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CHAPTER 8
A new African orality?
Tijānī Sufism, Sacred Knowledge, and the ICTs in post-truth times*
Antonio de Diego González

West Africa is a space of paradoxes. Not even the most traditional Sufis can resist information and communication technologies (ICT). Nowadays they carry the *tasbīḥ* (prayer beads) in one hand and, in the other, a mobile phone or an iPad of the latest generation, to help them transmit ancient knowledge. From this it seems that sacred knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and technology are compatible since they make life easier for the Muslim community, as Ibrāhīm Niasse (1900-1975) already pointed out in the 1950s.¹ Shaykh Ibrāhīm has been a well-authorized voice. He himself founded the *fayḍa* community in 1929, reviving Tijānī Sufism in West Africa, and adapting it to current time,² while maintaining a great respect for the traditional episteme. Niasse not only lived during the beginnings of the technological revolution, but he also authorized the use of microphones, speakers, and recordings for the purpose of helping Muslims in their *dīn*.³ He has also been a strong advocate of contemporaneity, which did not prevent him from being one of the greatest mystics of the 20th century, and keeping Sufism in balance with Islamic law (*sharī'a*).

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¹ Niasse, Ibrāhīm. *Al-Hujjat al-bālighat fī kaww adhāat alqurān sāi'gha* (Dakar: Muḥammad al-Ma'mūn b. Ibrāhīm Niasse, 1988).

² De Diego González, Antonio. *Ley y Gnosis. Historia Intelectual de la ṭarīqa Tijāniyya* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2020); Hill, Joseph. "Divine Knowledge and Islamic Authority: Religious Specialization among Disciples of Baay Ṣās." PhD diss. in Anthropology, New Haven: Yale University, 2007; Seeseman Rudiger. *The Divine Flood. The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Wright, Zachary. *Pearls from the Divine Flood*. (Atlanta: FaydaBooks, 2015), revised 2nd edition.

³ Niasse, *Al-Hujjat al-bālighat*, 54-56.

His children and grandchildren have followed this same path. Today, it is not uncommon to see his grandson shaykh Māhy Cisse in Medina Baye— the spiritual city founded by shaykh Ibrāhīm in Senegal— using several mobile phones to answer questions from his disciples based in Singapore or in the United States through WhatsApp or Facebook. A Malaysian disciple told me once in Medina Baye (Senegal):

Shaykh Māhy never leaves his phones. You know that you can always call him to ask any question, especially concerning matters of *ma'rifa* (*gnosis*). When I call him and he cannot answer my call immediately, he returns me call later. He does never neglect us; he is always with us. His voice always cheers you up, it is full of *baraka*.⁴

This testimony is illustrative of many things. The interviewee not only expresses how a Sufi master uses technology, but at the same time he emphasizes the transmission of *baraka* (subtle and beneficial energy) through the voice of the shaykh. Traditionally, the *baraka* was obtained in the presence of shaykhs and holy people, but today, as the testimony of this informant suggests, it can be conveyed through a telephone conversation. The physical presence of yesteryear is replaced by today's digital presence. A call, a video, or a recording on YouTube can be very beneficial for the disciple who is in search for knowledge and for the shaykh who is imparting it. Information and communication technologies (ICT) have brought together traditional and contemporary models, but maintaining an important element: orality.

Orality is one of the markers of Islamic identity. It is both complex and rich —beyond the clichés imposed by orientalism, anthropology, and the colonial and modern Arab intellectuals⁵— in the case of Africa it constitutes one of the primary sources for the study of the African intellectual history. If we fail to take orality into account, we lose essential speeches, very valuable traditions and, above all, precision in the speech that is transmitted generation after generation.

Without the Eurocentric and modern prejudice towards orality, the Islamic episteme showed its two faces: on the one hand, its written side, and on the other, its oral and aural dimensions. African Muslims, like so many others, created a whole lived knowledge that made memorization and orality its most recognizable sign.⁶ Precisely, Ware explains that

⁴ An interview with a Malaysian disciple of Māhy Cisse. Medina Baye, July 2016.

⁵ Kane Ousmane. *Beyond Timbuktu. An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 23-24.

⁶ Wright, *Pearls from the Divine Flood*; Ware, Rudolph T., III. *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

it was not only African Muslims that used orality, but non-African Muslims also did as well. The Prophet Muḥammad himself had received the revelation orally.⁷ Corporeality, orality, and aurality have been central in the Islamic epistemological model since the birth of Islam. Islamic knowledge often goes beyond the limits of rationality and the mental arena in order to enter into other spaces, creating an "epistemology of *living knowledge*" where the oral, corporeal, and aural dimensions have fundamental values.⁸ Therefore, it is not surprising that Niase did not have any problems in recognizing the value of technology and did not consider it to be an innovation (*bid'a*).

As pointed out by Cemil Aydin, the Islamic world has been a complex and diverse space because in the 19th century, it began to change with the emergence of pan-Islamic and modernist positions.⁹ The Islamic modernism of the 19th century attacked the traditional episteme accusing it of being lagging and superstitious, while being protected by the European colonialism, European colonialism demonized the vision of a *living knowledge* compared to the rational and illustrated knowledge to foster a "return to the true Islam."¹⁰ It was leaving aside the orality, the *baraka*, and the *ḥaḍra* (presence), which were replaced by the textual literalism, the imitation of European modernity and the political action.

This proposal derives from Eurocentric modernity. The same one that had racialized Muslims now offered them a tool to dominate the narrative and to adapt it to the ongoing historical progress. Also, European philologists had been doing this since the 16th century, starting with European colonial expansion. Walter Mignolo in his book *The Dark Side of the Renaissance* mentions that European modernity produced the ontologization of the written Western language above any other system that does not belong to this civilization. A question was raised as to the legitimacy, and even the existence —as pointed out by Mignolo— of any other intellectual manifestation outside the West.¹¹ The objective standard, scientific and Eurocentric —prepared by the thinkers of Modernity —was the pattern in which the rest of cultures and their practices were measured. This way,

⁷ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 25-29.

⁸ Wright, *Pearls from the Divine Flood*, 15-16.

⁹ Aydin, Cemil. *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.), 6-8.

¹⁰ Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 82-83; De Diego González, Antonio. El juego geopolítico de Marruecos y Arabia Saudí en África Occidental. *Araucaria Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política, Humanidades y Relaciones Internacionales*, 21,41, 2019, 415-438.

¹¹ Mignolo, W.D. *The Darker Side of The Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

categories such as the orality or corporeality were condemned to oblivion by stripping them from their ontological or historical value.¹²

Africa got to know these policies of modernity doubly. It wasn't just reduced to an abstract and unitary entity and therefore excluded from the global history following the opinions of the Hegelian philosophy of history,¹³ but the modernist Islamic authors attacked vehemently the Sufis and African traditionalists¹⁴ without recognizing their role in the Islamic world. Some historical narratives have constructed the image of a wild, tribal, irrational, syncretic, and chiefly oral Africa without taking into account the true sense of its orality. One of the highest authorities on the subject, Ruth Finnegan, affirms that there is often a confusion between the oral, unwritten, and written dimensions through which Africa has chosen to manifest itself.¹⁵ Traditionally we are led to believe that what is written is something imperative and fundamental, as explained,¹⁶ for the creation of a cultural literature. At the same time, possessing literature has always been considered a mark of the distinctive cultural level of a people¹⁷ and epistemic complexity.¹⁸ But, according to Finnegan, orality can generate literatures as complex as written ones can be. The only thing is that it is necessary to rethink some assumed concepts such as originality or continuity.

Eurocentric philology has imposed that, in order to have a written text, there must be an original canon from which to make copies, making it a certified version a special ontological consideration. Finnegan points out that in oral literature there is also a text, that does not have a reason to be original, but which is represented in a performance with its unique characteristics and its own orality.¹⁹ The performance that connects with the *living knowledge* is where the value of this practice dwells. The oral is legitimized in the tradition that has tools to justify it since early Islam.²⁰ Knowledge passes aurally from master to disciple, and the latest receives a permission (*ijāza*) to continue transmitting

¹² Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality and modernity/rationality," *Cultural studies*, 21, 2-3, 2007, 168.

¹³ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Volume I: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822-1823*, (P. Hodgson ed. & trans). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 196-198.

¹⁴ De Diego González, Antonio. "*Identidad y modelos de pensamiento en África*," PhD diss. in Philosophy, Universidad de Sevilla, 2016, 225.

¹⁵ Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral literature in Africa* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012).

¹⁶ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of The Renaissance*, 46-47.

¹⁷ Finnegan, *Oral literature in Africa*, 6.

¹⁸ Merolla, Daniella. "Introduction: Orality and technauriture of African literatures," *Tydskrif vir letterkunde*, 51,1, 2014, 80-90.

¹⁹ Finnegan, *Oral literature in Africa*, 13.

²⁰ Schoeler, Gregor. *The Genesis of Literature in Islam. From aural to read* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2009).

and updating it.²¹ A possessor of knowledge acts as guarantor of it, but also as the link of a chain (*isnād*) that verifies and legitimizes his status. This is the Islamic pre-modern example, but each culture has its own procedures for the verification and legitimation of knowledge. West African Muslims assumed that part of this epistemic paradigm to consolidate their position as intellectual authorities in Islamic World.

All over the world, and particularly in Africa, ICTs are still academically questioned as to how to treat written knowledge when it is placed in opposition to what has been called traditional orality.²² YouTube, Facebook, Skype, or WhatsApp are channels through which large amounts of information are transmitted instantly, in a way that is similar to the we used to use analogical audio tapes or DVDs. That is why it is not surprising that this reconfiguration of orality is conveying a new challenge at the time of the post-truth.²³ And, of course, it makes specialists raise a question that is difficult to answer: Is this the classical African orality or has a new one just emerged?

The theme proposed in this chapter is highly complex to deal with, but it fits very well in a book that addresses these features. Orality has always been an identity marker of the African intellectual history. A large part of its production and its subsequent oblivion spring from it. Certainly, it is not about speaking of orality in Africa, which is a widely-discussed topic and by various authors. But this paper attempts to answer the question as to whether there has been a new African orality based on ICT or if it remains being the same orality with some dressings. To illustrate this question, I will analyse the ways in which the ICT impacted Tijāni Sufism from the second half of the 20th century.

This Sufi community —as we have already seen— is not unaware of the transformations of the contemporary world. It has adopted new discursive styles²⁴ and technologies to reach out to a wider audience using both African languages (Wolof, Hausa, Pulaar) and European languages (French, English). I was able to document different cases during the drafting of my thesis, and the field work that I carried out in Senegal, Mauritania, the United States, and Europe. This chapter draws from these experiences and theorization

²¹ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 55; Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam*, 122-123.

²² Pérez-Sabater, Carmen. "The Linguistics of Social Networking: A Study of Writing Conventions on Facebook" *Linguistik Online*, 56, 6, 2012, 81-93.

²³ Post-truth is an epistemic concept in which truth works based on emotivity instead of consensus (metaphysical or logical). This concept is linked to the concept of «simulacra» by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1981) in which the truth does not correspond with his metaphysical/logical correlate - for example, as it works in classical Islamic thought- but with a purely emotive and deontologized reading by the subject. In our context, religious post-truth is deeply connected with religious populism and it threatens other epistemic manifestation that are not linked with the main discourse where populism is dominating. De Diego González, Antonio. *Populismo Islámico* (Córdoba: Almuzara, 2020).

²⁴ Hill, Joseph. "Baay is the spiritual leader of the rappers": performing Islamic reasoning in Senegalese Sufi hip-hop. *Contemporary Islam*, 10, 2, 2016, 267-287.

surrounding them to illustrate the intersections between orality, ICT, sacred knowledge, and Sufism in times where the post-truth and Baudrillard's *simulacra* constitute the epistemological norm.

From the oral to the written word. The recordings of Ibrāhīm Niasse

I heard the voice of Ibrāhīm Niasse for the first time in May 2014 while I was conducting field work in *Ma'aṭā Maūlāna* Mauritania. After the 'asr prayer, a kid from the town told me that it was time to listen to the "tafsīr of the Shaykh". Surprised I asked *which shaykh?* – *What other shaykh can it be?* —he said, surprised by my question— *Of course Shaykh Ibrāhīm* [Niasse].

I must have had a remarkable expression on my face, even knowing that Shaykh Ibrāhīm had died thirty-nine years ago. The boy held me by my hand and led me on an esplanade where there was a Mauritanian *khayma* (tribal tent) and all the people gathered around a rickety boombox whose sound was amplified by a microphone. In fact, the voice in Arabic of Shaykh Ibrāhīm sounded from the speaker, explaining *sūra Maryam* of the Qur'an. At the end of the meeting of *tafsīr*, they explained to me that the *cassette recording* was one of the greatest treasures of the town just like ancient manuscripts. And they highlighted the *great baraka* that the experience of hearing the *tafsīr* in the mouth of the Shaykh represented.²⁵

This small anecdote shows the value that *technauriture* has among the Mauritanian disciples of shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse. Technology makes anyone take part in a past performance and enjoy the benefits that traditional epistemology associates to such performance, as happened in his grandson shaykh Māḥy's previous case. The *baraka* in contemporary times, can also be stored in *cassettes*. Time later, once in Medina Baye, a grandson of Ibrāhīm Niasse gave me a USB key with five gigabytes of digitalised recordings of his grandfather, including two copies of the *tafsīr*, one in Wolof and another one in Arabic. The one I had heard in Mauritania, precisely.

The *tafsīr* of Ibrāhīm Niasse has a very interesting history. We can find it nowadays in oral format (analogical, digital, and living performances) and also in the written one (transcribed and translated). We must make clear that it is not simply a typical book or a recording, but it is an answer to the complex attitude of contemporary *technauriture*

²⁵ Notes of field work in Ma'aṭā Maūlāna, May-June 2014.

where orality has an impact on the subject producing situations of virtuality.²⁶ For the followers of *fayḍa*, Shaykh Ibrāhīm is the one who speaks, not a machine or a simple recording. The presence (*ḥaḍra*) of the Shaykh is real at that moment, that is why the boy insisted on taking me to the session of *tafsīr* with urgency, in order for me to benefit from the knowledge and *baraka* of the Shaykh.

There are two recordings of the oral version: the first one in Wolof, and the second in classical Arabic. Both were recorded during the month of Ramadan between the 1950s and 1960s,²⁷ in sessions of approximately an hour or an hour and a half. Shaykh Ibrāhīm offered two types of *tafsīr*. Carried out in classical Arabic in accordance with Islamic tradition, the first is thorough. It was destined to his most erudite disciples, using clarity and a formal language. The second one is in Wolof, starting with a Quranic verse followed by a long explanation that was directed to local audience. Its content becomes more symbolic and accessible for that audience. Some recordings do not follow a temporal continuity and are of poor quality, as some fragments cannot be heard clearly. The Arabic version lasts 22 hours and 16 minutes, whereas the Wolof one lasts 16 hours and 16 minutes.

As Ousmane Kane explains, Shaykh Ibrāhīm conducted oral *tafsīr* drawing inspiration from the traditional model learned from his family, and introducing some innovations.²⁸ Andrea Brigaglia refers to it as a supra-commentary (*ta'wīl*) of the classical *tafsīr* of Jalālayn, which is the main text used by Niasse to interpret the Qur'ān.²⁹ The comments also articulate reflections on metaphysical and cosmological issues³⁰ that are deeper and more suggestive than those accomplished by his contemporaries. The version in Wolof, in my opinion, is a little more spontaneous than the Arabic one, which in turn is more rigidly rhetorical than the first one. In the first, the musicality of the Wolof poetry is used more often. The version in Wolof is governed by the principle of solidarity with the public, something that requires more effort to be appreciated in its Arabic version because it needs a higher cultural level of the auditorium. Niasse's emotional involvement in his *tafsīr*, however, is very similar in both versions trying not to show excessive involvement,

²⁶ Merolla, *Introduction: Orality and technauriture of African literatures*, 80-90.

²⁷ Brigaglia points out that the Arabic version of Shaykh Ibrāhīm's *tafsīr* was recorded between 1963 and 1964 during fifty-six sessions in the month of Ramadan. Brigaglia, Andrea "Two Exegetical Works from Twentieth-Century West Africa: Shaykh Abu Bakr Gumi's Radd al-adhḥān and Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse's Fī riyāḍ al-tafsīr", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 15, 3, 2013, 253-266.

²⁸ Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*, 80.

²⁹ Brigaglia, *Two Exegetical Works from Twentieth-Century West Africa*, 258; Niasse, Ibrāhīm. *In the Meadows of Tafsīr for the Noble Qur'an*, Trans. Moctar Ba (Atlanta: FaydaBooks, 2014), 36.

³⁰ Brigaglia, Brigaglia, Andrea "The Radio Kaduna tafsir (1978-1992) and the construction of public images of Muslim scholars in the Nigerian media" *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 27, 1, 2007, 173-210, 335.

but giving it slightly metaphysical flavours.³¹ This shows that the Islamic tradition is not broken at any time, at least on the formal level.

Of the two recordings, the first to appear was the Wolof version in 1998.³² Sponsored by the Sall family, it was released on *cassette* tapes in New York with an introduction by Shaykh Barham Diop which was also oral in prologue form. It has recently been uploaded online at Archive.org³³ and to the YouTube channel titled *Mady Barham*.³⁴ The second one, the Arabic version, has not been published. There are some fragments on YouTube on the *CheckhIbrahimNiass* channel,³⁵ but the most interesting part of this recording is its transcription and publication in Arabic, a language very well known by many followers of Shaykh Niasse.

The transcription of the *tafsīr*³⁶ in Arabic was carried out by Muḥammad wuld ‘Abdallāh (1942—), a *muqaddam* of Shaykh Ibrāhīm, under the title of *Fī Riyāḍ al-tafsīr li al-Qur‘an al-Karīm* (In the Gardens of the exegesis of the Noble Quran) in six volumes. According to the biography by Baye wuld Hayba attached in the English edition of *tafsīr*, it took 36 years to the renowned and erudite scholar Muḥammad wuld ‘Abdallāh to complete the work which was published in 2010.³⁷ Very careful from a philological point of view, this edition includes not only the text of the *tafsīr*, but all the full sources and citations made by Niasse during the sessions. The text transliterates very faithfully the sessions and complements them with a valuable and critical apparatus of notes. This is a well-done adaptation of orality. One can listen to the recording while reading the text without finding any noticeable difference. The first volume of the Arabic transcription by Muḥammad wuld ‘Abdallāh was translated into English by Moctar Boubakar M. Ba and published by Faydabooks. The translation of subsequent volumes in English is scheduled to be completed in the next few years. However, the general view among the disciples of the *fayḍa*, the *talibé Baye*, is that it is much more beneficial to listen to the shaykh in the recording than reading him in the book. "In written form there is a lack of his presence and his deep voice... the Shaykh is missing," said a *talibé* in Medina Baye to me, being really convinced.³⁸

³¹ Brigaglia, *Two Exegetical Works from Twentieth-Century West Africa*, 258.

³² Hunwick, John et al. *Arabic literature of Africa Vol. 4: Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 198; Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*, 80.

³³ <https://archive.org/details/Baye-tafsir> [Last consulted on June 11 2017]

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/user/madybi2/videos> [Last consulted on June 11, 2017]

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/user/CheckhIbrahimNiass> [Last consulted on June 11, 2017]

³⁶ Niasse, Ibrāhīm. *Fī Riyāḍ al-tafsīr li al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm*. Ed. Muḥammad wuld ‘Abdallāh. (Lemden, Mauritania: Shaykh Muḥammad wuld ‘Abdallāh Publisher, 2010).

³⁷ Niasse, *In the Meadows of Tafsīr*, 31.

³⁸ Notes of field work in Medina Baye, July 2016.

The remaining African disciples of Shaykh Ibrāhīm did not need a transcription or written translation of his *tafsīr* because they have commented it in oral sessions in their own languages. This constitutes a case of epistemic dynamism, favouring performance to textual fidelity. The most significant case is that of Ṭāhir Bauchi (b. 1927). He is the most famous *mufasssīr* among the disciples of Niassa due to his expressive richness.³⁹ As Shaykh Kano explained by in the YouTube channel platform *Fathu Gado*, one finds almost all the *tafsīr* conducted in Hausa by Bauchi and based on the *tafsīr* in Wolof by Shaykh Ibrāhīm which Bauchi attended as a student in Senegal.⁴⁰ Bauchi conducts the exegesis of the Qur'an each Ramadan in front of his disciples who are fascinated by him. Andrea Brigaglia has noticed the political courage that these performances inspired in Nigeria during the years of war between Wahhabism and Sufism.⁴¹

The USB key that the grandson of Ibrāhīm Niassa gave me also included various recordings of *waxtane* (the term Wolof for speeches) on different occasions (*gamou*, Islamic festivities, classes). This grandson of Shaykh Ibrāhīm insisted that this material is more valuable than all the books that I already possessed, and that the Arabic exegesis of Shaykh Ibrahim was more “refined” and interesting than that in Wolof.⁴² These recordings are a unique and very valuable material to understand not only the legal or academic facet of Niassa, but also his connection to and charismatic appeal vis-a vis his disciples. The recordings have been zealously preserved by his relatives, only recently being digitized and made available to the disciples of the *ṭarīqa*. Some of them are available in the portal Archive.org under the title of *Gamou et discours of Cheikh Ibrahima*.⁴³ Most of them are in Wolof —“erudite Wolof”, as my Senegalese informants pointed out to distinguish Wolof spoken in the Saloum from the one spoken in Dakar—and deal with sensitive esoteric aspects and internal recommendations, that the *ṭarīqa* etiquette impose to discuss only with initiates. Most remain unpublished, though Zachary Wright has translated three of them: The eternal Islam; The inheritance of the Prophet; May Allah give us to Allah.⁴⁴

Analogical recordings represent the first intersection between recording technology and Sufism. Niassa allowed the audio recordings, taking a big step forward. The central idea of these recordings is not knowledge itself, but the awareness of being co-participants in

³⁹ De Diego González, *Ley y Gnosis*, 130.

⁴⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZJLpPHqvHw> [last consulted on 11 June 2017]

⁴¹ Brigaglia, *The Radio Kaduna tafsir*.

⁴² Interview with Māhy b. Makky Ibrāhīm Niassa, Medina Baye, July 2016.

⁴³ <https://archive.org/details/GamousBaye> [Last consulted on June 11, 2017]

⁴⁴ Wright, *Pearls from the Divine Flood*, 83-110.

the presence of the shaykh even through low-quality audio tracks. The *baraka* coming from the voice of the shaykh being transmitted in these recordings is the essential element, being immortalized for coming generations. The disciples revive the old schemes in every audition. Even if they are not fully aware of the meaning conveyed by these recordings, it is an experience to enjoy every time. Orality is the lived presence, something beyond writing, it is like being with the shaykh, listening to him and not simply reading him. For this reason, the experience of orality in the community of the *fayḍa* has been very fruitful. Something similar happened to one of Niasse's favourite disciples, *Ustadh* Barham Diop who became a shaykh with an immense and indispensable oral corpus of the contemporary Tijāniyya, unknown outside the Wolof speaking community.

The shaykh and his recordings: the audiovisual corpus of Barham Diop

The second generation of the *fayḍa* did not only keep the audio recordings, but added video shortly after the death of Niasse. Thirty years have passed from VHS to YouTube, a time in which the Tijāniyya was able to adapt itself to the new times. Video became the preferred format of the *talibé Baye*. They could now enjoy the presence of the shaykh, apart from listening to him. The component of presence is fundamental in Sufism, because it involves co-partnership between the disciple and his teacher. The one who sees something participates in that moment and, of course, obtains the *baraka*. The shaykh used to be available to the disciple whenever the last one needed him, the only thing he had to do was rewind the tape. And from all the Tijāni shaykhs that have been recorded when giving a class, there is one who stands out above all: Barham Diop.

Barham Maḥmud Diop (1932-2014) has been, for many years, the indefatigable secretary of Shaykh Ibrāhīm. After his death, Barham Diop became one of the most esteemed advisers of King Hassan II of Morocco—who called him "the walking library". He became the secretary of the Council of Ulema of Morocco and Senega, attending regularly the Ramadan lectures (*Durūs ḥasaniyya*) held in Rabat during the month of Ramadan.⁴⁵ What distinguishes him from many Tijāni shaykhs is that Diop, like Shaykh Ibrāhīm himself, has made it clear that the *fayḍa* was neither a local product nor a project anchored in the past. He considered it to be the best choice between modernity and tradition.⁴⁶ Contrary to what might be expected, Barham Diop wrote very little. But he delivered

⁴⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGnIUbcmA3U> [Last consulted, June 11, 2017]

⁴⁶ De Diego González, *Ley y Gnosis*, 407-408.

hundreds of lectures in Wolof, many of them during his trips to Tijāni communities in Europe and all of them have recorded both in audio and video. He treats topics like gnosis (*ma'rifa*) or the doctrines of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa*, but also current social issues such as pacifism and social rights.⁴⁷ social development,⁴⁸ or Islamic law and modern life.⁴⁹ These lectures were recorded by his disciples in a near professional way and are generally of good quality. As Ousmane Kane remarks, many of them were sponsored by members of the diaspora community who, in turn, gained prestige in their countries of origin for serving their shaykh (*khidma*).⁵⁰ Some examples of these recordings are found in the *Mady Barhama*⁵¹ channel at the YouTube platform, others (the audio recordings mainly) are located on the Archive.org portal.⁵² The latest comprise a corpus of eighty-five lectures of the *waxtane* genre. In addition, there is a collection of recordings of his talks in the European meetings of *Ansaroudine*, the International association of *talibé Baye*,⁵³ from 2011 to 2014. Apart from these, Diop had recorded documents of enormous value for the study of the community of the *fayḍa*: his own commentaries on all the main works of Ibrāhīm Niasse. Very valuable, these should be regarded as primary sources because they include direct comments by Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse that Diop reported, who was close to him. Notable among them, for example, are Diop's commentary on *Ruḥ al-Adab*⁵⁴ or *Kāshif al-Albās*⁵⁵, two major works of Shaykh Niasse. On audio there are commentaries of the extensive collections of poetry of Niasse by Diop. The availability of these works in written format is essential for the study of *fayḍa* as a religious phenomenon of the twentieth century. For this reason, it would be essential to review and revalue the corpus.

In all this audio-visual corpus, there is a revitalization and amplification of orality because the shaykh is being seen and felt as a lived presence. This is very important in the diaspora since it allows an interaction with the teacher, even without having him physical present.

⁴⁷ Conference in Madrid (Spain), July 16, 2011 [Last time consulted on June 12, 2017]

⁴⁸ Conference in Bilbao (Spain), June 25, 2011 [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁴⁹ Conference in Paris (France), July 9, 2011 [Last consulted, June 12, 2017].

⁵⁰ Kane Ousmane. *The Homeland is the Arena. Religion, Transnationalism and the Integration of Senegalese Muslims in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 164.

⁵¹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/madybi2> [Last consulted, June 12, 2017]

⁵² <https://archive.org/details/ChIbDiop> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁵³ De Diego González, *Ley y Gnosis*, 407.

⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sOugTJ6Kds> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]. For an English translation of the work, see Niasse, Ibrāhīm. *The Spirit of Good Morals*. (Atlanta: FaydaBooks, 2016).

⁵⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGrVnAB2Ymk> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]. For an English translation of the work, see Niasse, Ibrāhīm. *The Removal of Confusion Concerning the Flood of the Sainly Seal Ahmad al-Tijani: A Translation of Kashif al-ilbas an fayda al-khatm abi 'abbas* (translated by Zachary Wright, Muhtar Holland and Abdullahi Okene with forewords by Sayyid Ali Cisse, Shaykh Tijani Cisse, Shaykh Hassan Cisse (Louisville, Ky: Fons Vitae, 2010).

Unlike the early recordings of Ibrāhīm Niase, the production of Diop is destined to the consumption of the Wolof speaking diaspora in Europe and United States. A population that needs to remember not only its origins but also its *maḥabba* (love) for the shaykh. It was no longer necessary to go to Senegal to receive the teachings because technology had made it much simpler. Moreover, this form kept all the traditional identity and epistemological markers. The example of Barham Diop and the digital orality, as described above, can be extrapolated to any of the popular members of the second generation of the *fayḍa*,⁵⁶ such as Ḥassan Cisse,⁵⁷ Shaykh Tijāni Cisse,⁵⁸ Ḥājj al-Mishry,⁵⁹ or Shaykh wuld Khayri,⁶⁰ among others. Their recordings are all very popular and, as I have noticed during my field work, are constantly being used by the disciples, especially in the diaspora.

Until the appearance of *streaming* videos, the communities had these recordings on CD or DVD to listen to what the teacher had said in other communities in the diaspora. The rise of YouTube in 2005 accelerated this process because all the communities uploaded videos or audios of their recordings. At that time, the shaykhs regained the primacy of orality over written texts. This type of formats constitutes not only the reaffirmation of orality as an element of transmission in a traditional context, but also the democratization of knowledge (*‘ilm*) through these recordings. It implies a second moment in the intersectionality between technology and Sufism. In a rudimentary way, the virtuality and the co-presence of the shaykh were implemented, which was no longer reduced to a private sphere and personal transmission.

YouTube was a great element in favour of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa*, because it democratized and made accessible its teachings to many people who would not have had access to them otherwise due to their geographical location or their lack of connections with the *ṭarīqa* itself. Interestingly, this practice is well accepted within the *ṭarīqa*, even the low use of these technologies is rather criticized by some shaykhs and muqaddams like shaykh al-Ḥājj al-Mishry. His opinion is that in the Tijāniyya they should be used as much as in other *ṭarīqas* like the Ḥāqqani's Naqshbandiyya or Bentounes' 'Alawiyya.⁶¹ In fact, much of the current success of the Tijāniyya in Europe or the United States is due to this phenomenon, coupled with its virality in social networks. This has generated a new way

⁵⁶ De Diego González, *Ley y Gnosis*, 406-423.

⁵⁷ Hassan Cisse in Nigeria. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlAqXEjD1Tg> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁵⁸ Sheikh Tidiane Cisse in Benin & Togo <https://youtu.be/UfudRd8coIc> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁵⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReDCSmao1XE> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁶⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVqzsb2KM94> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁶¹ Interview with al-Ḥājj 'Abdallāh w. Muḥammad Mishry. Medina Baye (Senegal), December 2016.

of understanding both the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa* and the traditional shaykh-disciple relationship, after the emergence of social networks.

Sufism 2.0: The Shaykh and the social network

Of all technological revolutions, none can be compared to the one produced by social networks. The emergence of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat has changed the social identities and epistemological perceptions⁶² of contemporary societies, including those based on traditional epistemologies. Sufis have undergone these processes taking a real advantage of this great revolution in order to amalgamate traditional knowledge with new technologies permanently.⁶³ This has not only generated important sociological changes within the *ṭarīqa*, but also epistemological changes, since it does not renounce the transmission of the sacred knowledge (*ma'rifa*) through platforms that are precisely living forms of deontologizing narratives and knowledge.⁶⁴ At the same time, a new generation of disciples is increasingly aware of the fact that the presence of a teacher is not necessary to develop spirituality.

Social networks act as agglutinative of social relations and as an immediate transmitter of information. As soon as the information is processed, it is launched and can become viral, that is to say, it is spread massively through the internet. There is no time to reflect on it. Knowledge is reduced to a photo plus a text of no more than a thousand words or a video of a few minutes. In many cases, a link with a canonical PDF text is enough to generate a reverie in the collective imagination. And a mass use of the recordings that we described in the previous epigraph needs to be added to this too. The co-presence of the recording becomes a diffuse shadow in the imaginary of the members of a social network, because the social network tends to lower the burden of truth, when understood from an ontological level, of the sent message.

In the specific case of the Tijānis, this change has been driven by those living on the periphery. American, European, or Asian disciples have pushed a whole campaign in order to spread through social networks. Diverse *muqaddam*, with any amount of computer skills, spread and teach through the internet attracting a diverse audience. The

⁶² Dawley, Lisa. "Social network knowledge construction: emerging virtual world pedagogy", *On the Horizon*, Vol. 17 No. 2, 2019, 113.

⁶³ Ernst, Carl. "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 15, 1, 2005, 15-43; Janmohamed, Shelina. *Generation M: Young Muslims changing the World* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2016), 85-91.

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981).

most interesting thing is that they formally use techniques similar to those used in Africa making orality in the discourse predominate. There may be texts, but they are written in a fully oral record because Facebook conversations are more oral than written. The narrative model used by these *muqaddam* resembles the African ones both in aesthetics and in procedures, something of which they are proud.⁶⁵ They address issues of etiquette (*adab*) of the *ṭarīqa*, knowledge (*maʿrifa*) or actuality and always from the immediacy, a clear sign of these social networks, and especially from their interaction with the public. This interaction was already developed, in a first phase, in the Yahoo mailing list *Tijāniyyah*.⁶⁶

In recent years, Facebook has become one of the most important places to appreciate these phenomena. For example, the page *Tijani Ṭarīqah*⁶⁷ is one of several examples of Tijāni on-line communities with a predominantly Anglophone and Western audience, reaching 20,817 followers. Its basic structure consists of posting a text with a photo, with the intention of drawing the attention of the public. Their material are typically drawn from classical books of the Tijāniyya or extracted from oral sources and altruistically translated by members of the *ṭarīqa*. The translations of the texts however are not signed and no one regulates the quality or veracity of the text. This is one of the most negative *aspects* of this type of group, since it leaves a very sensitive knowledge of the *ṭarīqa* to public exposure without subjecting it to the verification procedure (*taḥqīq*). In fact, pro bono translations can lead to an underlying ideologization or to a personal interpretation of texts.

Another of Facebook's most well-known groups is *Mady Barhama Niasse*.⁶⁸ This group has 94,640 followers, and although originating from Senegalese origin, it has recruited membership from different countries. This group posts above all videos of shaykhs of the *ṭarīqa*. The visual component is very strong and it has a large file, that it shares with its aforementioned YouTube channel. This group is fully oral and there are hardly any written elements. Unlike *Tijāni Ṭarīqah*, there are no doctrinal or personal opinions, and the only thing that is posted are authorized videos of shaykhs of the *ṭarīqa*. It is a group that nurtures a great number of followers of the Tijāniyya in order to viralize contents referred back to it. There are many other pages similar to these two, where a high level of content is produced daily. For example, in Ramadan 2017, Facebook Live, Facebook's

⁶⁵ Interview with Shaykh Muḥammad Abdullahi. E-mail, May 2017.

⁶⁶ <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/qutbulmakhtum> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁶⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Tijanitarīqah> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁶⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/MadyBayeNiass> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

online streaming tool, has been broadcasting the live *tafsīr* sessions performed by Shaykh Māhyb. Ibrāhīm Niasse on the Kossy TV page.⁶⁹ Usually, these videos of the *ṭarīqa* are broadcast by its followers either by Facebook Live or by Snapchat in social events (*gamou*, *conferences*, etc.), giving a component of collective participation and immediacy.

If Facebook groups are important, we could say much or more of individual profiles. There is a new generation of *muqaddams* who act publicly in front of a diverse audience because they are aware of the situation in the global arena. In fact, that is something that can be observed. On the one hand, shaykhs and African scholars traditionally transmit using their classical rhetoric, and they worry mainly about traditional epistemological questions. Thus, they always quote and do not go too far in the speech, they maintain a tone of authority⁷⁰ and some distance with the public. On the other hand, *muqaddams* in the diaspora act as transmitters of Tijāni discourse using new strategies and discourses. They bind together thousands of followers and have made of Facebook a space of public communication and diffusion of the Tijāniyya.

With great charisma, they are able to treat current issues finding space for *ma'rifa* in public. These Facebook profiles are not scholars as such, they are social enablers and *influencers*, since their mission is to diffuse elements, but in a different way from traditional shaykhs. Often, they use short texts that are almost oral, with a great expressive force that does not quit the dialogue with other users. Users who, on the other hand, feel less inhibited to express themselves than in traditional disciple-teacher social relationships. They exert so much influence that they have revived narratives and practices in a peripheral world where the shaykh is not at all present and where the virtualization of the practice is greater.

Epilogue: Sacred knowledge and virtuality in post-truth

In the last five years, a boom in what I have called *e-Sufism* or Electronic Sufism can be observed among Tijānis communities. *E-Sufism* manifests itself through a virtualization and *simulation* of the spiritual practice in the way similar to what Baudrillard describes.⁷¹

⁶⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/KOSSY-TV-1758686851041722> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁷⁰ A good example of it is the statement of Abdel-Malik Niasse, son of Shaykh Ibrāhīm, in full controversy with a *muqaddam* who overstepped his functions in September 2016. The video uploaded to the YouTube platform⁷⁰ ended up becoming viral for all the community of the *ḥayda* in few hours on Facebook pages. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6hbgaejQbE> [Last consulted, June 15, 2017]

⁷¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation*.

This is reduced to a relation of the disciple with a famous shaykh without a full physical contact, but also happens in epistemic sphere. Relationships and transmissions are reduced to electronic communications, in addition to some punctual visits to the shaykh. In this way, the practices are also virtual and the disciple does not have a full epistemic experience of the Sufi practice, since his experience is reduced to what he captures by himself lacking the component of the physical transmission and its associated codes (gazes, gestures, etc.). Obviously, this practice usually occurs in the periphery where the shaykh is not present, virtualizing itself through the ICTs (social networks such as WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram, etc.). On many occasions, the disciple develops an idealized love, *maḥabba*, mediated by virtuality (*e-maḥabba*), the acquisition of knowledge (*‘ilm*) often online (*e-learning*), and it can even achieve on the spiritual level a spiritual training that is aloof and that takes place through the internet (*e-tarbiya*). Finally, the real experience becomes virtual, generating its own epistemological status.

Many of these digital *murids* end up visiting the *shaykh* in his own physical space, while others do not, despite obtaining permits that accredit them as *muqaddam*. The controversy is served in these circles. Some disciples defend themselves by saying: "My relationship with the shaykh is pure love, I need nothing more than a call to know about him (...),"⁷² to which other disciples respond "It is impossible to be [Tijāni] from the *Fayḍa* without visiting Medina Baye. You do not realize what it is to be a disciple of your shaykh until you come here."⁷³ In *e-Sufism* one of the central components is orality. It represents an ontological legitimacy of the discourse, as it was in recordings, to hear the Shaykh, having a transmission of the shaykh himself even in an epistemic *simulation*. Of all these practices, the most paradigmatic example is the *e-tarbiya*.

I heard a definition for this concept three years ago among Tijāni communities of the diaspora. These are usually related to a shaykh outside the community, specifically, in the case of the *Fayḍa*, who is usually affiliated with the e family. The internal structures of the group or their own experience, generate an identification with this figure as a "transmitter of knowledge." So, when the time comes for spiritual initiation or *tarbiya*,⁷⁴ they decide to do it online rather than with a *muqaddam* in their area. This is because who better than Cisse, prioritising his surname and lineage over the real *maḥabba* that the

⁷² Interview with an American disciple of Māhy Cisse. Atlanta, November 2013.

⁷³ Interview with a British disciple of Shaykh Tijāni Cisse. Medina Baye, July 2016.

⁷⁴ Seesemann, *The Divine Flood*, 71-79; Wright, *Pearls from the Divine Flood*, 145-148.s

disciple may have for him, can make the spiritual opening come sooner and in a better way.⁷⁵

The traditional and physical *tarbiya* is performed as an initiatory experience in which, beyond the scholastic classifications, a desire to know God⁷⁶ is emphasized and in which the role of the shaykh consists of helping the disciple. My informants during my field work pointed out that the *tarbiya* according to the Niassene model must take place in an environment of proximity of and daily interactions with the shaykh of *tarbiya* or the *murabbi*. Therefore a physical coexistence is required, which provides a model of behaviour and gnosis to the disciple, a kind of lived teaching. That is the basis of an experience which makes you known God.⁷⁷

It is paradoxical that *e-tarbiya* questions the epistemic mechanisms of Sufism and the *tarbiya* itself, since they demand a certain presence of the *murabbi* to carry out the process. That is to constitute a relationship that helps the disciple to make the journey, in which the *physical baraka* is a fundamental component. In this way, the physical presence makes it possible for the shaykh to accompany the disciple in the *tarbiya* process. However, in *e-tarbiya*, the bodily experience is replaced by a virtual one and the central component of coexistence and the experience of the gnostic as everyday life is lost. There is a long tradition in the Islamic world in which corporeality is fundamental, it represents its own imaginary.⁷⁸ The gaze, the saliva, the breath, etc. are elements that intercede and interfere in the transmission of knowledge (*'ilm*) and sacred knowledge (*ma'rifa*), and this disappears in the virtual experience. Moreover, the sense of tranquillity in the presence (*ḥadra*) of the shaykh is fundamental during the *tarbiya* phase. A French informant told me:

By virtualizing the *tarbiya* you lose the knowledge transmitted by the shaykh, you lose a special connection with the *ḥimma* of the shaykh and you become more dispersed. It's not the same as when he is in front of you. When you are in it [presential *tarbiya*] nothing disconnects you from him.⁷⁹

This French *talibé*, who had experienced an *e-tarbiya* and later finished his experience on a traditional *tarbiya*, made it clear. Another informant told me that "online *tarbiya* is

⁷⁵ Interview with an American disciple of Māhy Cisse. Atlanta, November 2013.

⁷⁶ Wright, *Pearls from the Divine Flood*, 147.

⁷⁷ De Diego González, *Ley y Gnosis*, 176-179.

⁷⁸ Kluge, Scott A. *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁷⁹ Interview with a French disciple of Māhy Cisse. Paris, April 2015.

only for pragmatic people and for those who know that the *murabbi* is truthful, that he is one of those you know."⁸⁰ Because the symbolic readings of everyday life are another element that generates this climate in which the gnosis transmission is possible, the disciple becomes conscious of a mystical level from a reality lived physically.

But in the *e-tarbiya* —as one informant pointed out— everything is diluted in a virtual and *simulacra* experience where everything is volatile. "Something important is lost," a *talibé* detractor of the *e-tarbiya* informed me, "if you are not physically with your shaykh."⁸¹ While supporters admit that it is a "mystical" subject and that "the shaykh knows things that others do not know, even through Skype."⁸² It should be noted that among Tijānis, this is a very disputed issue that has both supporters and detractors in equal parts since it affects a central aspect of the doctrine. However, they concur on the traditional vision: the word of the shaykh and the lived experience, in their oral, aural, and corporeal facets, of the disciple are worth more than a thousand books written on *ma'rifa*.⁸³ So, we can appreciate a sacrifice of the praxis and *habitus* of traditional Sufism. The oral, once again, re-emerges over any other epistemological marker in the experience of the Sufism. But one more step has been taken. Not only the co-presence that existed on the recordings is required, but an interaction with the shaykh is needed, and — ultimately— the construction of reality where all this process unfolds depends on the disciple. ICTs mediate and relativize reality, a reality that, to produce transmission, needs to be ontologized. Sacred knowledge (*ma'rifa*) demands the transmission of a "real truth," something that virtuality and epistemic *simulation* cannot achieve at all. Thus, the experience of the real is redefined with respect to what is written in books and what teachers report. And there is the challenge for the Tijānis, when trying to solve the epistemological problems derived from these experiences with the ICTs.

The Tijānis show, nowadays, a very changing reality at an epistemological level. Technology mediatizes not only their personal identities but also community identities. The publicity given by social networks makes Sufism, to paraphrase Carl Ernst, to be not only for Muslims,⁸⁴ nor the Tijāniyya for Tijānis who grew up in the epistemic structures of *ṭarīqa*. Thus, it expands more easily in more complex contexts and in post-truth times, and this has produced a profound deontologization of knowledge.⁸⁵ An age where feelings

⁸⁰ Interview with a British disciple of Māhy Cisse. Granada, May 2014.

⁸¹ Interview with a Mauritanian disciple of Hājj al-Mishry. Ma'ta Maulana, May 2014.

⁸² Interview with an American disciple of Māhy e. Atlanta, November 2013.

⁸³ Interview with al-Hājj Abdallah w. Muḥammad Mishry. Córdoba (Spain), April 2014.

⁸⁴ Ernst, *Situating Sufism and Yoga*, 205.

⁸⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation*.

and subjectivities prevail over the experience of the metaphysical grounds. This is paradoxical for a type of knowledge, as it is the *ma'rifa* that demands the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the experience.

Our era of post-truth, heiress of post-modernity, is characterized by placing narratives between the borders of reality and fiction, playing with the enormous capacity of viralization of these. Absolute and ontological knowledge appears, in these days, as impossible. And yet, supported by their mechanisms, the Tijānis launch messages with gnostic and absolute content, accepting and defying—in a paradoxical way—the norms of contemporary communication. The ICTs, and their enormous volumes of information, present a challenge to a classical epistemology based on personal transmission where the oral, the aural, and the corporeal have a great weight, because the message is considered sacred and real ontologically. This encompasses not only the imaginary, but also the physical. Although Eurocentric modernity wanted to reduce knowledge to a mere written and closed corpus, the knowledge of Sufism is a truly living knowledge.

All this work on the analysis of the three phases of ICTs in Tijāniyya, from the time of its first recordings to the introduction of social networks, leads us to note the answer to the question of whether a new orality has been generated based on ICTs is highly ambiguous and paradoxical, as the issue is in itself. In my opinion, based on all that I have shown, African orality is the same, although many new mechanisms of technology have been introduced changing many aspects from an epistemological level. Thus as a partial conclusion, due to the absence of a deeper exploration of the topic, I would like to point out four characteristics that can serve as approximations to the difficult question posed in the introduction.

First, it must be pointed out that the classical orality of Islam in Africa remains operative, invigorated, and retains most of its elements, symbolic meanings, and traditional markers. The episteme of African Islam defends and protects the mechanisms of legitimation⁸⁶ not only from an epistemological level but from the experimental one. Similarly, there is an entire tradition associated with the esoteric value of the shaykh's word, such as the example of the recording of *tafsīr* in Mauritania. Therefore, it is improbable that this orality will devalue at least in these communities.

In this way, and secondly, this traditional orality, first adapted in analogical media, has been amplified and revalued thanks to the appearance of video recordings and streaming

⁸⁶ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 55.

platforms. Shaykhs are still "talking" in front of the production of "written" material, as in the example of video recordings of shaykhs and scholars. The globalization of ICTs has affected disciples more than teachers. Disciples of diaspora or non-African Tijāni communities have taken orality as one of their discourse markers integrating it into their own episteme.

Thirdly, the greatest changes in orality have occurred with the introduction of social networks, the viralization of content, and the environment of the past in recent years. These have affected epistemological aspects of orality as the experience of the oral that has passed from the physical to the virtual plane. It is paradoxical that narratives with an ontological value as large as *ma'rifa* coexist in environments where the value of the others is not clear. For many disciples, there is a loss of value in the mechanisms of verification (*tahqiq*) and corporality, although the immediacy and the massive diffusion prevail.

Finally, the *ṭarīqa* Tijāniyya has not yet developed concrete epistemic strategies to rethink of all these changes in order to transmit it to the disciples. While this occurs, and as it is often the case in Islam, normativity is intimately linked to the personal experience of both the *muqaddam* and the disciple. This is something that denotes the enormous plasticity of *ṭarīqa*.

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