and physical sciences, history, geography, sociology, medicine and mathematics, often at renowned institutions like al-Azhar University in Cairo and the Qarawiyyin *madrasa* in Fez.[10] As library holdings in Mauritania demonstrate, more advanced fields of study included a multitude of topics, such as 'Qur'anic sciences, Arabic language, mysticism (Sufi literature), jurisprudence, scientific manuals (including medicine, astrology and mathematics), general literature…historical accounts (genealogies, biographical dictionaries, chronologies, pilgrimage memoirs), political material…[and] general correspondence'.[11] Nana Asma'u's nineteenth-century collection demonstrates comparable breadth.

Islamic education followed a similar pattern in Kano in the mid-nineteenth century. In Kano, the system of Islamic education begins at age three. For nine years students learn to write and recite the Qur'an, memorising all 114 suras. Following this, they embark on an introduction to various fields: *fiqh*, *hadith*, *tawhid*, *sira* and *nahawu* (grammar). A second reading of the Qur'an follows, assuring a refined facility in comprehension and pronunciation. After the age of about 20, students begin a more advanced study of famous books, reading them for mastery one at a time with the guidance of a teacher. Mastery of a particular work results in their earning a diploma which allows them to teach that work.[12]

Female students and scholars

In addition to providing fundamental education for children they raise, Muslim women in both Mauritania and northern Nigeria have long been known as teachers of adults in both regions, and as significant scholars in their own right.

Although girls begin their Qur'anic education at the same time as boys, they appear to fall away from the system of learning in the adolescent years. The degree to which this is true, or only apparent, is hard to determine. In many cases, especially in urban settings, they are simply not visible. Walking along a street in Fez it is not uncommon to hear a room full of Qur'anic student boys chanting their lessons; upon enquiring why there are no girls, one is assured that the girls are in class at the back of the house, out of public view. In Kano it has been the case that girls were educated by an older generation of learned individuals in their home, leading to the misconception that girls are not educated at all.[13] Nineteenth-century Nana Asma'u and her sisters (especially Khadija, who translated Khalil's renowned *Mukhtasar* into Fulfulde)[14] are not exceptions: Balarabe Sule and Priscilla Starratt's 1991 study of female scholars, mystics and social workers demonstrates that the tradition of Islamic learning is a vital one in contemporary northern Nigeria.[15]

Similarly, in Fez and Meknes women run elementary schools for traditional Islamic education, and Sufi women scholars may opt to continue their post-secondary education in traditional programmes of study rather than at the western-oriented university.[16] In addition, it is not uncommon for those who are more immersed in traditional life to meet regularly (once or twice a week) in study groups at a local *zawiya* for the discussion of a Qur'anic passage or other pertinent commentary on contemporary issues. In each case the *zawiya* gathering is led by a woman qualified to teach, give a sermon and answer questions.[17]

Even apart from formal systems of learning, the idea of the written word preserved in the book is revered in Muslim cultures. The dual founding precepts of Islam – the primacy of the pursuit of knowledge and the confirmation of equity – guide attitudes, and make women's scholarship a likely proposition in cultures that have not been overwhelmed by patriarchal limitations. Even in such cultures, women's insistence upon their rights as set forth in the Qur'an motivates them to pursue their intellectual activities.[18] Furthermore, this is not a new concept. Evidence from tenth-century Andalusia indicates that girls were attending schools with boys then, and women were writing; Wallah, princess-poet, was educated 'in classes including both sexes'.[19]

Traditional influences

The bulk of this study involves attention to works in Nana Asma'u's collection, which include poetic works in large categories. Those works influenced by the Qur'an and the Sunna include mnemonic guides to facilitate memorisation of the Qur'an, stories based on the Sunna, elegies, and poems about medicines of the Prophet. Historical works include influences from the *sira* and eulogies. Works inspired in a Sufi context reflect *khalwa* and *dhikr* experience, an account of Sufi women, and panegyric. Most of these reflect

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collaborative creativity, but several works best exemplify the collaborative technique with members of the community, and the reworking of poems that were commonly known in the region, some of which are directly related to tenth-century manuscripts, influenced by thirteenth-century panegyric, or focused on Abbasid concepts of state.

Nearly all Asma'u's works testify to direct influence by earlier works; all of them can be understood in the context of her Islamic education, steeped as it was in study of the Qur'an and the Sunna. Thus, a 'canon' of works represents not a static, preserved collection of old works, but a vital collection of materials that includes both the classics and contemporary compositions inspired by both earlier and contemporary works. A single manuscript represents but a moment in the continued variation of materials used for study. Some of these new creations, in turn, became part of a new, ever-changing canon of works in a fluid context of learning.

Beyond examples from Nana Asma'u's works, attention to the materials in use in the region indicates that the exchange of poems and treatises was not only common but also necessary to the advancement of scholarship in Islamic communities. At this point the definition of 'canon' becomes more problematic, because written materials are of only secondary importance to intellectual advancement in Sufi circles. Indeed, in Fez, Sufi scholars express reticence about relying on the written word, or publishing.

Understanding is advanced through contemplation of the spoken word, memorisation of Qur'anic passages and discussion of concepts in a variety of venues, including Qur'anic schools at the lowest to most advanced levels, community study groups in *zawiya*s, and in dedicated affiliation with particular brotherhood study groups. Thus, the 'canon' upon which women scholars in the Maghrib rely includes orally transmitted works, which often are deemed much more valuable than the written ones.

The Fodio community

Nana Asma'u's writings clarify that her education, like that of others of her level of learning, included the study and imitation of classical works as well as collaborative activity among her family members and peers. Her education must have followed the traditional patterns of learning evidenced for others in the region, from Mauritania and Mali to Kano, as her written works reflect familiarity with the topics of such a programme of study. Subsequently, her own written works became part of the corpus of works used in educating, especially in the education of women in the Sokoto Caliphate.

Alhaji Umaru (b.1858 in Kano) knew of Nana Asma'u, and commented in his writings that she was well known in the region.[20] Umaru began Qur'anic school at the age of seven and spent five years learning the Qur'an and Arabic literacy. At the age of 12 he began a programme of advanced learning with several different teachers that was to continue for 21 years, ending in 1891. The areas of study he pursued included Islamic religion, history, law and Arabic language, as well as two years devoted to Qur'anic

commentaries and history, and eleven years engaged in the study of religion and language. In addition he studied *hadith* theology, Maliki law historical traditions of Islam, the history of the Prophet's life, world history, West African authorship, Arabic grammar and pre-Islamic and Islamic poetry.[21] It is likely that this course of study was influenced by the intellectual movement that came out of Sokoto and spread throughout northern Nigeria during the nineteenth century in the course of reformation following the Sokoto *jihad*. And although Umaru does not cite works by any of the Fodios, it would not be surprising to find evidence that the poetry and prose produced by the Shehu, 'Abdullahi, Bello and Asma'u was an integral part of the Islamic education system at the end of the century.[22]

Asma'u's early nineteenth-century work, 'The Qur'an', is cited by the late Mervyn Hiskett as a poem of 'little literary interest'.[23] Yet the value of this work is that it compresses into 30 verses the names of every chapter of the Qur'an, rendering it a compact mnemonic device for the teaching of the Qur'an. Any qualified teacher would have been able to unpack each chapter title, teaching the entire chapter over one or more lessons. Asma'u wrote this poem in all three major local languages – Arabic, Fulfulde and Hausa – obviously intending it to have wide audience appeal.[24] This work's value is its efficiency in guiding an organised study of the Qur'an for students at both beginning and advanced levels. Thus, while it is not – to my knowledge – based on an earlier piece, its value in Islamic formal education is clear.

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Influences on Asma'u's works: Qur'an and Sunna

In *Tanbih al-ghafilin* (The Way of the Pious, 1820) Asma'u has used her brother Bello's *Infaqul al-Maisur*[25] as a model for a discussion of the Shehu's intellectual focus: his teaching methods and materials.[26] This work is imitative of the Sunna, and would have been familiar to anyone raised in the tradition of the *hadith*. Another such work is Asma'u's *Godaben Gaskiya* (The Path of Truth [Hausa], 1842), which advises listeners to follow the path of right behaviour, warning explicitly against sin by describing the pains of hell and explaining the rewards of heaven, as each is set forth in the Qur'an. Thus, it is also imitative of the Sunna, derived directly from the Qur'an,[27] as is *Sharuddan Kiyama* (Signs of the Day of Judgment [Hausa], n.d.). In the latter, Asma'u outlines in graphic detail the punishments of hell as they are described in the Qur'an. In addition, this work allows Asma'u to draw a metaphorical parallel between the price of sin and the cost of disobedience to local authority. The *shari'a* of the caliphate enforced behaviour through statutory punishment, and Asma'u chose to impress upon the masses the importance of obedience at all levels, from civil to spiritual.

Perhaps the most frightening of her works outlining the perils of hell is *Hulni-nde* (Fear This [Fulfulde], n.d.). Written in Fulfulde, it was not meant for the masses, but instead was addressed to her clan. The work's origin is in a poem by Muhammad Tukur; Asma'u added the *takhmis*. Asma'u was also familiar with the Shehu's sermon on the fear of hell,

which Bello later incorporated into his own *Infaqul al-maisur surat al-ikhlas*. In each case, these works were demonstrations of the authors' familiarity with the Qur'an's descriptions of hell. They are also implicit examples of collaborative work by the authors.

Several of Asma'u's works are in the classic Arabic poetic mode of elegy; they focus on aspects of character that would be familiar in studies of the Sunna and *hadith*. These include elegies for those well known, like her brother the caliph, Muhammad Bello, as well as for individuals of no historic note. The latter is exemplified by Asma'u's poem *Alhinin Mutuwar Halima* (Elegy for Halima [Hausa], 1844), in which she comments on the virtues of this ordinary woman, a neighbour, who is remembered especially for her patience and mediatory skills among family members.[28] In her 61 collected works, Asma'u includes 15 elegies, and three more that may be considered in this category: two mourn the loss of 'Aisha, a close friend, and one, written the year after an elegy for him, is a deeply felt commemoration of Bello's character. It should be noted that in her remembrance of her brother the caliph, Asma'u noted none of his political or historical achievements. Instead she outlined the moral and ethical qualities that distinguished him as a person who followed the Sunna with his heart.

Asma'u's *Tabshir al-ikhwan* (Medicine of the Prophet [Arabic], 1839) reflects immersion in the *hadiths*. Written in Arabic, it is meant to be appreciated by scholars, especially those who specialised in *tibb an-nabi*, which is understood to be the 'religiously oriented, highly spiritual…healing system of Madina…All the *hadiths* dealing with medicine and related subjects are presented…as an inseparable part of the larger body of the traditions of the Prophet, hence considered genuine and infallible'.[29] This work, like many of her other ones, reflects comparable works by others of her clan. The Shehu mentioned that he felt medical treatment with verses of the Qur'an was Sunna (in his *Ihya al-Sunna* [Revival of the Sunna]), and his brother 'Abdullahi wrote about the conduct of physicians and the procedures they should follow (in his 1827 *Masalih al-insan al-muta'alliqa bi al-adyan* [Benefits for Human Beings Related to Religions] and *Diya al-qawa'id wa nathr al-fawa'id li-ahl al-maqasid* [The Rules for Spreading the Benefits for the People's Goals]). But as with other works, it was her brother Bello who most influenced Asma'u in this piece on medicine. He was noted among writers throughout the Bilad al-Sudan as an authority on medicines.[30] Among Bello's 10 books on medicine is his *Talkhis al-maqasid al-mujarrada fi'l adwiya al-farida* (Summations of Objective Unique),[31] a summation of al-Kastallani's (b.1448 Cairo, d.1517 Mecca) fifteenth-century book on religiously oriented healing. Bello's other works on medicine included one focused on eye diseases (*Tibb al-hayyun* [Remedies for Eye Disease]), purgatives (*al-Qual al-sana' fi wujuh al-taliyan wa'l-tamashshi bi'l-sana*) and piles (*al-Qual al-manthur fi bayan adwiya 'illat al-basur* [Remedies for Piles]). In 1837, in his old age, he wrote *Tibb al-Nabi* (Medicines of the Prophet), a treatise on metaphysical medicine following a visit by Egyptian scholar and Qadiri Sufi Qamar al-Din, who passed his medical knowledge on to Bello.[32] In addition to these works, Asma'u also cites Muhammad Tukur as a source for her own work. Tukur was encouraged by Bello to write a 22 000-word book in 1809, *Qira al-ahibba' fi bayan*

sirr al-asma, which explains the medical benefit of reciting the names of God, or Qur'anic verse.[33] His *Ma'awanat al-ikhwan fi mu'asharat al-niswan* (The Means of Helping Brothers Toward Legitimate Social Relationships with Women) focuses on the use of minerals and herbs with prayer for the purpose of curing.[34] In her version, Asma'u focuses on suras 44–108, although it remains to be understood why she did so. In all Bello's works, as in Asma'u's on this topic, the aim was to provide information that could benefit the community.

Historical influences

Another classic Arabic poetic genre, *sira* (biography of the Prophet), is evident in Asma'u's *Filitage/Wa'kar Gewaye* (The Journey [Fulfulde/Hausa], 1839, 1865) – concerning the Shehu's campaigns of reform – and *Begore* (Yearning for the Prophet [Hausa], n.d.). In the first, Asma'u draws clear parallels between the nineteenth-century campaign of the Shehu in reforming Islam and that of the Prophet in establishing Islam in the seventh century. In the second, Asma'u focuses on aspects of the life of the Prophet that can be easily compared with the Shehu's life.[35]

Tabbat Hakika (Be Sure of God's Truth, 1831) harks back to the Abbasid concept of the state (*c*.750–1258), which was the subject of books by Asma'u's father, the Shehu (*Bayan Wujub* [Communication of What is Necessary Concerning the Hijira], 1806), uncle 'Abdullahi (*Diya al-Hukkam* [The Light for Governors], 1806) and brother Bello (*al-Gaith* [Explanation of the Requirements for the Upright Imam], 1821). Bello's work parallels the seventeenth-century work of the historian Naima (1687) with identical wording concerning the neo-Platonic concept of the 'Circle of Equity', which confirms the need for royal authority.[36] Asma'u's creation relies on the technique of *takhmis*, in which she used her father's work in couplets, adding three lines to each couplet to create a new poem whose running rhyme is the phrase *tabbat hakika* (be sure of God's Truth). The aim of the work is the juxtaposition of earthly and divine truth: truth v. Truth. This functions to raise the metaphorical meaning of the contents to a spiritual level, reminding both listeners and the leader that there is always a higher power than the mortal authority figure who rules.[37]

In addition to *Tabbat hakika*'s focus on the need for rulers to keep in mind divine law, this poem's collaborative nature demonstrates the interdependence practised by Islamic scholars in creating works that are now regarded as having only one author. If Asma'u based her poem on her father's poem in couplets and created a new work in quintains, whose poem is it? A bookseller in Fez showed me many old works of *hadith* and *fiqh*, all attributed to male authors. When I asked if it were possible to find works by women he said it was not, but added that that did not mean that women did not write. He insisted that it was quite common for women to compose, but for propriety's sake they would never sign their own names; they would sign their husbands' names instead.[38]

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Sufi works

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries Sufi traffic between Hausaland in northern Nigeria, Fez and Cairo was common. Not only would devotees in Hausaland be familiar with the Qadiriyya brotherhood, but the newly formed Tijaniyya brotherhood (*c*.1780) affirmed a linkage with Fez, where Ahmad al-Tijani is buried in the medina. The Fodio clan's affiliation with Qadiriyya Sufism was pervasive. In addition to Asma'u's involvement in mysticism, the Shehu's wife 'Aisha was a devout mystic, and his wife Hauwa and her daughter Fadima regularly went into retreat.[39] Early in his education the Shehu studied Ibn 'Arabi's *Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futuhat al-makkiyya*, *c*.1238).

Asma'u's *Mimsitare* (Forgive Me, 1833) is written in Fulfulde, thus indicating that it was not intended as a teaching tool for the larger Hausa-speaking audience, but rather was focused toward the Fodio clan. This work, along with *Tawassuli Ga Mata Masu Albarka/Tindinore Labne* (Sufi Women [Hausa/Fulfulde], 1837) and *Sonnore Mo'Inna* (Elegy for my Sister Fadima [Fulfulde], 1838), underlines Asma'u's Sufi activity. *Mimsitare* indicates Asma'u's own entry into *khalwa* (mystical retreat), while the other two works mention Bello's mother Hauwa and her daughter Fadima (respectively) having gone into retreat frequently. Asma'u was 40 when she wrote *Mimsitare*, about the same age as her father when he began to practise *khalwa*, and to have visions establishing his connection to Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order.[40] His recollections about Sufi experiences are related in his *Wird* (Litany).

Her later work, *Mantore di Dabre* (Remembrance of the Shehu [Fulfulde], 1854), is modelled on a work written by the Shehu early in his life, perhaps as early as age 10, in 1765. That poem, *Afalgimi* (Fulfulde), is a simple Sufi litany, whose style she 'copied…from the Shehu' (*Mantore di Dabre* v.10) nearly a century later. Both works appeal to God for strength in following the Sunna and generosity. Asma'u's imitation of her father's early work is meant as an expression of honour to him, following the Arabic poetic tradition of imitating another author's style.

The only poem in which Asma'u mentions her health is one that is clearly in a Sufi context. A mere dozen lines, this piece was untitled but was given a working title in translation: 'Thanksgiving for Recovery' (1839). Although no other known poems concerning recovery exist, this one is linked in context and tone with one by Rabia al-Adawiya of Basra, the eighth-century Sufi of renown. Rabia's poem concerns praying all night and fasting in appeal for the healing of her broken wrist. In Asma'u's work on this same topic she indicates both a reliance on classical sources and creativity in the Sufi mode.

Asma'u's 'Sufi Women' was written with the aim of endowing with respectability the Muslim women of the Sokoto Caliphate, both members in long standing and new converts. The basis of the work was a prose work by Muhammad Bello, *Kitab al-nasihah* ([Book of Advice], 1835), which he asked Asma'u to translate into Hausa and Fulfulde

and versify. Its aim was to create a teaching tool with the intention of promoting women's education in an Islamic way of life. To accomplish this, Asma'u crafted a poem that focused on exemplary women in the caliphate community, merging their names and stories with a litany of historically established Sufi women, whose reputations were well known.[41] At the time that Asma'u's collected works were published in translation (1997), it was thought that the earliest manuscript on which Bello's and her works were modelled was *Sifat al-safwat* (*c*.twelfth century) by Ibn al-Jawzi. However, Rkia Cornell's 1999 translation of Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami's tenth-century work, *Dhikr al-niswa al-muta 'abbidat al-Sufiyyat* (Early Sufi Women), demonstrated that al-Jawzi's own work was modelled on the earlier one by al-Sulami.

Asma'u's poem shares an obvious connection to al-Jawzi's work (and by extension, therefore, to as-Sulami's) because an overwhelming majority of names in the original appear in the same order and with comparable descriptions in Asma'u's poem. Her poem differs from the original, however, in her addition of women from the caliphate to the list of revered Sufi women, thereby elevating their status to that of historical Sufi women. Her poem also differs from Bello's version in that she omitted admonitions to women that he included as a means of trying to control irreverent behaviour. Instead, she focuses on what women have accomplished, and what they are capable of doing to contribute to the Muslim community. This is another example of Asma'u using existing works as the basis for new material honed to a different purpose. In this manner she was able to benefit from the credibility associated with works well established in Islamic intellectual circles, and also revise aspects of the works to convey messages relevant to her place and time. 'Sufi Women' is one of the works used extensively in Asma'u's training of extension teachers for secluded women in the community; thus it provided a window to an Islamic world in which women were recognised as important to the community.

Each poet establishes her own canon by drawing from a vast array of materials that have remained accessible since at least the tenth century. The canon changes with the needs of a particular scholar; the emphasis of works varies according to the needs of the moment. Many of the newer works, created on the foundations of earlier works, become classics for subsequent generations.

Asma'u's collaborative activities are evident in other works as well.[42] She and other scholars in the caliphate community felt linked to the wider Islamic world. Her father the Shehu wrote only in Arabic. Her uncle 'Abdullahi favoured pre-Islamic poetry, and that of seventeenth-century North African poet Abu 'Ali-Hasan b. Mas'ud al-Yusi.[43] Asma'u's elegies bear striking similarity in tone to those of al-Khansa, a woman poet who was a contemporary of the Prophet,[44] so it is likely that she knew the works of this woman.[45] Asma'u's *Dalilin Samuwar Allah* (Reasons for Seeking God [Hausa], 1861) is rooted in Bello's *Infaqul al-maisur*, which clarifies the content of the Shehu's sermons.

Examples abound of the close collaborative bond among several generations of Fodios, and their reliance on classical works.

Asma'u's *Kiran Ahmada* (In Praise of Ahmada [Hausa], 1839) is a panegyric to the Prophet in the form known as *madih*, which functions to provide an outlet for emotional needs in worship; prophetic panegyric has long been associated with Sufism.[46] Asma'u would have been familiar with panegyrics to the Prophet, which were well known by the thirteenth century, especially al-Busiri's *Burda* (The Cloak), al-Fazazi's *al-Ishriniyyat* (The Twenties), al-Lakhmi's *al-Qasa'id al-witriyya* (Superogatory Odes) and al-Tawzari's *Simt al-huda* (The Necklace of Guidance), all of which were well known in the region. Asma'u's emulation of the subjects and styles of these works is evident in her own poems, so it is known that she was familiar with them.[47] Another example of panegyric is Asma'u's *Mantore Arande* (Remembrance of the Prophet [Fulfulde], 1843). In this work she selected details of the Prophet's life that could be paralleled with those of the Shehu, as she did in 'Yearning for the Prophet'.

Collaboration

Fa'inna ma'a al-'usrin yusra (So Verily… [Fulfulde], 1822)(see page 164) is a prime example of collaborative authorship between Nana Asma'u and her brother Muhammad Bello, to whom she was very close. Her poem is a response to an acrostic poem left for her by Bello as he headed into battle. Each bears the verse *fa'inna ma'a al-'usrin yusra* (Qur'an 94: 5) as the acrostic that runs down the length of their 14 lines, marking the first letter of each line. Bello's poem was written as comfort to a worried sister; hers was composed as a prayer for victory and his safe return. While these works bear no known relation to earlier classical poems, the fact of their close collaboration indicates a style that is representative of Arabic poetry.

Asma'u's *Gawakuke ma'unde* (The Battle of Gawakuke [Fulfulde], 1856) is also highly collaborative. Bello described this battle, as did al-Hajj Sa'id, a follower of al-Hajj 'Umar, and Asma'u would have known those works. Despite its apparent historical theme, this work is actually an elegy describing the character of Bello, his *baraka*, charismatic leadership, and miracle working, setting him in the context of Sufi devotion.[48] By combining these styles and addressing a topic already covered by other poets of her time, Asma'u creates a work of wide appeal at the same time that she paints a political figure with particular Islamic colours.

Contemporary Kano

Sule and Starratt's study of educated women in Kano demonstrates that women's education is a 'widespread urban phenomenon'.[49] They discuss the education of women who came of age during the mid-twentieth century. The pattern of early learning was

similar for all: Qur'anic study from a parent during childhood, followed by the study of works on Maliki law and the principles of prayer.[50] Following this stage, they studied various books[51] focused on Maliki law and ritual, panegyric of the Prophet, stories about the Prophet's family, mysticism and Arabic grammar. Their canon of works prepared these women for their roles as teachers and spiritual leaders. It was common for them to teach at several different levels. Many would teach primary school during the day and adult education classes at night. Several ran Islamiyya schools in the neighbourhood, and one was widely known as an expert in the recitation of *tafsir* – she recorded readings for radio and television. In every case women's courses of study continued through successive marriages, establishing the habit of learning as their life's work. In their old age, they continued to teach at a private level, tutoring other women in particular books.

My own experience in close association with women of the Kano palace affirmed that learning for children begins at age four and continues in both the Qur'anic and western mode, as they divided their days between the two schools. There are many options for secondary school, ranging from the School for Arabic Studies to western schools. It is at this stage that women, who marry young, appear to fall away from education, but their retreat into the private milieu of domesticity does not mark the end of education for them. Private tutoring is common and easily suited to a life with domestic demands that militate against sitting in class away from the home. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Kano state government instituted a programme of adult education classes throughout the region. Classes were held during the day and at night to allow for wide attendance. The curriculum was broad, including literacy and numeracy, religious knowledge, childcare and hygiene, and crafts for entrepreneurial skills. At the same time, in the palace several of the emir's wives, with teacher-training certificates themselves, were engaged in tutoring adult women from the royal community and from outside the palace. One of them also established a small primary school class for children in the palace who were unable to attend a formal school. In the trend toward Islamiyya schools replacing Qur'anic schools, Helen Boyle's study in Kano notes that the gender ratio favours girls over boys, 2 to 1.[52] It appears that women in northern Nigeria take very seriously the admonition to 'seek knowledge, even unto China'.

Contemporary Morocco

Several studies of women and education in Morocco have focused on the extent to which girls and women are integrated into public school settings where the genders are mixed.[53] In each case the studies concern the role of literacy as a gauge of empowerment for women functioning in changing socio-economic roles. But none discusses the role and extent of traditional education among women – especially Sufi learning – in Morocco. It is likely that the women who attend *zawiya* discussions on a regular basis, in villages throughout Morocco, have studied works similar to those outlined for Kano – whether

Beyond the collection of written documents, investigation of oral sources is especially central to an understanding of scholarship in Sufi circles. Many Sufis in Morocco note that the most important material is written on the heart, not on paper where it can be destroyed.

in oral or written form.[54] More research is needed to examine the scholarly background of these women and investigate the materials they studied. If the cross-fertilisation of scholarship that appears to be evident for the Maghrib holds, then it may be possible to determine the sources most common to scholarship in the region. Also, it is important to seek further evidence of correspondence between the regions, as shown by Asma'u's letter to the Mauritanian scholar.

In addition to written documents, orally transmitted works are central to an explanation of the works upon which Muslim women scholars in the Maghrib have relied. Helen Boyle's analysis devotes a great deal of space to the concept of the body as a site of cultural production, noting the value of memorisation of the Qur'an in instilling cultural values and understanding. This is particularly relevant to the types of study found among Sufi groups in the region. In discussions at the home of Shaykh Moulay Hassan and his wife in Fez, adherents of a rural Sufi teacher, noted that the works they were taught were conveyed orally. When asked about writing them down, their teacher explained it was preferable to memorise them. Other Sufis discussed the perspective that the written word was a crutch beyond which one needed to move in internalising the word of God. In attempting to understand a canon of works pertinent to women scholars, the importance of the spoken, memorised word cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

In her corpus of works Nana Asma'u relied on both her own educational background in classical Islamic works and her familiarity with works by her kinsfolk for the creation of her own poems. Many of her poems are collaborative works, which honour the poems of her contemporaries by reworking them to her own effect. Echoing a traditional programme of study, her works include descriptions of the Qur'an, panegyric, elegy, and biography of the Prophet. Asma'u transforms some of these into works more pertinent to her own context: her biography of the Shehu parallels her biography of the Prophet; her description of the Prophet's endeavours selects as its focus events that she parallels in her description of the Shehu's campaigns. Asma'u's Sufi devotion is also a formative feature of her works, which include litanies and *dhikr*. Her poem on medicines of the Prophet reflects traditional works on religious-based healing, and her work on Sufi women not only imitates the classic tenth-century work of the same name by al-Sulami, but also weaves into it the names of local women whose status she elevates by their association with historical women of note.

Beyond the collection of written documents, investigation of oral sources is especially central to an understanding of scholarship in Sufi circles. Many Sufis in Morocco note that the most important material is written on the heart, not on paper where it can be destroyed. All Muslims begin with the same source, the Qur'an, whose multivalent nature ensures that it is accessible to all, regardless of their intellectual capability, literacy or talent. Depending on an individual's position in society she will focus on law

or history or Sufi concepts or another aspect of interpretation. Thus, an individual's canon will vary depending on her interests and needs, just as one's understanding of the Qur'an depends upon the individual's circumstances.

If 'canon' is to be perceived as an authoritative list, we can begin to collect the names of books common to a region, but because there exist so many classical works, and because the emphasis on one or another would vary from region to region, a canon may not be limited. A fixed canon would militate against the fluidity of learning and composition that is evident in the examples described above. Thus, while it is not possible to establish a static canon of works from which Asma'u – or any other poet – drew inspiration, it is important to confirm that each poet establishes her own canon by drawing from a vast array of materials that have remained accessible since at least the tenth century. The canon changes with the needs of a particular scholar; the emphasis of works varies according to the needs of the moment. Many of the newer works, created on the foundations of earlier works, become classics for subsequent generations, joining the ranks of those that have heretofore constituted the 'canon'. Further fieldwork is needed to investigate the kinds of classical works that constitute the basis for contemporary scholarship.

NOTES

1 See 'Welcome to the Mauritanian scholar' in Boyd and Mack (1997: 282–283). For subsequent references to Asma'u's works, unless otherwise cited, see relevant pages in this source.

2 Asma'u's easy correspondence with the mysterious Mauritanian scholar (Alhaji Ahmed Muhammad al-Shinqiti) implies a longer-standing network of correspondences and familiarity that likely date to at least one if not several previous generations, which would put the connection well into the eighteenth century. More work on the Shehu's writings needs to be done to demonstrate this linkage.

3 Hiskett (1973: 63–64).

4 The erudition of the Shehu 'Uthman dan Fodio, his brother 'Abdullahi, his son Caliph Muhammad Bello and his daughter Nana Asma'u are especially well known, even when their writings are not available.

5 Ahmad al-Tijani, b.1737 southern Algeria, d.1815 Fez, Morocco, established order in 1780.

6 See Mack (2004).

7 Compare Lydon's (2004) observations and those in works on Nana Asma'u – see Boyd (1989); Mack & Boyd (2000); and Boyd & Mack (1997).

8 This was my experience during fieldwork in Kano, Nigeria, 1979–81. In an article in 2005, Margot Badran notes a similar pattern ('Liberties of the faithful', *al-Ahram Weekly*, http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/743/fe2.htm.)

9 Lydon (2004: 48, 68).

10 Fourteenth-century Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* gives a sense of the breadth of traditional Islamic learning.

11 Lydon (2004: 62).

12 Sule & Starratt (1991: 36) – see note 6 for more sources on programmes of study and their appendix, which includes annotated descriptions of the books studied by contemporary Kano women.

13 Galadanci (1971), cited in Sule & Starratt (1991: 37).

14 Sule & Starratt (1991: 36).

15 Note the appendix in Sule & Starratt (1991), which includes a list of traditional books regularly studied by these Kano women scholars.

16 In fieldwork in Fez and Meknes (2002, 2003) I visited these schools and worked with a Sufi woman who had completed secondary school and was immersed in advanced Sufi studies in the medina in Fez.

17 It was my experience that no matter how small the village, these groups of women were devoted to their study sessions: in Tiznit, in south-west Morocco, women meet once a week, while in Tamagroute, at the end of the Marrakesh road, they meet twice a week for sessions of several hours.

18 See Badran ('Liberties of the faithful', *al-Ahram Weekly*, http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/743/fe2.htm) for the confirmation of this perspective, which is also evident throughout my own field notes from Kano in the late 1970s.

19 Nykl (1946: 72), cited in el-Hajj (1996).

20 Pilaszewicz (2000: 86).

21 Pilaszewicz (2000: 10–11).

22 Six other of Asma'u's sisters also wrote: Hadiza, Habsatu, Fadima, Safiya, Maryam and Khadija. Their manuscripts are housed in the family's private collections.

23 Hiskett (1975: 44).

24 It was written in 1829, 1838 and 1850, respectively, appealing (chronologically) to Fulfulde speakers, then the Hausa majority, and finally to Arabic speakers.

25 This title is rendered in English only with difficulty. Neither Jean Boyd nor Murray Last was comfortable with an English translation. Last (1967: xxviii–xxxiii, l) refers to this manuscript as 'the most detailed and factual account of the *jihad*' available. Its availability, however, is moot, considering that several of the Arabic manuscripts of it are in private hands, and the translations by (colonial Resident) EJ Arnett (1920) are unreliable. Boyd adds that: i) Bello gives detailed accounts of the battles they fought on the Gewaye (journey) which need maps. They are not present and without them the text is unfathomable; ii) Arnett did not dissect Bello's words out of quotations from other texts; and iii) It was printed in 1922 on poor paper which crumbled to powder in time. There is also a Hausa translation of *Infakul Maisuri*, trans. Sidi Sayudi and Jean Boyd, Sokoto History Bureau, 1974 (personal communication, 1 October 2006).

26 Sections include attention to: barriers dividing people from paradise; discussion of dangerous habits; redeeming habits; and distinguishing features of those who follow the Sunna.

27 In addition, Asma'u's sense of her authority is clear; she remarks that, 'I, daughter of the Shehu, composed this song – you should follow her…' (v.126).

28 Boyd & Mack (1997: 195–196).

29 Abdalla (1981: 16).

30 Abdalla (1985).

31 127 pages in length.

32 Last (1967), cited in Boyd & Mack (1997: 100). Also noted here is that it was characteristic of both Bello and his sister Asma'u to couch their works in terms of benefit to the masses, a deviation from the focus of classical writers on the topic, who composed their works as gifts to royalty.

33 Abdalla (1981: 158) notes that Tukur's sources for this work 'are not practitioners from the high period of Islamic civilization, but some lesser known Sufis and theologians who flourished in the medieval period'.

34 '…the title translates as "The means of helping brothers toward legitimate social relationships with women" (Alhaji Shaykh Ahmed Lemu, personal communication, 21 September 1994). Abdalla says "in the *Ma'awanat al-ikhwan fi mu'asharat al-niswan* emphasis is placed on *material media* for the treatment of various illnesses and as aphrodisiacs" (1981: 163). As far as we know there is no translation of the work' (Boyd & Mack 1997: 101).

35 Boyd & Mack (1997: 133, 304).

36 See Boyd & Mack (1997: 45–46). 'Abdullahi emphasises the role of a leader in administering justice to the disenfranchised, while the Shehu affirms the role of scholars in enjoining truth, the Sunna, and justice.

37 See Boyd & Mack (1997: 46n) for a discussion of the controversy concerning authorship of this poem.

38 This is perhaps the most extreme form of collaboration.

39 Hiskett (1973: 61–69); Boyd & Mack (1997: 60).

40 Hiskett (1973: 64).

41 Boyd & Mack (1997: 68–72).

42 Boyd & Mack (1997: 133–134) indicate a degree of collaboration that makes tracing an 'original' difficult.

43 Hiskett (1973: 10).

44 Boyd & Mack (1997: 84).

45 The Boyd & Mack (1997: 84) citations include two works by al-Khansa, one cited in Arberry (1965: 38) and one translated by Wormhoudt (n.d.: 96). See also Waddy (1980: 70).

46 'Abdullahi wrote such panegyrics to the Prophet, and the Shehu wrote *Ma'ama'are* (In Praise of the Prophet) in 1805, which 'Isa, Asma'u's brother, translated into Hausa in 1864. See also Hiskett (1975: 43).

47 Hiskett (1975: 43–44, 48–50).

48 Boyd & Mack (1997: 231).

49 Sule & Starratt (1991: 48).

50 *Ahalari* (*al-Mukhtasar al-'alamat al-akhdari fi mathab al-Imam Malik*) by Abu Zaid Abdul Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Saghir al-Akhdari al-Maghribi al-Maliki (Introduction to Maliki law) and *Kawa'idi* (*Qawa'id al-salat*) (principles of prayer).

51 See the appendix in Sule and Starratt (1991).

52 Boyle (2004: 135–136).

53 See Agnaou (2004); Bennouiss (2001); and Boyle (2004).

54 See the appendix in Sule and Starratt (1991).

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم والصلاة والسلام
على نبينا الامين محمد وآله واصحابه الاكرمين
ومن تبعهم باحسان الى يوم الدين
وبعد فقد سئلت والله المستعان عن امراة
تشاجرت مع زوجها وتخاصمت معه وقالت له
انت علي حرام كالميتة هل يقع بكلامها هذا او بنكاحها
لزوجها وهل على الزوج شيء في ذلك وهل
على المراة نفسها شيء في ذلك فاجبت
والله المستعان انه ليس على الزوج شيء وكذلك
ليس على المراة شيء وكلامها هذا لغو في البر
او في البر والمراة ليس لها ان تخرج من بيتها او
تحلف على زوجها وانما الحلف والتخريج
جعلهما الله بيد الزوج لا بيد الزوجة
لقوله تعالى الرجال قوامون على النساء بما
فضل الله بعضهم على بعض وبما انفقوا من
اموالهم فالمراة لا يقع كلامها في تكليف
نفسها او تخريجها لا في صورتين
احداهما ان تنكف بالردة عامدة والثانية
ان تجعل الزوج كلافها بيدها مع ان هذه لا
تخلو من خلاف عند جمع والظهر انما يلزم