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Kolej Universiti Islam Anglimalangsa Selangor
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY / COLLEGE SELANGOR



Persatuan Intelektual Muslim
Malaysia (PIMM)

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(ICIED 2011)

"Islamic Education: Contributing to the World"

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FOREWORD

Assalamu`alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

Welcome to the 2nd International Conference on Islamic Education 2011 (ICIED 2011)

On behalf of the International Islamic University College Selangor (KUIS) and the Association of Malaysian Muslim Intellectuals (PIMM), I would like to extend our warmest welcome and appreciation to all speakers, presenters and participants of the ICIED 2011.

I believe, this international conference will offer opportunities to exchange ideas, knowledge and experience with the aims to bring together a large number of scholars, experts, researches and practitioners from around the world. Furthermore, we may discuss further, analyze and share findings to enhance the quality of Islamic education system.

The views of scholars and educators from around the world on several issues are valued and we could use this opportunity to interact with each other on the issues centered on the implementation of the Islamic education world-wide.

Finally, I hope that this international conference will be able to achieve all its objectives and at the same time picking up new and insightful issues which can be further deliberated as planned in seminar, dialogues and research.

ASSOC. PROF. DATO' DR. AB. HALIM TAMURI

Director

2nd International Conference on Islamic Education (ICIED 2011)

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**WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT: ALHAJA MUALIMATU RIANAT
AROWOLO AN ICON OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP IN ILORIN
EMIRATE, NIGRIA**

Ibrahim AbdulGaniyu Jawondo

Abstract : The past has bequeathed the present with the profiles of successful people in different endeavors for man to effectively deal with the present and the future. In Islam, literature abounds about Muslim scholars; men and women alike. The memoirs of Khadijat and Aisha among the wives of the prophet, Fatima the prophet's daughter, Asmau and Hafsatu the daughters of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo are good examples. In furtherance of the lofty scholarship tradition, the Muslims in Nigeria as well as the government fast tracked Muslims' education by modernizing traditional Qur'anic schools along western education. Alhaja Rianat Arowolo is a product of the educational reform. Today, she is reputed for Islamic scholarship in Ilorin Emirate. This paper therefore, examines the scholarship of Alhaja Rianat Arowolo as a product of Islamic education reform of the 20th century in Ilorin Emirate; one of the reputable Islamic cities in the north-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Key words: Women, Development, Islamic scholarship, Ilorin Emirate.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have researched extensively on the lives of women in different societies including Muslim societies (Beek & Keddie, 1971; Utas, 1983; Turabi, 1993). While some are of the opinion that women are totally absent in the religious space because of some socio-cultural practices which reduced them to domestic and child bearing specie (Akintan 2003:653, Patai 1967:320; Lemu, 2003:637), a section are of the opinion that Christianity and Islam discriminate against women as they could not become priest and Imam respectively (Iwuchukwu, 1997: 43; Akintan, 2003:657). On the other hand some reported that in spite the societal and religious discriminations women struggled to contribute their own quotas and made the presence felt in religious sphere (Coulon, 1988). Thus educated Muslim women often undertake heavy workloads by combining home and religious affairs (Lemu, 2003:637). Alhaja Rianat Arowolo is a woman biologically, a responsible house wife, a sewing mistress, a Yoruba by birth and language, a Muslim by birth and practice, a mother and grandmother, a northerner by location and culture, all of which constitute cogs in the wheel of progress of women in African societies (Iwuchukwu quoted by Akintan, 2003:657), yet, Alhaja Arowolo excelled as a

scholar in the field of Islamic scholarship. This corroborates the submission of Coulon who said:

...despite their inferior position in African Islam women are not entirely excluded from the religion. Their Islamic practices are not necessarily limited to the domestic sphere, and their fundamental religious beliefs are not based solely on animist traditions. Women participate in their own way in Islam, manipulating it and accommodating it to their needs. They are active Muslims even if their practices are informal, hidden, parallel, or heterodox (1988:115).

What then are the factors responsible for her success? Are they intrinsic, that is, internally motivated, or extrinsic, that is, externally imposed or a combination of the two? This paper, therefore, examines the various factors that interplayed in building the personality of Alhaja Arowolo as an Islamic scholar of repute and her contributions to the development of Islam, Islamic scholarship and the general impact she has made on her students and her immediate society; Ilorin Emirate and Nigeria at large. In accomplishing this goal, data were gathered through extensive interviews with the personality in question, her teachers, classmates and contemporaries, her students, children and siblings as well as personal observations of the author. The paper concludes that the scholarship of Alhaja Arowolo has led to a considerable socio-cultural, politico-economic and religious transformation of the Muslim women in Ilorin Emirate.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

In any Society, development is dependent on the availability of both human and material resources. Women; (a collection of adult females, whose members are biologically the same, sometimes feel the same, experience the same degree of influence from diverse phenomenon and sometimes exhibit similar reactions to some events on some occasions) (Shaw, 1985, Megis 1990, Moor 1994, Olajubu, 2003: 642), are part and parcel of the human resources needed for societal development. Regrettably, they are faced for quite some time with some socio-cultural inhibitions which retarded their personal development and contributions to the community. In the developed world, women have attained their rightful position in the society but yet to reach an appreciable level in the developing countries. In Nigeria, like in some Third World countries, the institution of 'foreign' religions; Islam and Christianity and the consequent modernity resulting from them is gradually reducing the neglect of women and their developmental efforts. Thus, the leverages granted women by Islam have played a tremendous role in the personal and societal development of Muslim women in Islamic scholarship.

Development; an incident causing a situation to change or progress for better by being larger, stronger, successful and more impressive, is visible in human life and

endeavours, thus, we talk of human growth and development as well as societal socio-economic, religio-political and structural developments (Seleti, 2004). Islamic Scholarship is directly concerned with attainments in Islamic learning. Consequently, this paper concentrates on documenting the achievements of Alhaja Mualimatu Arowolo in Islamic scholarship in Ilorin Emirate. Ilorin Emirate is comprised of five Local Government Areas. Its metropolis is the capital of Kwara state, one of the twelve northern states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Ilorin is a renowned Islamic city which was established around 1823 through the efforts of Shaikh Salih popularly known as Shehu Alimi and his Jama'a. The city was responsible for the islamization of most parts of the Yorubaland in the 19th and 20th centuries and it has since remained a land for Islamic and spiritual guidance among the Yoruba (Gbadamosi, 1978: 10).

Scholarship, (acquisition and dissemination of knowledge) a requirement for national growth and development has been erroneously seen in most African societies as men affair. Thus, women Islamic scholarship has suffered a great neglect. Since the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate in 1809 and colonialism in Nigeria in 1900, women have been contributing to Islamic and Western scholarship but scholars have not given them the required attention. What could have been responsible for this? Could it be as a result of gender discrimination or insensitivity of the society? It is against this background that this paper examines the contributions of Alhaja Rianat Arowolo to the development of Islamic scholarship in Ilorin Emirate, Nigeria.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Alhaja Mualimatu Rianat Arowolo was born into the family of Alhaji al-Shaikh Zunurein Jamiu and Hajia Salamat of Jabaje compound, Oke Apomu, Ilorin. The family had established a long standing tradition of Islamic scholarship. Thus, Alhaja Rianat Arowolo learnt the holy Qur'an from the school established by her father in Accra (Ghana). The school was located at Cow Lane. Among her teachers in the (morning and evening sessions) Qur'anic school were; the father, Shaikh Zunurein Jamiu Jabaje, Alhaji Dikko Atebise of Adara Compound Agbaji, Ilorin; a student of Shaikh Tajumumin and a certain Alhaji Kamal; an hausa man by tribe. As mentioned above, the Shaikh shuttled between Accra in Ghana and Ilorin in Nigeria. At each time, the daughter, Alhaja Rianat travelled with him. Thus, she also had the opportunity of learning from a modern Qur'anic school in Ilorin where she learnt from great scholars like Shaikh AbdulRaheem Aminullahi (popularly called Oniwasi Agbaye by his position as the chief missionary of Ansarul Islam society of Nigeria) and Alhaji Abdulkadir Sunusi Alounmata when she was enrolled at the Ansarul Islam School called Al-Adabiyyah, where her father was a co-founder and a teacher. She was there along with others (male and female) for a short period of two years, 1953 and 1954. Among her mates were Alhaja Batuli Sallah, Alhaji Imam Hassan Al-Qadiriyyah (the current Imam Al-Adabiyyah mosque, Okolowo, Ilorin) and Alhaja Sarata Yahya who later married Alhaji Yusuf

Sanusi of Oke-Agodi. Even though she was at the school briefly for a period of two years before she went back to Ghana, her track record of magnetic brain, sensitizing and captivating voice, good rapport with both staff and students and studiousness remain indelible in the minds of her mates, her teachers and in the records of the school. Since this time, her teacher saw in her, the potentials of becoming a great scholar of repute in the nearest future. Some were of the opinion that she had been invested with the Baraka of her father as a learned and pious Malam because she took after her father in learning and skilled dissemination of knowledge with attractive voice. It is important to stress here that inheritance of barka (blessing) is a common phenomenon in Islamic tradition (Coulon, 1988; Ogunbiyi, 1982; Boyd & Mack, 1999 & 2000). She went back to Ghana to continue her education and tailoring apprenticeship. After some five years of learning, the parents found her matured enough for marriage. In 1959 she got married to Alhaji Arowolo and the marriage is blessed with children.

HER EMERGENCE AS A SCHOLAR AND TEACHER

By around 1963, the elite group that moved out of Alhaja Gogo Alawo's Asalatu group had settled at a place called Centre Igboro (a vocational training centre). The Asalatu became known and addressed after the centre; Asalatu Centre Igboro. With the exit of Alhaja Omo-Oloka from the group to establish a new Asalatu group around the same area in line with her husband interest, the Asalatu group was renamed 'Asalatu Centre A' and the new one 'Centre B'. As the Asalatu C. A. grew in influence, the number of the members increased, so also, was their educational demand. Thus, the old curriculum was no longer adequate for the old members who were desired of new learning. Alhaja Rianat Arowolo seemed to them to have possessed the desired type of knowledge. This made them to go closer to Alhaja Rianat Arowolo who combined the traditional and modern knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadith and other Islamic sciences as well as combined civilizations of Nigeria and Ghana. Besides her extended learning, she was energetic because she was younger and possessed good method of teaching and incomparable humility, confidence and zeal to propagate what she learnt. Though, she did not attend western school, she had acquired a working knowledge of English language through her stay and close interaction with the Ghanaians during her adolescence period. This gave her opportunity to interact freely with the western educated class which dominated the new Asalatu group. Perhaps, because she also had a sure means of livelihood which often reduce greed for money, she was loved by all.

Learning at the Asalatu, centred on Quranic reading, recitation of Dalailu al Khairat and rote learning of short traditions of the prophet (hadith), questions and answers on Islamic jurisprudence, theology and mundane live. Sermons are given to members on their rights and privileges as a wife, their duties as a wife and mother, and as a Muslim in general as well as their duties to neighbors and the society at large. Her engagement with all of these confirms her mastery of Arabic

grammar, poetry, prosody, phonetics, morphology, rhetoric, Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic jurisprudence. Prayer sessions are created to take care of individual supplications and solicited spiritual assistance. The methods of teaching employed ranged from chorus reading from the Qur'an and hadith, listening to recorded recitation of the teacher, group learning through the different group leaders chosen by the teacher from among the members of the group who are advanced in learning than others. Talking about the personality of Alhaja Rianat, some respondents said: 'Alhaja Rianat was gifted, very exceptional in learning; exemplary in character and very loving and amiable'. 'Alhaja Rianat Arowolo is a teacher of repute with great zeal to make people learn from her'. Another respondent commented on her honesty and generosity when she said;

Alhaja is very honest and generous. Whenever charity is extended to the group by individuals, associations and government, she distributed them to the deserving members without fear or favor and when this were no longer visible she used her hard earn money to take good care of us; the members, the poor and the needy that may visit us. Many of our members benefited from the Hajj tickets extended to her by the successive state government.

With the emergence of Alhaja Rianat as the sole Mualimatu of the Centre A Asalatu Group, the parent body Ansarul Islam Society of Nigeria, in recognition of her erudition, she was granted Full autonomy over her group and all women members of the Society were placed under her. This is similar to the recognition accorded Nana Asmau by Sultan Bello of the Sokoto Caliphate (Boyd & Mack, 1999 & 2000). By this, she became the Grand Mualimatu of the Society in Ilorin Emirate and Nigeria as a whole; responsible to the founder and his Calipha, the Chief Missioner and her surviving teachers. Thus, no one gave lecture at any of the women Asalatu groups except with her permission. She also led women to the Society's programmes in or outside Ilorin. She was the first woman invited to give a live Radio Islamic sermon in 1966 and she continued until very recently (in the late 90s) when young ladies took over from her. According to Alhaji A. B. Sallah, a onetime Islamic programmer at Radio Kwara, her lectures and Asalatu chants on the Radio went far and wide and these encouraged Muslim women from far and near who listened to the programmed at interval to emulate her by singing her songs and poems at Islamic ceremonies in their various locations. These events doubled women interest in Islam and Islamic scholarship.

She performed her first Hajj in 1973/74. However, since 1982 she performed hajj annually and sometimes at interval of two to three years to renew her Hajj and to provide spiritual guidance to the women pilgrims from Kwara state. She delivers lectures on yearly bases at her centre on the rites of Hajj to women preparing for Hajj. Many of her leading Mualimatus like Mualimatu Babakini, Malimatu Afusat Alounmata, Malimatu Awwawu Jabaje, Malimatu Aisat Isale Ajasa, Malimatu Alhaja Olonje Isale Oja, Malimatu Alhaja Fatima, and Mualimatu Awwawu Omolabi Okasinwon, etc. have enjoyed from the free hajj tickets extended to the

group (sometimes by the Kwara State government and / or Muslim philanthropists) for them to have practical experience of what had been learnt and to serve as guides to women pilgrims from Kwara State at the holy land (Jawondo, 2005).

Another major spiritual endeavour of Alhaja Mualimatu Arowolo is Sufism. Having been well learned in the science of the Qur'an, hadith and other Islamic sciences, a necessary condition for the proper understanding and sporadic progression in Sufism, she got initiated into the Tijjaniyyah order under the leadership of Shaikh Usman Erubu in 1980. Although, she did not lead her group in Tijjaniyyah litanies but she has been faithful to the duties of Sufism. In the year 2010 she made a visit to Kaolak in Ethiopia, the home of the Shaikh Ibrahim Niyas al Kaolak the father of modern intellectual and populist Tijjaniyyah order (Joseph, 2010). Even though her full time teaching does not permit her to be physically present at times, she is indeed committed to all the activities of the Tijjaniyyah order in Ilorin, Kwara State and Nigeria at large. Alhaja Mualimatu Arowolo is a scholar, a Sufi and a marabout. Like earlier Sufis in Islam, she practiced asceticism, reading of the Qur'an, hadith, Dalailul Khairat and fasting (Boyd & Mack, 1999 & 2000).

ACHIEVEMENTS / IMPACT

The Centre 'A' Asalatu group under the leadership of Alhaja Mualimatu Rianat Arowolo has turned into a full fledged informal learning institution. It has since 1963 produced numerous students who have travelled far and wide carrying the banner of Islam and Islamic scholarship along with them. Till date old women, young ladies and female children trooped in for learning. Her house is a sort of counseling clinic where shades of people go for advice on religio-political, socio-economic affairs. Learning took place at the Centre all the time under the tutelage of the appointed group leaders who assisted the Grand Mualimatu. They in turn took lessons at will with her. The Grand Mualimatu, Alhaja Rianat Arowolo attends to the general house on Mondays and Fridays between 9:00am and 2:00pm. On Mondays, lessons are taken from the holy Qur'an and other books on Islamic sciences. On Fridays, praises of Allah and that of His messenger, Muhammad are chanted. It is from this singular act that the common name 'Asalatu' for all women Islamic groups was derived. However, women do not have the monopoly of the usage of the term, because men groups also use it in addition to other formal names. The methods of teaching is largely oral by reading from the text, listening to recorded audio materials, singing of religious songs, individual and group learning as well as interactive session where questions are answered. With the kind permission or instruction of the Grand Mualimatu, other Mualimatu have continued to establish their branch of the Asalatu group in their matrimonial houses or areas or mosques where women in the areas learn Islam and Islamic scholarship. The leaders fix a day and time that will be convenient for

them in order not to miss their lessons at the main centre and their obligations to the Grand Mualimatu; Alhaja Rianatu Arowolo.

On Mondays and Fridays when Mualimatu Arowolo would be at the Centre to teach and deliver sermons, the Centre is always full to its capacity. On these days, time is set aside to attend to the spiritual needs of the members an important driving force in Islamic populism (Keddie, 1972). When it is time, members are asked to give their intentions. These are either said aloud or silently. Everyone gives alms in accordance to her financial capability. After all these, the Grand Mualimatu leads others in special prayers usually after the conclusion of learning. This was usually done on daily bases during the Ramadan fasting because of its significance. Beside this, quite a number of people (men and women) met with her at home to solicit for prayers on issues bothering their minds. The extent of the effectiveness of these prayers is difficult to measure but there is evidence to believe that they are very productive. A respondent narrated her experience thus;

During my pilgrimage to Mecca, I was in the company of Mualimatu Rianatu Arowolo who was my teacher. At Jeddah, I mistakenly placed on a platform my Asalatu prayer books which were immediately seized by a Saudi policeman. I tried to explain to him how dear I held the books but he refused to return them to me. I was later made to understand that that was the practice because they revere only the Holy Qur'an. Yet, I was disturbed because I belief also in those prayers. There and then, Mualimatu Rianatu Arowolo calmed me down and advised that we pray to Allah for the return of the prayer books. Both of us started to read Dalailu Hassan - Husein. Not quite long another policeman appeared, came straight to us and asked us of our problems. By gesticulation, I explained to him and he ordered for the release of the prayer books to me.

She added that a certain Alhaja Eleha Iya who was a member of her Asalatu group presented before the Jamaa her wish to go on holy pilgrimage to Mecca but she lacked the where withal. Prayers were said to Allah on it continuously until an unknown person assisted her with fund.

Monies realized from the in-house prayers, outdoor ceremonies usually attended by her group leaders and personal money and gifts extended to her from among the members, general muslim population of Ilorin and beyond are used in running the Asalatu group, giving alms to the poor and the needy from within and outside, sending members of 'the group leaders' on holy pilgrimage to Mecca and maintaining herself.

To catch the children young into Islamic scholarship alongside modernity, she established a nursery and primary school in her father's house, Jabaje compound named Zunurien Jamiu Nursery and Primary School, Ilorin. She has also made some efforts at producing reading materials for her members. Some of these

reading materials are being used far and wide as her students travelled with them to nooks and crannies of the emirate, state and Nigeria at large. Efforts are on to make a collection of the reading materials. In spite of the growing influence of Alhaja Mualimatu Arowolo within her group, in Ansarul Islam Society, among the Muslims of Ilorin Emirate and beyond, she is always cautious of her position as a woman and so she tries to abide very strictly to the dos and don'ts as spelled out in the Qur'an, the traditions and the consensus of opinion of the learned, the customs and traditions of both her religious society, Ansarul Islam and Ilorin Emirate in general. Thus, she remained very uncontroversial like in the same manner the daughters of Shaikh Ibrahim Niyas in particular and Sufi women leaders of the Taalibe Baay in Senegal in general (Joseph, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This article looked at the contributions of Alhaja Mualimatu Arowolo to the development of Islam and Islamic Scholarship in Ilorin Emirate. It was discovered that her family educational background, her studiousness, the support of her husband and the desire of the society to showcase women scholars assisted not only in making her a scholar but making her impact felt far and wide. These are primary factors in the educational development of any individual (Mortensen, 1983). Through her efforts, a good number of women scholars have been raised since 1963 to this time from her informal school called Asalatu. Like the Yan Taru of the Nana Asmau of Sokoto (Boyd and Mack, 1999), she raised a group of women scholars who in turn established Asalatu centres at the different nooks and crannies of the Emirate and Kwara state at large. A modern Nursery and primary school (co-educational) was also established to cater for the children. Through her efforts and example many independent Asalatu group sprang up and are doing well in the promotion of Islam and Islamic scholarship.

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