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# The Strength in the Song

## MUSLIM PERSONHOOD, AUDIBLE CAPITAL, AND HAUSA WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE OF THE HAJJ

Narrators are, in more than one sense, formed by their own narrations.  
—Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts*

Barbara M. Cooper

Two hackneyed phrases in English capture a certain impatient and impersonal sensibility regarding capital in the West: time is money, and talk is cheap. These phrases make little or no sense in Hausa-speaking Niger, so far as I can tell, where the classic adage regarding capital is *magana jari ce* (speech is wealth). While this expression is commonly invoked in celebration of Hausa literary arts (indeed, a well-known publication promoting literacy is so named), in this essay I would like to take seriously for a moment the understanding that oral performance can be a form of capital. The Hausa language has many words for wealth, but the word generally used to mean investment capital is used in this proverb. What would it mean to say that the act of speech is a kind of investment, or that oral performance can be thought of as a transaction involving wealth? The finest gift I ever received in Maradi was a song. Of course, one receives many gifts as a researcher: eggs, soap, chickens, taxi fare, cloth. One struggles mightily to ascertain what sorts of gifts might be appropriate to give in return. In this essay I would like, after a fashion, to make a return gift commensurate with the kind of wealth that was given to me—a celebration of a life through the power of song, an evocation of the potency of what can be heard but not seen.

Hajjiya Malaya sang this song for me one pleasant September morning in 1989 as we sat in the cool dark of her modest *banco* (mud) home in the compound of numerous female kin of the Sarki, the traditional ruler of the department of Maradi (a territory that had been an autonomous and bellicose kingdom prior to colonial rule). She broke into song in the midst of an otherwise unremarkable conversation about her life in which I asked her about the pilgrimage to Mecca indicated by her title. At the time I was astounded at this “breakthrough into performance” (Hymes 1981). Although my surprised expression made her laugh, it did not keep her from continuing her song cheerfully and at a breathtaking clip. The melody soared from a high lilting tone praising Allah and her kinsman the Sarki and then swooped down into a much lower range and a more somber mode in her punctuated refrain praying for her adoptive son

Mahaman Lawali. Her voice was surprisingly clear and strong for a woman in her nineties. Here, then, is the wealth she shared with me:

*A Song to My Son, Mahaman Lawali*

Bismillahi arahamani  
I begin with the name of Allah  
because of God's work  
blessings on Lawali.

. . . . .

Let me keep Mahaman, Allah,  
Let me keep Mahaman, Allah,  
I bring prayers to the King, Allah,  
I carry them to the place of Allah's prophet,  
For me, leave me Mahaman Lawali.

Let me keep Mahaman  
So that if he should grow up he can make me a place to sleep,  
If he makes porridge, he will give me some,  
If he makes gruel,  
He will give me some in the morning.

I say to Mahaman,  
Your mother has no money,  
But Allah made a way for her,  
I say, Allah made a way for me,  
The Sarki [the traditional ruler of Maradi, her kin] sent me to  
God's house, Lawali.

Allah gave me the will, I threw [stones at Satan],  
I passed the day in the fields of Adam, Mahaman,  
I saw the rocks of Mount Arafat,  
I slept at Muzdalifa, Mahaman.  
In the morning I went to throw stones at Satan,  
We went to throw stones at Satan, and then there I was at God's  
house, Lawali.

Allah gave me the will to make the circuit of the Kaba,  
I did the Tawaf, I did Safa and Marwa [Sa'y], Mahaman,  
I went to visit the tombs at Medina, Lawali,  
I say I went to Medina and made a visit.

You know, your mother has no anger, Lawali,  
Truly, threshing makes the grain ready,  
We took nothing but the purest, Lawali.

I tell you, my mother's kin,  
I have no evil feelings,  
For I am still praying to God  
To give each one their share of strength.  
(Malaya 1989)

I have provided here the central core of Hajjiya Malaya's song, which she repeated with minor variations many times. The song was recursive, with her social, emotional, and spiritual reflections strung creatively and spontaneously upon the more linear strand of her movement through the rituals of the hajj.<sup>1</sup> Rather than simply narrating the trip in song, Hajjiya improvises on the dual themes of the pilgrimage proper and the social relations in which its successful completion is embedded. The song is therefore multilayered: it is an invocation to God, echoing no doubt the prayers she offered up in Mecca for the as-yet-unborn child; it is a gift to her new son, with whom she shares her experience upon her return; and it serves both to entertain and to edify her female friends and kin at the celebration of his birth and naming (*bikin suna*) and at other such family gatherings. The moral message it conveys can therefore be understood, as Beverly Mack (1997) has recently argued concerning the poetic works of female Sufi scholars of Nigeria, as a kind of *zakat* (alms) offered for the instruction and moral uplift of the community at large.

Like other, more narrative accounts of women's pilgrimage experiences that I collected, this song opens with an expression of gratitude for the sponsorship enabling her to make the trip; it traces the geography of the hajj ritual in speech; it locates the experience of the hajj in local social tensions and relations; and its primary emphasis is on the spiritual experience of God's special protection in Mecca. It is also a prayer, an aspect of the song/poem that gives it particular poignancy and a sense of the speaker's direct and personal relationship to Allah. Many members of Malaya's kinship and friendship networks were familiar with this song, which she had performed for them on numerous occasions. Hajjiya Malaya's poetic rendition of her hajj brings into focus many of the issues surrounding both the pilgrimage proper and women's oral reenactments of their pilgrimage experience on returning home. I will use her song to explore the cultural forms Maradi women seem to borrow from more broadly in making public their pilgrimage experiences, the social context of such performances, and the sociopolitical implications of women's growing access to the moral and cultural capital signaled in the title *hajjiya*.

Hausa women's performance of the hajj is historically quite new.<sup>2</sup> While individuals of all social backgrounds have, particularly recently, managed to perform the pilgrimage, it remains closely identified with

material success through trade and with access to capital on a scale out of most women's reach. Indeed, today the term used to describe a successful male merchant in Niger is *Al Hajj*, regardless of whether he has performed the pilgrimage or not. The literature on the Hausa diaspora emerging from the hajj assumes, by and large, that the pilgrim is male, and where women appear at all they enter as the "wives of pilgrims," not as pilgrims in their own right. It's clear that until this century most pilgrims from West Africa were indeed male, and this has left an interesting imprint on Hausa pilgrim communities, since male pilgrims have married local Arabic-speaking women; the women and children may speak Arabic, while young men only learn Hausa as they move into adulthood for trade (Works 1976, 61).

Prior to independence, women's limited access to substantial trade capital along with their obligation to care for young children and elderly kin made pilgrimage particularly difficult for them.<sup>3</sup> Women have been able to make the trip more recently because of state subsidies for religious travel and because air travel has reduced the time they must be absent to perform the rites at Mecca.<sup>4</sup> Subsidizing the hajj is one way a single-party state in an overwhelmingly Muslim region (Niger is 90 percent Muslim) can gain some legitimacy. As will become clear in a moment, sponsorship of the hajj is an important form of symbolic capital in this region, something lost neither on politicians in postcolonial capitals nor on traditional rulers in more provincial locales such as Maradi.

I came to this consideration of Hausa women's pilgrimage accounts in the course of collecting detailed life histories of women in the Maradi region for a historical study exploring the articulation of material struggles with cultural contests. I discovered that many of the women I worked with did not seem to have a sense of their life experience as containing a story worth telling, or at any rate a story amenable to a public recounting in the context of an interview. I came to appreciate how remarkable such classics of ethnography as *Baba of Karo* (Smith 1981 [1954]) and *Nisa* (Shostak 1983) in fact are. Women might be quite happy to talk about their economic activities, or to gossip about one another, or to detail the successes and failures of their children. But teasing out the details of the women's own lives proved a painstaking task, performed with ease only as I gradually discovered which veins of experience Maradi women themselves were interested in mining. Much of my work up to this point has focused on a particularly rich vein around the question of shifting marriage obligations in the region (Cooper 1997). Presumably the topic of marriage felt safe and appropriate, cloaked as it is with the mantle of history understood as "tradition." By detailing their own weddings and the nature of their successive marriages it was possible for women to take center stage without seeming presumptuous, for the topic at hand was

seemingly “customs” and how they had or hadn’t changed, rather than the women themselves.

However, there was another, seemingly unrelated, lode in my interviews, presenting women with an occasion to talk strikingly openly about themselves and their own lives. This emerged when I asked women with the title *hajjiya* to tell me about their pilgrimage. This question elicited lengthy responses that might continue uninterrupted for several minutes, responses that I came to discover had their own characteristic shape. In other words, it seemed to me that I had stumbled on an indigenous Hausa oral form—the pilgrimage account—and because the women I spoke with knew how to tell such a tale they delivered their accounts comfortably and probably in something close to the form they had delivered them on other occasions. I do not claim that these oral performances were not tailored in many ways for me as an audience, for clearly they were. I do suggest, however, that as a younger woman curious about Mecca I made a reasonably familiar audience, and that the ease with which Maradi women responded to this question probably reflected their sense that this was a question they had answered safely and engagingly in the past.

What we have in Hajjiya Malaya’s song is an engagement with modernity and the articulation of an individuated form of identity in the absence of the literacy and print media so often taken for granted as inevitable elements in the rise of modernity and the elaboration of the supra-local forms of communal identity implicated in it (see, e.g., Havelock 1980; Goody 1986; McLuhan 1964; Anderson 1991; and Gellner 1983). Theorists of literacy and globalization have assumed to a remarkable extent that transformations in societies are driven in predictable ways by technology, in particular the technologies of writing, print, and other media such as television. The novel uses to which the hajj phenomenon puts transport, communication, and finance technology should already give us pause here. The hajj today rests on an almost unimaginable technological and administrative infrastructure involving transport, communication, Islamic banks, medical practitioners, massive slaughterhouses, and sanitation crews—none of which could have been predicted in a narrow understanding of the expansion of technology under capitalism.<sup>5</sup> The technologist reading of social transformation also contains other unwarranted assumptions. First, all spaces are assumed to be uniformly susceptible to distancing or “space-time compression”—the collapse of space into a shared, homogeneous experience through technologies allowing simultaneity (Giddens 1990; Harvey 1989). However, Mecca will never be homologous with, say, L.A. or Frankfurt—indeed, it presents an alternative, recentered modernity in which the collapse of time becomes, in a sense, the triumph over all time and space through ritual.

Second, such work implicitly sees the postmodern subject emerging

from the encounter with global modernity as formed by the media understood largely as emanating from a Euro-American center. Walter Ong (1986, 25) has remarked, with a certain unintended irony, that “literacy is imperious” because writing is a technology that restructures thought, making it difficult for the literate to understand the nature of the world prior to writing. Like many with little experience with living oral cultures, Ong wrongly assumes that “pressed by the need to manage an always fugitive noetic universe, the oral world is basically conservative” (ibid.). By such an understanding it is hard to see how change is possible; and accordingly, where there is change it is assumed to have its origins in the restructuring of thought or social organization through technologies such as writing and print. Yet it is not altogether clear that the particular transformation in thought evidenced in Hajjiya Malaya’s song could be understood to derive from predictable properties of an expansive and dispassionate technology or even from the needs of industrial society. The newly public persona in Hajjiya Malaya’s song derives from the unpredictable and opportunistic adaptations of an extraordinarily resilient Hausa cultural economy articulated orally through a passionately expressed Islamic idiom in the context of women’s new access to the hajj. If there are technologies at play here, they are the airplane and the boom box.

### **From the Poetics of Hegemonic Culture to the Medium of Colonial Resistance**

The pleasure of song, combined with the mnemonic qualities of verse, has made songs an important part of how Islam has been promoted in the Hausa-speaking region. Certainly when Nana Asma’u, the daughter of Usman ‘dan Fodio (the leader of the nineteenth-century jihad that transformed the face of the Hausa kingdoms and led to a tremendous expansion of Islam in the region), hoped to acculturate illiterate women into Islam she made use of poems and songs (Boyd 1989). Asma’u used poems and songs to teach her followers, known as *‘yan taru*, proper comportment in Islam. Their pilgrimages to local shrines and tombs clearly resonate with Hajjiya Malaya’s hajj to Mecca, and the poetic form she employs possibly draws on the kinds of oral poems and songs women learned in the wake of the jihad of Usman ‘dan Fodio.

In other ways this oral song resonates with the more masculine genre of the written poem expressing a longing to perform the hajj. West African rulers from Mansa Musa to Askia Muhammad have long drawn on the *baraka* (spiritual force) that performance of the hajj invests in them to shore up their power and prestige (Lewis 1980, 135–36). By the same token the criticisms of many Islamic reformists gained force through their

performance of the hajj, making it possible to topple nominally Muslim rulers. Performance of the hajj could serve both to reinforce the claims of standing rulers (see Barkindo 1992 on the state-sponsored hajj tradition of Kanem/Bornu) and to justify the attacks of reformists (see Hiskett 1984, 168, 170, 227, 235, 237). Thus the performance of the hajj has long played a role in political legitimation—whether to protect existing rulers or to justify revolt in West Africa. The emphasis of the nineteenth-century jihadists in Hausaland on Islamic orthodoxy enhanced the appeal and salience of the hajj. Ironically, the tremendous political and military demands of the era also made it impossible for the leaders of the jihad to absent themselves long enough to perform the hajj.<sup>6</sup> A poetic tradition emerged in Hausaland wherein the expression of longing to go to Mecca also served to evoke a nostalgia for a more perfect Islamic community.<sup>7</sup>

The jihadists, including Nana Asma'u, wrote a great deal of poetry, much of it didactic in intent or engaging with a long exegetical tradition. Such works taught the audience the jihadist's interpretation of proper behavior and the rewards and punishments associated with human conduct. By contrast, poems invoking in imagination the pilgrimage to Mecca emphasized the personal and the emotional, an intimate ecstatic experience in body and imagination. The senses of the individual believer gathered evidence of the Prophet's actions, linking the space and time of the poet with that of the Prophet in the Hijaz.<sup>8</sup> In such poems, devotion to the Prophet Mohammed becomes physically embodied and expressed as a powerful yearning. This yearning to be with the Prophet serves as a motivation to act rightly and to convey his teachings to others. Yearning or longing are thus permissible—even admirable—traits in a believer. Where otherwise an expression of personal emotion might have little place in the poetry of the jihadists, the sense of longing in evidence here, when associated with the Prophet and the Islamic heartlands, became fully positive.<sup>9</sup> Such verse contained within it the key elements that could begin to authorize a poetics of personal experience and emotion in the form of hajj poetry: an emphasis on personal experience and emotion together with a transcendent visitation with the Prophet which could be located spatially in the Hijaz.

The hajj, then, is not simply a form of spiritual capital for those who succeed in performing it. It serves also as a powerful and broadly held metaphor for both the individual spiritual quest and the collective emulation of an ideal Islamic community. These themes obviously have particular salience in the context of colonial domination under a non-Muslim power. Like the rituals themselves, the hajj as poetic trope serves to evoke the past through an alternative political and spiritual geography in order to recuperate a reformed and renewed future. The familiar litany of the ritual performances of the hajj then becomes a way of evoking a utopian

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Islamic community, particularly with the onset of colonial intrusion.<sup>10</sup> When Hajjiya Malaya evokes the landscape of the hajj in poetic form she conjures this utopian vision as well, a vision in which the duties of one generation to the other are upheld, in which each one has “their share of strength,” and in which jealousy and competition are neutralized by prayer. The poem, more effectively than straight narrative, permits her to evoke an ideal space, one that imaginatively maps the spiritual topography of Mecca onto her social relations in Maradi. The tremendous yearning in her song—for the health of Lawali, for the proper outcome of their relationship, and for the eventual happiness of her jealous kin—draws force from the poetic traditions she, an illiterate woman, unconsciously imbibes in this predominantly oral rather than literate environment. If the poems of longing for Mecca seem to have a more obvious political referent than Hajjiya Malaya’s poem, that is because the political sphere in which her poem has most salience—the interior court of the Sarki’s palace—is largely invisible to the outsider.

### **The Counterhegemonic Poetics of Popular Performance**

The consideration of these alternately didactic and ecstatic literate genres does little to help us understand the more performative qualities of Hajjiya Malaya’s song. Hajjiya Malaya, unlike Nana Asma’u, was not herself literate. If these poetic traditions, once translated into vernacular songs, made their way into the broader understanding of Islam in the region and contributed to shaping local oral forms, they nevertheless cannot fully explain the shape and power of Malaya’s oral performance. I shall turn, then, to consider some of the oral forms, all of which antedate Islam in this region, that also inform her composition.

I suspect that I was given this song because I had asked Hajjiya on another occasion whether she knew any women who were professional praise-singers. She was much amused, and pointed out that she herself was well known for her songs (*wa’ko’ki*). She was not a *zabaya* (a woman, often of a relatively low-status background, who earns her living from singing at the ceremonies marking major life events). On the contrary, Hajjiya Malaya was an aristocrat maintained modestly at the expense of the traditional ruler of Maradi, the Sarki. However, she clearly saw her work as related to that of a praise-singer, a sense reinforced by the song’s careful enunciation of the Sarki’s sponsorship as well as her public performance of the song before audiences similar in composition to those at a family celebration. One way of making sense of this performative kinship would be to note that Malaya repays the Sarki’s patronage by making public his generosity. In the case of this song about going to Mecca his

generosity has pious overtones, since sending clients and kin to Mecca is one way a devout Muslim can gain merit.

Praise-singers occupy an ambivalent place in Hausa culture. As generally lower-status individuals engaged in something akin to a craft for pecuniary reward, they are sometimes looked down on by others. On the other hand, their proximity to the wealthy and powerful lends them a certain allure of power. Furthermore, their ability to subtly (or not so subtly) sabotage the reputations of their patrons and sponsors in song gives praise-singers very real influence over the wealthy. In a sense, the song of the praise-singer is the most public statement possible of the actions, standing, and moral fiber of her patrons; it serves, in effect, as an audible statement of account of local symbolic capital.

It was in reflecting on the nature of the power of professional praise-singers that I began to fully appreciate the force of Hajjiya Malaya's song and the importance of audible capital. I became acutely aware of the public quality of such songs one afternoon when I was recording what I thought was a private performance of praise songs by a well-known singer, Hajjiya Zabaya. The sound of her songs carrying over the walls of the compound prompted numerous neighbors to respond by sending her an endless stream of gifts of grain, food, cash, and cola. Sounds, messages, loyalties, and favors—all carried beyond the compound walls into the surrounding neighborhood to create an audible public performance. Evidently simply to hear the praise-singer's song was to be drawn into social exchange.

Hajjiya Malaya's song in praise of the Sarki, then, has an importance that might easily escape the eye. Once I had recorded it many of her friends and relatives asked me if they could have a copy of the tape, alerting me to the circulation of ideas, commentary, and critique in audible forms. In Maradi, cassette tapes are an important way in which the internal spaces of homes are breached, making it possible for seemingly private arenas to overlap and intersect with, even to compete with, the more apparently public spaces of the mosque, the market, and the political meeting. Alternative interpretations of Islam are debated through such recordings, Christian proselytizing is advanced through "cassette ministries," and popular culture makes its irreverent commentary on contemporary politics through the circulation of cassettes. If spectacle remains important to the negotiation and performance of culture and politics, one neglects the audible at one's peril in a region in which *daraja* (respectability) is associated with a certain distancing from vulgar (or rather visible) public display.

If in her song Hajjiya Malaya praises the Sarki, she simultaneously makes public her own standing and moral fiber. When such qualities are made known broadly they give rise to obligations and expectations. The

Sarki is expected to continue to perform as a beneficent and pious ruler. Hajjiya makes herself known as a successful pilgrim, a client, and a devout woman who deserves continued support. Most importantly, she establishes in a very public fashion her relationship to her adoptive son. While the adoption of the children of close kin is not unusual in this region, sustaining moral claims on those children can be difficult. By making public through song her adopted son's debts to her and responsibility for her in her old age, Malaya in effect weakens the potential claims of others on him. Particularly relevant here are her own close kin, whose jealousies are forestalled through her prayer that "each one" will receive "their share of strength." They also, then, become publicly indebted to her for her prayers.

It is not hard to imagine the sense of social obligation Lawali has grown up with hearing this song repeatedly throughout his childhood, nor is it hard to imagine the difficulties others might have in challenging his ties with Malaya. Hajjiya Malaya, who had no living birth children, had managed to keep Lawali with her for eight years at the time I recorded the song. Her failure to produce healthy children had contributed to her numerous divorces, yet in spite of her great age and her dependent status she had succeeded in maintaining her claims to this adopted child. The song was no doubt an element in her success in sustaining her ties to Lawali. The song, then, is far from being a simple record of a trip to Mecca. The dynamics generated by this public song of praise and prayer make the song and the singer important agents within the local political field.

Hajjiya's particular casting of the oral *wa'ka* is unusual, however. Hausa language does not distinguish between song and written poetry, employing the same term, *wa'ka*, for both, suggesting that any oral/literate typology will elide some important historical commonalities between written poetry and songs. Nevertheless, some attention to the differences between the contemporary conventions and expectations of the *wa'ka* as oral song (*wa'kar baka*) as opposed to the *wa'ka* as written poem (*rubatuciyar wa'ka*) is called for in order to appreciate the novelty of this song. In a comparative study of oral songs (composed largely by women) and published *wa'ka* poems (written largely by men), Beverly Mack (1986, 185) notes that in general low-status Hausa women singers use songs to "say and do what other women cannot, criticizing the status quo, and encouraging behavior that is not normally condoned." The oral *wa'ka*, she points out,

is appropriate to the praise song for prestigious individuals, naming and wedding celebrations, spirit-possession cult ritual, pacing domestic tasks, etc. It is suited to the non-religious—the ritual, entertainment, and quotidian

situation. These extemporaneously delivered *wakoki* are basic to Hausa entertainment in both private and in public settings. (Mack 1986, 182)

The written poems, on the other hand, are often didactic and conservative even when written by literate women. For example, they are useful for conveying information on current events to secluded women in northern Nigeria while upholding the values of respect, propriety, and domesticity. The poets, “in contrast to the creators of oral *wakoki* . . . feel women’s behavior must remain within the constraints imposed by tradition” (Mack 1986, 188). Mack points out that when Nigerian Hausa women author poems they tend to write secular poems of a didactic and nationalist bent.

Furniss (1996) locates this divide between the oral *wa’ka* song and the written *wa’ka* poem temporally with the concern of the jihadists to set off orthodox expression (in poetry) from *hululu* (idle chatter) and/or *bi’di’a* (innovation) (in song):

The Jihadists and their successors had sought to establish a dominant culture which was, in the main, Islamic, serious, urban and male. Frippery, licentiousness and “idle chatter” had been supposedly relegated to the rural world, and to the worlds of women, children, and pagans. *Bori* was for prostitutes and deviant men, traditional tales were for old women and children, non-serious song was for farmers, hunters and the idle, only praise-singing remained part of the dominant cultural scene, but even that had incorporated Islamic ideals and forms into its vocabulary. The typical form for the expression of dominant culture, poetry, had an extensive vocabulary of praise, praise of the Prophet, but which could also be appropriated in due course for Sufi praise of saints and for secular praise of major political figures. (Furniss 1996, 203–4)

By composing a clearly religious song, Hajjiya Malaya has violated the expectations of the oral *wa’ka*. She has taken a genre largely devoted to entertainment and transgression (or “idle chatter”) and used it in ways that bridge (or perhaps heal) the postjihad rupture between the feminine oral *wa’ka* and the more masculine written poem. Her song takes on some of the didactic and spiritual qualities of the written form, teaching her audience about the rites of the hajj, for example, while upholding the conservative values of respect for elders. In other words, she has co-opted into the oral form some of the qualities of the more prestigious masculine written form. She has, in effect, adopted something of a masculine persona, despite the clearly feminine and maternal concerns of the poem. Indeed, it is precisely the moral force of the maternal combined with the religious sanctity of the hajj itself that make it possible in this instance for a woman who has little or no formal schooling in Islamic scholarship to

presume to compose such a deeply spiritual song on such a personal theme.

However, the *wa'ka* song/poem is not the only cultural referent shaping this poem. Gatherings to listen to a hajj account would be similar in composition and timing to those for an evening of *tatsuniyoyi* (Hausa folktales); the emphasis on entertainment and enlightenment for children as well as for women carries across the two oral genres. Both would be shared during the leisure of the evening as the day's tasks were completed. Folktales teach respect for authority, love of animals and nature, and verbal dexterity. They also offer a vision of Hausa women that, although not always flattering, in general belies the notion that these Muslim women are either passive or lacking in cunning. As Connie Stephens points out, telling folktales is predominantly a feminine activity and can plausibly be seen as a counterpoint to the kinds of pursuits and oral genres preferred by Muslim men:

Although Hausa men still perform *tatsuniyoyi* . . . the tales are more often told by women. The steady growth of Islam, with its own narrative and poetic traditions, has encouraged the idea that men should concentrate on more overtly religious themes. Women, who generally spend less time in Qur'anic school and at the mosque, are more likely to perpetuate the pre-Islamic *tatsuniya* tradition. (1991, 222)

In these fantastic fictional tales women are, as Stephens suggests, independent, powerful, and full of a sense of self-worth.

Both storytelling and the singing of *wa'ka* songs can potentially bring opprobrium or disapproval upon the women who perform them. Both are performed at night, when women traditionally visit one another. However, women's evening movements are also carefully scrutinized for fear of affairs. Common elements of Hausa stories trouble some Muslims, who find the spirits who populate the stories as well as the characters' often wild and improper antics inappropriate. Similarly, some singers' performances bear a kinship to *bori* spirit possession activities if they are accompanied by drumming on calabashes and vivid body movements (Mack 1983, 223). Both the oral *wa'ka* and the *tatsuniya* tradition are potentially at odds with conservative readings of proper Islamic practice. This explains somewhat why women's songs and poems are often didactic in nature, for their educative function vitiates any criticism they might bring on their authors. Conversely, if a woman hopes to teach others appropriate behavior, poetry rather than songs or tales will generally serve her well by lending cultural legitimacy to her didacticism (Furniss 1996, 16).

Hajjiya Malaya's song, then, stands in interesting tension with the song and folktale traditions. In seizing on the performative resource of

storytelling while recasting the tale as one more clearly in line with the kinds of genres generally seen as appropriate by Muslim men, she is carrying forward a tradition in which women are creative, active agents while reworking it to conform to more masculine notions of piety and propriety. No one could mistake her song for a *tatsuniya*, of course, for it is not set out, as folktales are, with the formulaic verbal markers of an invented fantasy (“*Ga tan ga tanku; Ta zo ta wuce*”). Indeed, the force of her song requires that it have reference to a real event prescribed by Islam whose incredible dimensions are miraculous rather than fantastic. The performance of the hajj account, then, draws on the tradition of storytelling by firelight, but it goes further by turning the tale into an account of a real event. It is significant that women whose life stories are not authorized by existing genres find a rare justification for seizing the stage to recount a part of their lives publicly when the account centers on the performance of the hajj.<sup>11</sup> This observation calls for a consideration of Muslim Hausa women’s religious practice and the extraordinary role of the pilgrimage in their lives.

### **Islamic Practice: Feminine Variants and the Universal Hajj**

West African Islam, and indeed African Islam in general, has historically tolerated a strong strand of saint veneration. Islamic practice in many regions of Africa may entail pilgrimage to tombs of local saints (Lewis 1980, 74). Such local pilgrimage cults are often very important to women, perhaps because the pilgrimage to Mecca has been, by and large, impossible for them until quite recently. Certainly among the Hausa it is clear that women’s experience of Islam has been shaped by *ziyara*, or visiting saints’ tombs.<sup>12</sup> Such local pilgrimages are often multivocal and have been powerful to women precisely because they draw on familiar ritual practices even as they contribute to women’s greater integration into Islam. Indeed the hajj rites in Mecca themselves draw on and recast pre-Islamic pilgrimage traditions (Peters 1994, 3–59). The highly textured quality of the rituals in and near Mecca explains, perhaps, how this preeminently Muslim practice can simultaneously resonate with pre-Islamic rites elsewhere.

The importance of women’s local rituals to their understanding and practice of Islam has contributed to the readiness with which both Muslims themselves and scholars of Islam have presumed that the tremendous variations in how women practice Islam mean that Muslim women are less pious and, in a sense, less Muslim than their male counterparts. Women stand in, then, for locality, particularity, national authenticity, and diversity in Islam. These qualities, however rationalized and valorized, tend to

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undermine women's standing in a religion stressing unity and universality. This reality no doubt prompted Robert and Elizabeth Fernea's revisionist article, "Variation in Religious Observance among Islamic Women," in which they enumerate the diverse forms of female worship, including the *zar*, *qraya*, *maulid*, and *azza*, seeing these as peculiarly feminine contributions to shared local conceptions of Islam (Fernea and Fernea 1972, 391–401). They propose that these need not be seen as failed or deviant forms of Islam, but should be understood as localized expressions of common core beliefs.

Women's Islamic practice, then, exhibits tremendous variation. The preceding consideration of popular or counterhegemonic Hausa performance practice suggests that, indeed, many Muslim Hausa women engage in practices from *bori* cult activities to storytelling and singing that some Muslim Hausa men might regard as unorthodox. Such variation, in turn, is precisely what politicians and scholars, often male, tend to attack. For this reason, the uniformity of the performance of the hajj has the effect, for women, of providing one place where their practice of Islam is unassailable.<sup>13</sup> This means that, whether women use their newfound *baraka* to gain sanction for their own practices or to attack the prevailing practices of others, they have increasingly at their disposal an extremely potent form of religious capital, one based on performance rather than on scholarly training.

### **Globalization, Multiple Modernities, and Muslim Personhood**

Numerous scholars who work in Muslim regions have insisted recently that modernity be understood as multiple, complex, and frequently engaging what one might call a dialectical ambivalence toward the West (Watts 1996; Lazreg 1994; Metcalf 1990). Göle (1997) rightly warns that to read such alternate modernities through the lense of resistance is to miss the creative reappropriations and new subjectivities they entail. It seems inadequate to see Muslim subjectivities of the contemporary moment as being primarily or initially emanations of or reactions to the Western secular subject—we must break free of the solipsism that reduces all discourses to responses to the West (for a particularly suggestive treatment of this issue see Larkin 1997). We must ask ourselves whether there are modernities outside the reflexive/reactive "alternatives" to the West, modernities that emerge out of global phenomena and postcolonial histories but which engage different kinds of understandings of wealth, personhood, and the public sphere than are commonly taken for granted in much work on modernity and globalization.

Like Barbara Metcalf (1990), I see the hajj as inviting an intriguing autobiographical impulse, but in the case of the oral performances of the hajj I collected I do not think a credible case can be made for their origins in Western media or modernist literary forms, if only because the paucity of print matter and the low incidence of literacy in the Maradi region (in striking contrast with northern Nigeria and South Asia) render any such linkage implausible. More importantly, however, the imprint of preexisting Hausa cultural forms is so clearly evident here that any potentially novel influence of print culture on subject formation appears insignificant by comparison. My purpose in this essay in dwelling on one song in particular is to drive this point home as forcefully as possible. Globalization is deeply imbricated in local social concerns and is articulated within and through local cultural forms in unpredictable ways. My work with women around their experiences of the hajj has taught me that globalization is not readily or productively collapsed into subsumption under Western or even Northern capital. The expansion of Islam has long been an extraordinarily powerful globalizing force (see, e.g., Abu-Lughod 1989), one that cannot be reduced to resistance to the West or more loosely to the “relativization” imperative, to use Robertson’s ungainly formulation.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, globalization does not annihilate locality: cultural forms at more proximate scales are given heightened, not reduced, salience with globalization. Rather than producing deterritorialization, the modern hajj, I would argue, produces a resacralization of familiar terrain and a powerful recentering around Mecca. Finally, within this complex nexus linking the individual with scales from the household and neighborhood to the global community of Islam, the renegotiation of gender can be performed without any reference to or articulation of a feminist stance in dialogue with the West. Women’s growing access to the performance of the hajj as a form of moral capital has figured in subdued local struggles to recalibrate women’s social position, influencing local understandings of women’s position within Islam.

Women’s increasing ability to fulfill their obligation to perform the hajj has tremendous political-economic implications, raising the important question of which women are best positioned to take advantage of the shifting and shrinking spiritual geography of the late twentieth century. In Hajjiya Malaya’s case her links to the fading but still relevant aristocracy of the Maradi region provided her with indirect access to the wealth of the Nigerois state. Elderly women in general have a stronger moral claim to those periodic pockets of accumulated capital that make pilgrimage possible, reinforcing the strong gerontocratic element in Hausa social life. But not all of the women I encountered who had gained the title *hajjiya* were elderly or aristocratic. All Muslim women in Maradi who have any success in trade make saving money for their pilgrimage a very high pri-



ority, so that for women as well as for men successful completion of the pilgrimage is a mark of commercial success. A new class of prominent female merchants, the *hajjiyoyi* (the plural form for *hajjiya*), has emerged in Maradi; their pious title shields them somewhat from criticism for their visibility in the commercial realm. Furthermore, the association of pilgrimage with age enhances their occasionally dubious claims that they are postmenopausal and therefore no longer subject to the constraints on movement and visibility taken for granted as appropriate for younger women. Among the educated elite of the civil-servant class the title *Madame* competes with the title *hajjiya* as a mark of social distinction—once again access to the resources of the state creates differential access to moral capital. Finally, and intriguingly, several young women who earn their keep through sexual services have managed to dignify their lifestyles through the acquisition of the title *hajjiya*. Women gain access to the capital necessary to perform the pilgrimage through a variety of means, from clientage to wage labor to successful trade. They then translate that experience into forms of capital that are recognized in Maradi proper and thereby convert themselves, in a sense, into recognizably Muslim persons. Attention to just such locally specific cultural transactions, through which real individuals interact with global processes, are critical to sustaining a rich sense of human agency, personhood, and individual worth.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously in a region as poor as Niger these multiple transactions (cash into pilgrimage, experience into song, unseen woman into visible Muslim person) generate tremendous competition for scarce capital. Not everyone succeeds in going to Mecca: of my 110 female informants only 17 had performed the hajj in a sample deliberately skewed toward elderly women and urban women who were active in trade. While this is a startling increase over the number of women who performed the pilgrimage in past centuries, it continues to be the case that only a small percentage of the population succeeds in fulfilling this religious obligation. Women in urban centers with access to the resources of the state clearly have an advantage over women who are locked in marginal farming enterprises in rural areas. We need to begin to gain a clearer picture of how global phenomena such as the hajj influence the generation and circulation of wealth and status, amplifying existing social differentiation while simultaneously altering the terms on which distinctions (such as gender, age, and sexuality) are marked and understood.

Given the importance of the hajj to the circulation of symbolic and moral capital, I suggest that to make sense of this particular globalizing process we must let go of traditional understandings of profit maximization and qualify the assumption that globalization is driven by the predictable march of technology in the service of capital conventionally

understood. Transport, communications, medical and food processing technologies are, in the hajj, put to uses that fall well outside the purview of conventional corporate expansion or even of the more labile impulses of post-Fordist flexible accumulation. As any world traveler will note in perusing flight magazines, commercial airlines have little interest in expansion into the African market beyond South Africa and a few select eco-tourist havens. The significant but seasonal linkage between Saudi Arabia and a host of sites throughout the Islamic world, then, remains utterly invisible by such a reckoning. If governments throughout the wider Muslim world invest heavily in hajj infrastructure, so also do individual Muslims. Indeed, the topic of the hajj reliably produces heated debates among Maradi's Muslims about economic rationality.<sup>16</sup> For pilgrims from one of the most impoverished countries on the globe, the hajj often represents their most vivid encounter with technology, wealth, and cosmopolitan culture. Women and men who perform the hajj not only may return with a new sense of themselves as Muslims, but also will be burdened with numerous expensive gifts, from VCRs to videocameras to brocaded wall hangings of the Great Mosque. As Mariane Ferme (1994, 28) observes of "Alhaji Airplane" upon his return to Sierra Leone from Mecca, his "dream of modernization going hand in hand with religious piety was shaped by his own spiritual and physical pilgrimage, but was also consistent with the rest of the community's perception that material wealth and 'advancement' were aspects of the integration in a more cosmopolitan Muslim community."

Technology and commodities in themselves, then, tell us little about the uses to which they will be put, the kinds of modernity that will emerge, or the forms of subjectivity that will accompany those modernities. To borrow Appadurai's (1990) useful vocabulary, if the hajj presents an immensely complex "ethnoscape" of human movement of tremendous historical depth, it also presents us with a contemporary "finanscape" whose contours are largely invisible to the West and whose logic is poorly captured in traditional models of profit maximization. The contemporary pilgrimage is made possible through a landscape of technology put to unpredictable uses, and it is justified at the national scale through "ideoscapes" that assert the primacy of the national even as the traveler's supra-local Muslim identity is reinforced. What does the individual pilgrim make of this complex experience? And what is the relationship between the individual subjectivity that crystallizes out of the experience and the "mediascapes" in which it is embedded? That is, what are the "proto-narratives of possible lives" (Appadurai 1990, 9) that emerge, and how are they generated?

I suggest that the verbal reenactment of the hajj provides Maradi's women—largely illiterate, for the most part poorly schooled in Islam, and

often marginalized by local understandings of the role of women in Islam—with an alternative means of access to the cultural and spiritual capital of Islam. The performance of the hajj provides such women with a moral endowment. The Hajjiya can successively and repeatedly draw from this endowment to produce the oral *zakat*, a kind of audible capital that authorizes both her autobiographical impulse and her affiliated social claims. To argue that the hajj presents women with such a moral endowment is not, of course, to suggest that everyone will be willing to accept this currency—the piety in which women’s social claims are thus modestly veiled is amenable to the satirical and subversive critique that is so familiar a mark of Hausa popular oral arts. Nevertheless, Hausa men may have done some Islamic schooling at local *makaranta* (Koranic schools), and therefore have access to the foundational textual basis of Islam. Those few with higher learning can themselves in their person embody Islam and Islamic practice as *mallamai*, professional Muslim scholars. Women in Maradi, on the other hand, often see themselves and are often seen by men locally as inferior Muslims, first because of their limited access to the most important loci of Islamic capital and second because of the association of feminine practices with innovation and particularity rather than Islamic universality. But for women, particularly older women who came of age before schooling for girls became more common after 1970, access to a pure form of Islam comes through performance, what Shii scholar Ali Shari’ati refers to as *harakat*: “As the Qur’an is Islam in words, and the Imam is Islam embodied in a human figure, so the hajj is Islam in *harakat* (setting out, movement)” (qtd. in Fischer and Abedi 1990, 159). This essay has illustrated how one woman translated that movement into a replicable and memorable performance, a text that made it possible for her to become audible within a milieu where her commitment to Islam might otherwise remain unseen or be undervalued. In doing so, as Elizabeth Tonkin (1992) rightly points out, she struggles to become both the author and the product of her own narration.

## Notes

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Tunda magana jari ce, aka ba ni, ga maganar Hajjiya Malaya mai daraja, ya dace in bado.

1. The performance of the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) is known as the fifth pillar of Islam, along with the declaration of faith, the five daily prayers, the tithe, and the fast of Ramadan. The ritual requirements of the hajj are easy enough in principle to summarize, as the European traveler Burkhardt did in 1829 for the benefit of his European readers:

The principal duties incumbent upon the Hajji are: 1. that he should take the Ihram [state of ritual purity made visible through special white pilgrim dress]; 2. be present, on the 9th of Dhu al-Hajj [the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar], from afternoon till sunset at the sermon preached at Arafat [the *wuquf* standing ceremony]; 3. attend a similar sermon at Muzdalifa, at sunrise on the 10th of Dhu al-Hajj; 4. on the 10th, 11th and 12th of Dhu al-Hajj throw on each day twenty-one stones against the devil's pillars at Mina; 5. perform the sacrifice at Mina; or, if he is too poor, substitute for it a fast at some future time; and 6. upon his return to Mecca visit the Ka'ba and [if he is combining the Hajj and the Umra] visit the Umra [which entails circumambulating the "House" for the final four of seven times (tawaf) and running between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times (Sa'y)]. (Qtd. in Peters 1994, 257)

Most pilgrims also visit the prophet's tomb at Medina at the same time.

2. Trade in West Africa has long been linked to the performance of the hajj via the Sahara desert; Muslim identity, occasionally enhanced through performance of the hajj, facilitated the activities of trans-Saharan traders from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. A land route skirting the southern edge of the Sahara opened up with the expanded security of the Sokoto Caliphate in the mid-nineteenth century. Such pilgrims were less likely to be aristocrats or merchants and might simply be pious farmers. In the early decades of this century the hajj was intimately linked to popular resistance to colonial rule. Large populations of Hausa have ended up in Chad, Sudan, and ultimately Mecca as a result of the strong West African reading of the obligation to perform the hajj. For the West African hajj see Al-Naqar 1972, Barkindo 1992, Works 1976, and Yamba 1995. For more general treatments of Islam in Africa see Hiskett 1984 and Lewis 1980. For comparative anthropological and historical studies of pilgrimage see Eickelman and Piscatori 1990 and Morinis 1992. Peters 1994 offers a study of the hajj as seen from Mecca.

3. For an exception that proves the rule see Mack 1988.

4. Pilgrimage by Hausa speakers rose spectacularly after independence. In 1928 and 1933 Nigerian Muslims were so few that they did not make their way into official records in Saudi Arabia; by 1966 Nigeria clearly ranked among the top twenty nations sending pilgrims, and by 1972 it was second only to Yemen in the number of its pilgrims (Long 1979, 130–31). Most of those pilgrims would have been Hausa speakers, including many Nigerois from across the border in Niger.

5. A recent hajj guidebook is revealing about the quality of modernity to be encountered on the hajj today: advertisements for modern architectural firms and cutting-edge fertility clinics jostle with Saudi government announcements regarding the Hajj Research Centre at King Abdul Aziz University, the Mina Develop-

ment Project, and completed and projected construction projects. The maps are a bewildering tangle of pedestrian tunnels, freeways, and parking complexes (Farsi 1988). Fischer and Abedi offer a Rabelaisian depiction of the intricacies of this modern bureaucratic machinery interspersed with contrasting glimpses of a more rustic hajj circa 1964 (Fischer and Abedi 1990, 1680–70).

6. Theological works by the jihadists revived the long-simmering question of whether jihad was equally, if not more, meritorious than the performance of the hajj (Al-Naqar 1972, 46–47, 56–61). In combination with popular belief in the mystical powers of the leaders to “fly” to Mecca miraculously (Al-Naqar 1972, 63 n. 8), these essentially apologetic works exonerated the leaders of the jihad from the obligation to perform the hajj under the particular circumstances obtaining at that time. Such theological argumentation did little, one supposes, to relieve the genuine longing of such committed believers to perform the hajj.

7. Shehu Usman ‘dan Fodio’s beautiful poem “Ma’ama’are” is paradigmatic. For its historical context see Hiskett 1984, 160; for a lovely translation see Furniss 1996, 195–96.

8. Furniss (1996, 197) offers “Ma’ama’are” as an example of “Prophetic pangyric” (*Madahu*), a genre that draws on classical Arabic models and gives evidence to the importance of the Sufi strand within West African Islam. He goes on to draw upon the work of Abdullahi Bayero Yahya to note the centrality of pilgrimage, miracles, salvation, the way, excellence, and love in *Madahu* verse (198).

9. It is this authorized emotion that Nana Asma’u draws on at the close of a didactic poem relating the life history of the Prophet: “Oh God forgive the sins of Asma’u / Because she found the strength to long for Muhammadiyah” (“Yearning for the Prophet” in Boyd and Mack 1997, 309–45, lines 315–16).

10. Caliph Attahiru composed a famous poem enjoining his people to retreat before the advancing “Christian” forces of the British into the safe territory of the holy land, in effect inverting the original spatial referents of Muhammad’s hijra (Hiskett 1984, 269–70). Later scholars and ordinary Muslims drew on the poetic tradition to express discontent under British colonial rule; for an evocative poem by a commoner see Works 1976, 12.

11. Of course, women undoubtedly share aspects of their own lives with one another and with trusted men in intimate settings. My point is rather that any more open and public account must be safe and that the performance of a hajj account provides a measure of sanctity affording a sense of security. The interview situation in which I, as a researcher, work is by definition public, regardless of how confidential the conversations I elicit may seem.

12. For a description of such practices in relation to the ‘*yan taru*’ movement see Boyd 1989, 52, 77.

13. Delaney (1990, 521) argues that the visual marginalization of female pilgrims in Mecca through their retention of local dress serves to reinforce Turkish women’s marginalization at home. Hausa female pilgrims, like Hausa men, did mark their ritual status with special pilgrim clothing they referred to as *ihram*; neither they nor Hausa men seemed to regard their performance of the hajj as in any way inferior. None of them remarked on other women’s clothing one way or the other, which is striking given the importance of dress in the normal course of events in Maradi. Care is taken during the rituals to protect women and the elderly, particularly during the stoning ceremonies; however, there seems to me to be no sense among Hausa pilgrims that women’s performance is any less mer-

itorious than men's.

14. Robertson's theories are summarized in Waters 1995, a useful overview of current globalization theory.

15. I suspect that Appadurai's (1998, 241 n. 13) preference in his recent reflections on the intimate violence of ethnic conflict for the term "person" over the Foucauldian term "subject" bears on this issue, for the question of how dehumanization occurs is in many ways related to the question of how personhood is constructed or ruptured. While I have used both *personhood* and *subjectivity* here, I have, like Appadurai, a preference for the former in this context because of its resonance within the anthropology of performance and ritual.

16. Does it make sense for an individual to perform the hajj repeatedly in such an impoverished region? Hausa asked themselves. Would it make more sense to invest in schools, in mosques, or in an income-generating activity? Where does a successful individual draw the line in sponsoring the trips of others? And who should have priority? See Tangban 1991 on what he sees as the dubious rationality of Nigeria's investment in the hajj.

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