God's Name is not a Game: Performative Apologetics in Sufi *Dhikr* Performance in Senegal

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Abstract

This article examines debates surrounding the proper performance of communal *dhikr*, or reciting God's name, within the Fayḍa Tijāniyya Sufi community in Senegal. The controversial practice of *yëngu* ('moving oneself'), or dancing and drumming during *dhikr*, has become popular among some Fayḍa youth. Although some Fayḍa leaders condemn *yëngu* for allegedly mixing God's sacred name with the profane, *yëngu* practitioners remain integral to the Fayḍa community. Academic discussions of controversies over Islamic practice have often framed disagreements in terms of competing interpretations of Islamic law (*sharīʿa*). This article examines several other methods of religious convincing that *yëngu* proponents invoke, such as mystical experiences and truths that transcend law. Perhaps more than any explicit argument, *yëngu*'s continuation within the community depends on 'performative apologetics,' or demonstrations of exemplary knowledge, piety, and devotion through which one incorporates a potentially controversial practice into one's self-presentation as a pious Muslim.

A Contested Devotional Practice

In 2009, while I conducted research in Dakar on the Fayḍa Tijāniyya ('Tijānī flood') Sufi movement, my friend Amadou[1] called me and invited me to visit him and his family in the town of Thiès. That Thursday night, he told me, was his and his family's turn to host the weekly chant meeting (*sikkar*) of their local *daayira*, or local chapter of the movement. At such gatherings, *daayira* members perform collective *sikkar* (from *dhikr*, 'remembrance' in Arabic) – chanting God's name – usually followed by religious speeches by leaders. Having attended dozens of such gatherings, I knew I would likely see young initiates into the Fayḍa's mystical education (*tarbiya*) enter an altered spiritual state (*ḥāl*), perhaps screaming, crying, leaping, or convulsing. Fayḍa adherents who undergo *tarbiya* describe experiencing the obliteration of the self (*fanā' al-nafs*) and the unity of all things in God, something for which they use the term 'knowing God' (*xam Yàlla*). Additionally, Amadou warned, in this case I might be alarmed by his *daayira*'s engagement in *yëngu* (literally 'to move oneself'), or frenetic drumming and dancing while performing *sikkar*.

Since beginning my research on the Fayḍa community in 2001, only a handful of the dozens of meetings I had attended had featured *yëngu*. Yet years before witnessing the practice, I had heard disapproving rumors about it. Many Fayḍa adherents described *yëngu* as an ignorant, pre-Islamic (*jāhilī*) practice smuggled into the Fayḍa by recent converts to Islam. They accused disciples who engaged in *yëngu* of 'playing' (*foo*) or 'joking around' (*caaxaan*) with God's sacred name. Yet, significantly, disciple communities that engaged in *yëngu* enjoyed good standing in the community and little attempt was made to force them to abandon the practice.

Although the *sikkar* at Amadou's family's house in 2009 was not my first time witnessing *yëngu*, it was the first time I clearly saw the stereotypes surrounding it challenged. A university student from a long line of Qur'ān teachers and religious leaders, Amadou grew up in a village founded and

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1 All names of research participants are pseudonyms, except for Baay Ousmane Diawo, a well-known leader who gave his permission to use his name. Names of other prominent leaders have also been preserved. Other identifying information such as towns have been altered.

dominated by Islamic scholarly lineages. Such villages, their identity strongly associated with Islamic scholarship and spiritual power, have always excluded the drumming and frenetic dancing common in most Wolof-speaking villages. Yet here I witnessed Amadou, several of his relatives, and their spiritual guide from a similar Islamic lineage dancing to a lively drum beat in a circle of disciples chanting the name of God. Amadou and other *yëngu* practitioners consciously defy through words and deeds the notion that they are 'playing' with God's name. Likewise, they reject the "denial of coevalness"[2] that presents *yëngu* either as a pre-Islamic vestige or as an unlawful 'innovation' (*bid'a*). Instead, they present it as a positive development inspired by God and posthumously approved by Fayḍa founder Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (1900–1975), better known to disciples as 'Baay' (Father).

This article addresses the question of how *yëngu* proponents attempt – with uneven success – to establish *yëngu* as an acceptable Islamic practice. The rise of Islamic reform movements throughout Africa has led to increasingly public controversies over correct Islamic practice. These controversies revolve largely around the question of who most faithfully follows the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* (reported sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad). Consequently, in conceptualizing Islam, scholars examining such debates have found a productive starting point in Talal Asad's suggestion to "begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'ān and the Hadith."[3] Asad's call for more attention to the "argument and reasoning"[4] surrounding Islamic practice is particularly germane to African contexts, where scholarly attention to magic, charisma, and clientelism has often obscured Islamic scholarship and teaching.

Here I also find it productive to 'begin' – as Asad suggests – with this analytical starting point. However, I hesitate to join the growing chorus

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2 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

3 Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," Occasional Papers Series (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986), p. 14.

4 Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," p. 16.

of scholars who adopt this concept as a *definition* of Islam.[5] This is not to critique Asad's overall approach, including his and others' subsequent work connecting Islamic discourses to disciplinary practices that shape subjectivity and agency.[6] Rather, first, I caution against any impulse to reduce something as polyvalent as Islam to a single definition. Second, in addition to examining discursive "argument and reasoning" in Islam grounded in authoritative texts, I highlight other strategies mobilized to "authenticate"[7] Islamic practice – that is, to convince people to adopt a practice or accept it as legitimate. In the Fayḍa community, momentous changes in religious practice have occurred without controversy, such as women coming to act openly as spiritual guides and chant leaders.[8] Others changes, such as the rise of *yëngu*, have aroused intense debate; yet the choice of whether to practice it or to accept its practitioners in the Fayḍa community depends relatively little on explicit arguments. Perhaps the

5   For another critique of "discursive tradition" as a definition of Islam, see Samuli Schielke, "Hegemonic Encounters: Criticism of Saints-Day Festivals and the Formation of Modern Islam in Late 19th and Early 20th-Century Egypt," *Welt Des Islams* 47, no. 3/4 (November 2007): pp. 319–55, doi:10.1163/157006007783237446; Samuli Schielke, "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life" (Zentrum Moderner Orient Working Papers, 2010), https://195.37.93.199/publikationen/Working Papers/schielke_2010.pdf.

6   Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Talal Asad, "Agency and Pain: An Exploration," *Culture and Religion* 1, no. 1 (2000): pp. 29–60, doi:10.1080/01438300008567139; Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1999); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons And Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

7   Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

8   Joseph Hill, "'All Women Are Guides': Sufi Leadership and Womanhood among Taalibe Baay in Senegal," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 4 (2010): pp. 375–412; Joseph Hill, "Entrepreneurial Discipleship: Cooking Up Women's Sufi Leadership in Dakar," in *Cultural Entrepreneurship in Africa*, ed. Ute Röschenthaler and Dorothea E. Schulz (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 58–80; Joseph Hill, "Picturing Islamic Authority: Gender Metaphors and Sufi Leadership in Senegal," *Islamic Africa* 5, no. 2 (2014): pp. 275–315; Joseph Hill, "Wrapping Authority: Women Sufi Leaders in an Islamic Movement in Senegal" (unpublished manuscript, 2015).

most crucial strategy in securing *yëngu*'s place in the Fayḍa community is what I call 'performative apologetics,' the demonstration of exemplary religious qualities so as to reconcile a potentially controversial practice with one's projected "line"[9] as a proper Muslim.

Arguing Orthodoxy through Performance

As debates over Islamic orthodoxy globalise and competition between Islamic currents intensifies, believers' dress and religious acts have increasingly become acts of "public piety"[10] asserting a particular vision of Islam and social order. In Africa, approaching Islam in terms of ongoing debate grounded in foundational texts has proved especially productive in examining the growing controversies between Middle East-inspired Islamic reform movements and locally prevalent Islamic traditions.[11] Debates within a single Islamic movement have received far less attention. Although some features of the *yëngu* debate may be particular to the Fayḍa movement, other Islamic groups must similarly grapple with charismatic

9   Erving Goffman, "On Face-Work," in *Where the Action Is: Three Essays* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 1–36.

10 Benjamin F. Soares, "Islam and Public Piety in Mali," in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, eds. Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 205–26; Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*; Charles Hirschkind, "Cassette Ethics: Public Piety and Popular Media in Egypt," in *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, eds. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 29–51; Dorothea Schulz, "(Re)Turning to Proper Muslim Practice: Islamic Moral Renewal and Women's Conflicting Assertions of Sunni Identity in Urban Mali," *Africa Today* 54, 4 (Summer 2008): pp. 20–43.

11 Robert Launay, *Beyond the Stream: Islam and Society in a West African Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Eva Evers Rosander and David Westerlund, eds., *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (London: Hurst, 1997); Adeline Masquelier, "Debating Muslims, Disputed Practices: Struggles for the Realization of an Alternative Moral Order in Niger," in *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives*, eds. John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 219–50; Adeline Masquelier, *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Restatement of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Roman Loimeier, "Patterns and Peculiarities of Islamic Reform in Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 3 (August 2003): pp. 237–62, doi:10.2307/1581849; Benjamin F. Soares, "Rethinking Islam and Muslim Societies in Africa," *African Affairs* 106, no. 423 (April 1, 2007): pp. 319–26, doi:10.1093/afraf/adm015.

upstarts who rival central authority and challenge mainstream practice yet also mobilise on behalf of the larger movement.[12]

The intra-communal *yëngu* debate refracts broader debates between rival Islamic currents over 'orthodoxy.' Like those struggles, the *yëngu* controversy is intensely discursive, invariably references the Qur'ān and other authoritative texts, and ultimately aims to establish which practices cultivate and demonstrate a properly Islamic ethos. However, this intra-communal controversy also relies on a range of other sources of knowledge and modes of convincing, including appeals to dreams, visions, spiritual experiences, common sense, and inspired authorities. Furthermore, a practice may gain acceptance less through discursive argumentation than through non-discursive acts of demonstration.

Yëngu proponents sometimes invoke principles of mystical transcendence, whose authority comes not from texts but from intuitive experience attained through spiritual practice. Like many Sufis, Fayḍa adherents consider the literal prescriptions of *sharī'a* to be necessary yet also hold that certain hidden, mystical truths can transcend questions of literal legal permissibility.[13] Any discursive reference to such mystical truths can only be figurative, their full comprehension presupposing the hearer's access to similar experiential knowledge. *Yëngu* proponents also invoke the principle of the 'greater good,' for example arguing that

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12 On such powerful subgroups and charismatic leaders in the Tijānī branch based in Tiwaawan, see Ousmane Kane and Leonardo A. Villalón, "Entre Confrérisme, Réformisme et Islamisme : Les Mustarshidin Du Sénégal: Analyse et Traduction Commentée Du Discours électoral de Moustapha Sy et Réponse de Abdou Aziz Sy Junior," *Islam et Sociétés Au Sud Du Sahara* 9 (1995): pp. 119–201; Leonardo A. Villalón, "Generational Changes, Political Stagnation, and the Evolving Dynamics of Religion and Politics in Senegal," *Africa Today* 46, 3 (2003): pp. 129–47; Fabienne Samson, *Les Marabouts de L'islam Politique: Le Dahiratoul Moustarchidina Wal Moustarchidaty, Un Mouvement Néo-Confrérique Sénégalais* (Paris: Karthala, 2005). In the Senegalese Murid order, Cheikh Béthio Thioune and Modou Kara Mbacké are prominent examples of controversial figures whose conspicuous service to central leadership offers protection from their critics.

13 Joseph Hill, "Divine Knowledge and Islamic Authority: Religious Specialization among Disciples of Baay Ñas" (Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 2007); Joseph Hill, "Sovereign Islam in a Secular State: Hidden Knowledge and Sufi Governance among 'Taalibe Baay,'" in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, ed. Mamadou Diouf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 99–124.

bringing young people to God and away from drugs and alcohol through *yëngu* outweighs any alleged fault in breaking a rule.[14] Both proponents and opponents invoke Shaykh Ibrahim's and other central Fayḍa authorities' speech and actions ostensibly condoning or condemning *yëngu*. Many interlocutors attribute their actions to Shaykh Ibrahim's posthumous visitation through dreams, through which he communicates his wishes and thereby legitimates certain religious practices.

Beyond these discursive arguments, *yëngu* proponents go to great lengths to demonstrate through visible acts a surplus of the piety, devotion, knowledge, humility, and community belonging that detractors claim are inconsistent with *yëngu*. Whether practitioners reference these performances in a discursive defence, these public performances of discipleship – or acts of performative apologetics – constitute the most effective argument for accepting *yëngu* practitioners as good Muslims and Fayḍa community members.

The term 'performativity' – or the constitution of social reality through communicative acts – derives from John Austin's[15] class of 'performative utterances' that effect some social action under certain conditions. According to Austin, such an utterance is neither 'true' nor 'false' but rather 'felicitous' or 'infelicitous,' or socially recognised as effective or ineffective. Judith Butler has broadened the notion of 'performativity' to the constitution of social reality through meaningful acts.[16] Moreover, she has shown how norms do not simply govern acts but are constituted – and potentially subverted or subtly changed – through their reiterative performance.[17] Performativity, then, is central to not only the pragmatics but also the meta-pragmatics of religious practice.

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14 This principle resembles the established Islamic legal principle of *maslaḥa* (common interest), although speakers do not present it as a legal argument.
15 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).
16 Although Austin reserves the term 'performative' for an objective class of utterances, he shows other utterances to have similar 'illocutionary' and 'perlocutionary' effects.
17 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993).

That is, not only are religious acts themselves felicitous or infelicitous but so are attempts to establish norms surrounding practice through debate and demonstration.

Scholars' emphasis on discursive *sharīʿa* reasoning at the expense of other ways of establishing Islamic knowledge and authority may stem partially from the focus on more visible debates between competing Islamic tendencies rather than the subtler negotiations over practice between members of a single Islamic community. The Fayḍa has encountered vehement criticisms from fellow Sufis and non-Sufis since its beginnings in the nineteen-thirties. The voluminous critical and apologetic literature surrounding the Fayḍa revolves around debating the movement's orthodoxy according to *sharīʿa* reasoning. Yet within the Fayḍa community itself, debates focus less on *sharīʿa* reasoning than on referents of knowledge and authority particular to the community, such as shared mystical experience, devotion to Shaykh Ibrahim's family, and the imperative of spreading the Fayḍa. This is not to suggest a dichotomy between an orthodox 'great tradition' based on texts and a syncretistic 'little tradition' based on vernacular culture.[18] A single religious leader might choose from a number of modes of argumentation depending on the intended recipient. The ways of knowing and demonstrating Islam discussed in this article are fully Islamic yet exceed the notion of Islam as discourse.

Some Fayḍa adherents may object to my focus here on disagreements within the community and on an arguably marginal practice. I do not intend to present *yëngu* or the disagreements surrounding it as defining the larger movement, as similar controversies and variations in practice can probably be found in any community. Rather, my aim is to highlight how Fayḍa adherents respond to such controversies in a way that maintains a notion of shared religious community despite competing notions of correct Islamic practice. As Turner has shown,[19] it is during liminal moments of crisis outside the everyday that community members

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18 Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).
19 Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ, 1987).

can reflect upon, reinforce, and potentially question and remake social reality.

The remainder of this essay narrates two *yëngu* events to which Amadou invited me and contextualises both performances in relation to debates over rhythmic and melodic performance in the Fayḍa and in Islam more generally. I end by showing how, in their explanations of their practice, *yëngu* proponents performatively reconcile their practice of *yëngu* with their "line"[20] as good Muslims and disciples.

Interlude I: Moving Oneself for Baay

Since finishing high school, Amadou had spent his weekdays studying and working in Dakar and his weekends with his aunt and sisters in nearby Thiès. Since my previous research trip in 2005, Amadou's younger sister Rokhy had become the second wife of a *muqaddam*, or representative of the Sufi order, in Thiès. The same *muqaddam*, Baay Omar, had guided Amadou through *tarbiya* (spiritual education). Since then, Amadou and his relatives had participated in Baay Omar's budding *daayira* in Thiès.

At Amadou's invitation, I took an afternoon shared taxi to Thiès with another young research assistant, Ammat. Amadou's long-time friend and fellow Fayḍa adherent, Ammat was curious to see his first *yëngu* meeting. We arrived shortly before sunset, whereupon Amadou's aunt served us dinner while a few young disciples set up an amplifier system in the courtyard, tying a conical loudspeaker to the trunk of a towering eucalyptus tree. Baay Omar's first wife, Mati, signalled the impending *sikkar* meeting to the neighborhood by chanting over the loudspeaker – first intoning "*Lā ilāha illā Allāh*" ('There is no God but Allah') and then alternating between this phrase and "*Allāh Allāh*." Baay Omar had taught Mati to chant *sikkar* and to sing the standard repertoire of Wolof songs praising Shaykh Ibrahim. Until recently the public performance of such chants was reserved to men. He had also begun to teach his second wife, Amadou's younger sister Rokhy. Rokhy would repeat each iteration of

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20 Erving Goffman, "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction," *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes* 18, no. 3 (1955): pp. 213–31.

the *sikkar* in response over a second microphone along with two men and one other woman sitting with them on a woven plastic mat. All rocked their heads slowly to the rhythm of the *sikkar*. As in most *sikkar* meetings, the heavy-duty loudspeaker was cranked to maximum volume, making the chanters' voices not only deafening but also distorted almost beyond recognition. Disciples gradually trickled into the courtyard, sitting cross-legged on the mats and joining in the response.

After an hour and a half of *sikkar*, around 11:00 p.m., three male disciples in their late teens set up a percussion section at the edge of the seating area. One played a djembe drum with his hands.[21] Another sat on a large, plastic, yellow water jug, using sticks to beat three other water jugs filled to various levels. The third young man beat a simple inverted metal plate with spoons. To my ears, the rhythms they were playing were similar to the rhythms I had often heard at village *sabar* dance circles, although the drummer informed me afterwards that the *sikkar* rhythms are distinct from those of profane dancing. By the time the percussion began, about fifteen *daayira* members had gathered on the mats, all young men and women in their late teens and early twenties. A similar number of neighborhood children, too young to be initiated as disciples, had been drawn by the sound and stood around watching.

The onset of the percussion signalled to the disciples to stand up, set the plastic mats aside, and form a dance circle. Mati continued to chant *sikkar* accompanied by the percussion for about a half an hour longer while young men took the second microphone to chant the response in unison with some members of the circle. The *sikkar* and percussion accelerated and gained in intensity as the young disciples in attendance took turns dancing frenetically in the centre of the circle much as they might in village *sabar* dances. Most dancers were initiated disciples, aside from the occasional neighborhood child who would steal into the circle. In the moonless courtyard, lit only indirectly by a dim vestibule light, I could occasionally see the red light of my electronic recorder whirling in the middle as Amadou took his turn. With relish, Baay Omar, Amadou,

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21 In this area, the djembe is considered an import from Mande-speaking areas. The original *yëngu* drum is the *sabar*, a family of traditionally Wolof drums.

Rokhy, Mati, and all the other *daayira* members took turns in the circle. After Mati's half hour of leading the *sikkar* with the percussion, a male chanter took over, soon setting down the microphone, apparently so he could sway more easily.

After fifteen more minutes, Baay Omar signalled for the *sikkar* to stop, and everyone sat in a circle, with men on one side and women on the other. He closed the meeting with an impassioned and at times humourous speech about esoteric knowledge (*xam-xam*, *ma'rifa*), occasionally addressing me. At one point, he defended *yëngu* and chastised its critics:

> I have a guest [the author] who is interested in knowledge. That's why I have to talk about knowledge. But I'll end up by picking a fight. What's that? It's about the drumming and dancing. If someone who drums for Baay [Shaykh Ibrahim], dances for Baay is to die, they can get ready and kill me. If someone who drums for Baay goes to hell, let them light the fire! [Audience members laugh.] If one who drums for Baay has nothing, I'll have nothing... So the worst Taalibe Baay [disciple of Shaykh Ibrahim], the lowest Taalibe Baay is the Taalibe Baay who puts down his fellow disciple. You [who do this] are not a Taalibe Baay and you're not a Muslim... And they think we haven't studied. Maybe we haven't studied, but we *know.* Studying and knowing are not the same.

Unlike some other leaders who advocate *yëngu*, Baay Omar made little attempt to justify or rationalise the practice in terms of religious legality. Instead, he emphasised his intuitive certainty that *yëngu* was an appropriate expression of his love for Shaykh Ibrahim and that no one had the right to criticise him because of it. While his declaration that *yëngu* critics are neither disciples nor Muslims may seem to place them outside the fold of Islam (an act of *takfir* or excommunication), this interpretation would implicate him in the same behaviour he is criticising. It makes more sense to see him as insisting that when one speaks in such a way one is not speaking as a Muslim or a disciple.

Well after midnight, Ammat and I took leave of Amadou, Baay Omar and the rest of the disciples and flagged down a shared taxi back to Dakar. I asked Ammat what he thought of the *yëngu*. He said he had heard of this kind of thing but had had difficulty believing that fellow disciples of Shaykh Ibrahim would do such things. Actually seeing it in person was shocking. When I asked if he would ever participate in such things as his friend Amadou did, Ammat replied that because Baay Niasse did not do such things he preferred not to as well, and that people would think less of him if he did. This was the answer I had expected.

What I did not expect was the fact that Amadou and Baay Omar not only took part in *yëngu* but did so with such gusto and defended it with such passion. Like Ammat, both come from established Njolofeen clerical lineages of the Waalo area of Western Saalum,[22] the same lineages that produced Shaykh Ibrahim and many other renowned Islamic scholars. The Njolofeen families migrated to the region from Jolof during the nineteenth century jihads that established an Islamic state in the region, and beyond that they trace their roots to the ancient Pulaar-speaking clerical families of the long-Islamised Senegal River Valley. Each Njolofeen village was founded by a Qur'ān teacher and his family and followers who migrated from the northern Jolof region during the nineteenth-century to support an Islamic revolution.[23] Each is devoted to farming and Qur'ānic study and lacks the artisanal occupational groups, especially the praise singers and musicians (*géwal*, *griot*) found in surrounding villages, contributing to a sense of devotion to Islam and exclusion of profane activities. Even after a century and a half in Saalum, the Njolofeen families still reserve the term 'Saalum-Saalum' for the Wolof speakers with deeper roots in the region, many of whom were much more recently Islamised. Thus, although Njolofeen share a Wolof ethno-linguistic identification with eastern Saalum-Saalum, they remain strongly endogamous and tend to consider themselves bearers of a distinct Islamic heritage.[24]

22 Not to be confused with the Waalo kingdom in the Senegal River valley to the north.
23 Hill, "Divine Knowledge and Islamic Authority."
24 Ibid.

Yëngu originated in eastern Saalum communities where Islam only became a majority religion during the twentieth century. Shaykh Abdoulaye Wilane, a scholar and leader from the eastern Saalum town of Kaffrine, confirmed to me in a 2014 interview the widespread belief that he invented *yëngu*. He has been its most visible proponent, and it was his disciples whom I first saw engage in it. Baay Omar's leader, Baay Ousmane Diawo, told me that he first witnessed *yëngu* in 1990 while visiting Abdoulaye Wilane in Kaffrine. Many of the people I have heard criticising *yëngu* have been Njolofeen, many of whom assume that *yëngu* results from eastern Saalum-Saalum youth's difficulty fully adopting 'true' Islam. Yet here I was witnessing two Njolofeen from venerable Njolofeen scholarly lineages losing themselves in *yëngu*.

'Law' vs. 'Reality': Controversies and Productive Tensions

This anecdote reflects larger shifts facing the Fayḍa movement as it grows rapidly at a grassroots level, largely beyond the control of central leaders, and in contexts where religious allegiances are increasingly experienced as part of one's individual – yet not necessarily individually chosen – life path. At the centre of disciples' personal spiritual quests are religious performances through which they not only cultivate religious experience and community but, directly and indirectly, remake norms and rearrange social alliances. Religious performances are often controversial because they concern not merely what happens 'on-stage' – in this case in a *sikkar* circle – but the nature and boundaries of community and authority 'off-stage.'[25] The Fayḍa itself is what one might call a 'shifter,'[26] whose referent, shape, and form change as one moves between nodes in this global network.[27]

Since its beginnings in the nineteen-thirties, with limited central

25 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).

26 Michael Silverstein, "Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description," in *Meaning in Anthropology*, ed. Keith H. Basso and Henry A. Selby (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), pp. 11–55; John G. Galaty, "Being 'Maasai'; Being 'People-of-Cattle': Ethnic Shifters in East Africa," *American Ethnologist* 9, 1 (1982): pp. 1-20.

27 Joseph Hill, "The Cosmopolitan Sahara: Building a Global Islamic Village in Mauritania," *City & Society* 24, 1 (April 2012): pp. 62–83.

organisation and messaging, the Fayḍa Tijāniyya has spread in capillary fashion through diverse communities worldwide.[28] Fayḍa adherents' discourses of simultaneous apparent (*ẓāhir*) and hidden (*bāṭin*) truths often serve to accommodate multiple perspectives into what many experience as a single movement.[29] Perhaps the most palpable sign that one has shifted from one context in this global network to another is a shift in the performance of *dhikr*. Such shifts occur not only when moving between local communities but even within a single local community's *dhikr* performances, as the example in the following section illustrates.

The *yëngu* debate takes place against a backdrop of centuries-long debates over which, if any, forms of rhythmic and melodic performances are permitted in Islam. Although many people speak of a single 'Islamic position' on music and dance, disagreement continues to surround the question.[30] One position forbids all instrumental accompaniment, musical melodies, dancing and even the more melodic (*mujawwad*) styles of Qur'ānic recitation that are mainstream throughout much of the Muslim world.[31] In contrast, many Sufi scholars have held that music, poetry, and dance are only forbidden if they excite the lower passions and lead away from God. For example, al-Ghazālī (c. 1058–1111) argued that, for one who thinks only of God, even sensual poetry and music will only draw the mind to God. Although he forbade the spiritually uninitiated from attending *samā'* ('audition') performances of sacred music and dance, al-Ghazālī cautioned anyone who had not tasted the spiritual secrets contained in such performances against pronouncing on their permissibility.[32] Similar

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28 Hill, "Divine Knowledge and Islamic Authority"; Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

29 Hill, "Divine Knowledge and Islamic Authority"; Hill, "All Women Are Guides"; Hill, "Sovereign Islam in a Secular State: Hidden Knowledge and Sufi Governance among 'Taalibe Baay.'"

30 Martin Stokes, "Silver Sounds in the Inner Citadel? Reflections on Musicology and Islam," in *Interpreting Islam*, ed. Hastings Donnan (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 167–89.

31 Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, New ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985).

32 Leonard Lewisohn, "The Sacred Music of Islam: Samā' in the Persian Sufi Tradition," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6, 1 (1997): pp. 1–33.

ambiguity is found in many Sufi scholars' positions today, which tend neither to forbid nor embrace any particular genre categorically, instead accepting whatever draws one closer to God while rejecting the opposite. Whatever their persuasion, those who present themselves as Islamic authorities tend to dissociate themselves from performance genres that could be viewed as profane or undignified.

Such ambiguities are prominent in the Fayḍa, whose leaders in principle condemn practices that contravene God's law (*sharīʿa*) yet also recognise that some actions that appear to contravene *sharīʿa* may actually manifest a reality that transcends it. If anything characterises the Fayḍa in its disparate forms, it is perhaps the simultaneous insistence on divine law (*sharīʿa*) and mass ecstatic mystical experience. While the juxtaposition of outer (*ẓāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*) truths is widespread in Sufism, Shaykh Ibrahim's popularisation of mystical discourses of direct knowledge of God has made this juxtaposition particularly salient and contentious both for the Fayḍa community's critics and within the community itself.[33] Medina Baay's central leaders negotiate between presenting themselves as globally legitimate Islamic authorities, emphasising Shaykh Ibrahim's distinctive spiritual heritage, and accommodating the diversity resulting from the Fayḍa's decentralised propagation through spontaneous ecstatic religious experience. Shaykh Ibrahim's mystical teachings have drawn vehement critiques not only from Salafi-style reformists but also from fellow Tijānīs who view his teachings as potentially blasphemous and as encouraging forbidden behaviours among his disciples.[34] However,

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33 Mervyn Hiskett, "The 'Community of Grace' and Its Opponents, 'the Rejecters': A Debate about Theology and Mysticism in Muslim West Africa with Special Reference to Its Hausa Expression," *African Language Studies* 17 (1980): pp. 99–140; Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Restatement of Tradition*; Rüdiger Seesemann, "The Shurafaʾ and the 'Blacksmith': The Role of the Idaw 'Ali of Mauritania in the Career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (1900-1975)," in *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, ed. Scott S. Reese (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 72–98; Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival*.

34 Hiskett, "The 'Community of Grace' and Its Opponents, 'the Rejecters': A Debate about Theology and Mysticism in Muslim West Africa with Special Reference to Its Hausa Expression"; Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival*.

even if these potentially conflicting imperatives generate controversy, the Fayḍa's ability to keep them in productive tension is key to its global spread through diverse socio-cultural environments.

Shaykh Ibrahim and his successors have gone to great lengths to demonstrate adherence to widely accepted norms of orthodoxy, to disavow behaviours potentially perceived as unorthodox, and to de-emphasise certain teachings when in the company of uninitiated outsiders. Shaykh Ibrahim wrote voluminously defending the compatibility of his teachings with Islam's foundational texts[35] and declared that anyone who deviated from Islamic law was not his disciple.[36] Yet Shaykh Ibrahim's prescriptions are often ambivalent and open to a range of interpretations. In a well-known fatwa authorising the transmission mystical knowledge to women, he states:

> As for secrets, they are destined for the *'ārif* [gnostic, knower of God]. Not all who are carried away [by gnosis] are thereby *'ārif*, but rather one who perseveres (*baqā'*) after extinction (*fanā'*) and follows the Truth in the way of the Prophet, dominating the self.[37]

Like many of Shaykh Ibrahim's prescriptions, this one cuts two ways. It acknowledges that the knower of God must go through the experience of self-extinction (*fanā'*) in divine unity, a state in which one appears to be carried away (*majdhūb*) in insanity. His disciples today therefore often refer to him as "the leader of the insane" (*sëriñ u dof yi*). Yet paradoxically, self-extinction in God can interfere with self-mastery, becoming a form

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35 See, for example, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, *The Removal of Confusion Concerning the Flood of the Saintly Seal Aḥmad Al-Tijānī: A Translation of Kāshif Al-Ilbās 'an Fayḍa Al-Khatm Abī Al-'Abbas*, ed. Shaykh Ḥasan b. 'Alī Cisse, trans. Zachary Valentine Wright, Muhtar Holland, and Abdullahi El-Okene (1932; repr., Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010).

36 Al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm ibn al-Shaykh 'Abd Allāh [Niasse], *Jawāhir Ar-Rasā'il*, ed. Al-Shaykh ᵓAḥmad ᵓAbū Fatḥ Al-Yarwāwī, vol. 1 (n.p., 1969). In many letters in this volume, Shaykh Ibrahim dissociates himself from anyone who does not uphold the prescriptions of *sharī'a*.

37 *Ammā al-maqāṣidu fa-ḥazzu l-'ārif. Mā kāna majdhūban* [**sic**; Fayḍa scholars read this: *kullu majdhūbin*] *bi-dhāka l-'ārif. Bal man baqiya ba'd al-fanā'i wa-salak nahja al-rasūli al-ḥaqqa wa'l-nafsa malak.*

of self-indulgence leading one away from God's law. The true Sufi, then, must show perseverance (*baqā'*) in following God's ritual and social prescriptions even while experiencing the dissolution (*fanā'*) of all distinctions in the divine. Where Fayḍa adherents sometimes disagree is over when, to what extent, and in what was ecstatic experience can excuse temporarily flouting the law. To what degree must someone be held accountable for actions done in a state of mystical union with God? To what extent is it permissible to plan and encourage ecstatic experiences, for example, organizing a meeting with instruments and rhythms likely to 'move' people in a certain way?

Since *yëngu* surfaced in eastern Saalum during the nineteen-eighties, the Fayḍa's central leaders have never responded with unanimity to its growing popularity. Shaykh Ibrahim's oldest son and successor Al-Ḥājj 'Abd Allāh famously persisted in forbidding disciples from performing *yëngu*. However, others refrained from imposing a ban on what practitioners presented as an authentic expression of ecstatic religious experience. Those *muqaddam*s whom I have asked about the practice have expressed opinions ranging from outright condemnation to grudging tactical acceptance to fervent advocacy. The general trend has been for central leaders, whatever their personal opinions, to move gradually away from open opposition, recognising both the futility in attempting to stop *yëngu* and its practitioners' service and recruitment.

No amount of condemnation has succeeded in preventing *yëngu* from exploding in popularity far beyond its originally small geographical area. Many of the Senegalese youth who have entered the Fayḍa during this period have joined *daayira*s that practice *yëngu*. The *yëngu* movement's sharp rise in popularity has led some of its proponents to dub it '*Faydu saani*' (a second *Fayḍa*/flood), although this epithet is ambiguous and controversial even among its practitioners. Moreover, some aspects of *yëngu* have become somewhat mainstream. For example, the Shababoul Faïdati *daayira* under the direction of Shaykh Ibrahim's youngest son Baay Mbay 'Emcee' Niasse sometimes accompanies their *dhikr* with an energetic yet choreographed dance in formation, albeit without percussion and with more restrained movement.

Among Fayḍa adherents in places such as Mauritania and Northern
Nigeria, certain forms of drumming and bodily movement are commonly
and uncontroversially integrated into *sikkar* performance. In neighboring
Mauritania, *dhikr* is sometimes accompanied by drums (*ṭabala*), usually
with restrained rhythms played by women who are not hereditary musical
specialists. In Medina Baay, I have often seen male Hausa disciples from
Northern Nigeria and Niger standing in a circle chanting a pentatonic
dhikr while rhythmically pounding their chests with their joined fists.
Senegalese disciples who condemn *yëngu* tend to excuse these other
practices, describing them as less sensual, more subdued in sound and
movement, and maintaining the division of men and women.

Much of the visceral opposition to *yëngu* seems to stem from its
resemblance to local forms of drumming and dancing with sensual and
pagan connotations. Significantly, *sabar* drumming and frenetic dancing
in Senegal are associated with socially stigmatised griots (*géwal*) who
are sometimes assumed to be lax Muslims.[38] As praise singers, griots'
work requires them to speak loudly and openly and to embody a habitus
that contrasts with the quiet, dignified bearing associated with noble
people and Islamic clerics. Many outsiders insist – incorrectly according
to Njolofeen – that Njolofeen such as Shaykh Ibrahim and many of his
close followers descend from blacksmiths and therefore have inherited
a low caste status.[39] Such perceptions may compound their tendency to
distance themselves from any behaviour that might associate them with
low-caste behaviours.

Another factor contributing to the perception of unorthodoxy
surrounding *yëngu* is that, while religious meetings usually segregate
men and women into separate sections with a certain amount of space
between them, the frenetic nature of *yëngu* and its organisation in a single

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38 I have encountered rural griot musicians who openly admit to drinking
    and not observing regular prayer, an admission unthinkable for most rural
    Senegalese Muslims, yet many are as religiously observant as members of
    other groups.
39 Seesemann, "The Shurafaʾ and the 'Blacksmith': The Role of the Idaw ʿAli
    of Mauritania in the Career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (1900-
    1975)"; Hill, "Divine Knowledge and Islamic Authority."

circle leads men and women to stand and dance closer together. In non-ritual settings, Senegalese disciples do not typically insist on the strict daily gender segregation found among Mauritanian Arab disciples, yet gender segregation remains a persistent marker of collective religious rituals.

Many Fayḍa adherents, like many Muslims more generally, speak as if there were no ambiguity regarding questions of orthodoxy. They condemn outright practices such as *yëngu*, visibly wearing prayer beads or a pendant with a photograph of a leader, and interspersing God's name (*dhikr*) with the names of people. Yet the same leaders who criticize these behaviours do little to curb them or to exclude their practitioners from the Fayḍa community. These leaders recognise that the Fayḍa's rapid, grassroots growth is facilitated by the movement's ability to adapt to diverse local situations and to accommodate somewhat divergent local disciple communities.

Practitioners are conscious of the controversy surrounding *yëngu* and avoid displaying it in front of central leaders. In turn, central leaders turn a blind eye to it even if their representative status prevents them from embracing it openly. As these communities' engagement in *yëngu* is no secret, not performing it in front of central leaders is not a matter of deception but rather one of sparing these leaders the uncomfortable decision of either condemning or tacitly condoning it. The next section illustrates this dynamic, showing how disciple communities switch between different repertoires of religious performance to accommodate different relationships with Islamic authority and community. This allows them to participate in the larger Fayḍa and Islamic communities on the basis of shared practices while maintaining distinctive practices. Meanwhile, it allows central leaders to represent notions of orthodoxy more broadly accepted in the Fayḍa and Islamic community while integrating diverse local communities as full members.

Interlude II: Shifting Repertoires of Religious Performance

Once again it was my collaborator Amadou who invited me to the annual *Gàmmu* (Arabic: *Mawlid*), a meeting celebrating the birth of the Prophet

Muḥammad, held in 2010 in the town of Ñooro. The meeting's host was Baay Ousmane Diawo, Amadou's and Baay Omar's spiritual leader. Like the houses of many leaders, Diawo's compound is composed of several structures. These include his humble, thatch-roofed personal quarters; two cement-block buildings with rooms for several close disciples' nuclear families; and one cement-block building nearing completion that would soon be inaugurated as the new Islamic Institute. Diawo cited several justifications for building his compound on the edge of town: the land is cheaper there; they are relatively far from neighbors who may be bothered by their activities; and perhaps most importantly, Shaykh Ibrahim revealed the site of his new headquarters to him in a dream. In interviews, Diawo and several of his *muqaddam*s told how the disciple community had left the village where Diawo had originally settled because fellow Fayḍa adherents in neighboring villages vehemently opposed *yëngu*. They recounted continued opposition from both Fayḍa adherents and others in Ñooro, where many people consider them to be fanatical and ignorant. Nonetheless, in this town of multiple religious affiliations, they still enjoy more freedom than they would in a more tight-knit village.

Like most *gàmmu*s, this one began with a late afternoon 'conference,' in this case featuring a well-known nephew of Shaykh Ibrahim from Medina Baay. After a dinner break, the all-night *gàmmu* proper started after midnight and finished after sunrise. At the *gàmmu*, two of Shaykh Ibrahim's senior sons were the main speakers. The opening conference was held in the open space in front of Diawo's compound, where enough plastic woven mats had been set out to accommodate several hundred people. A few hours later, the *gàmmu* itself was held across town in a public square under a large tent that had been equipped with about a thousand chairs, a sound system, and extensive fluorescent lighting. Most attendees were Diawo's disciples from Ñooro, other parts of Saalum, the Gambia, and Casamance. Like Diawo himself, most of Diawo's disciples are Pulaar speakers (Fulbe), although many are Wolof and a few come from other ethno-linguistic backgrounds.

Beforehand, Diawo told his disciples not to engage in *yëngu* in the

presence of their esteemed guests from Medina Baay. In the afternoon before the conference, Diawo instructed his disciples to line up on both sides of the main road to welcome their honoured guests. Although he certainly knew the guests would not arrive for another hour or two, this was an opportunity for disciples to stand in disciplined formation and *sikkar* together. At the end of the line towards the road to Kaolack, from whence their guests would arrive, stood the young men and women of the *Fityān al-Fayḍa* ('Youth of the Flood') security corps, who chanted while standing at attention. On one side of the road, the women stood in white uniforms consisting of cotton pants, a long shirt with a photo of Shaykh Ibrahim printed on the front, and a white head tie. The men of *Fityān al-Fayḍa* faced them on the opposite side of the road, wearing more militaristic-looking dark green uniforms with white reflective trim. A few core young men wore green suits and ties. Many *daayira*s around Senegal today have similar uniforms and are trained to maintain security and order at large meetings, an idea that Diawo and his disciples say they pioneered. When their esteemed guests arrived, these uniformed and orderly disciples encircled their cars to buffer them from the exuberant crowd as everyone marched and chanted from the highway down a dirt road to Baay Diawo's compound.

During the conference and *gàmmu*, the *daayira*'s *sikkarkat*s (chant leaders) performed precisely the same repertoire that one hears at any major Fayḍa gathering in Senegal, including *sikkar* melodies, Wolof songs extolling Shaykh Ibrahim and his mystical teachings, and Arabic poems praising the Prophet Muḥammad. Indeed, the *sikkar* leader in Diawo's community, Muhammad Kebbe, is well known and respected among Senegalese Fayḍa adherents for his widely-circulated recordings of this standard Fayḍa repertoire.

At the close of the *gàmmu* meeting, attendees arose and chanted some of the more exuberant *sikkar* melodies in unison, many of them mildly swaying in rhythm. After a few minutes, the youth security corps escorted the visiting leaders to their cars outside the tent. Once the leaders' cars were out of sight, the attendees marched in formation, many of them in uniform, across town to Diawo's house still *sikkar*-ing in unison. Several hundred

disciples, mostly young people from their late teens to early twenties, then formed a circle in the open space in front of Diawo's compound and joined in chanting *sikkar*. When the drums arrived, participants took turns performing *yёngu* in the middle of the circle. Baay Diawo himself and several of his *muqaddam*s took turns energetically dancing in the circle.

Performative Apologetics: Defending *Yёngu* as Religious Practice

This shift in ritual performance corresponded to a shift in orientation between differently bounded yet overlapping communities in which Baay Diawo's disciples participate. Later that day, I spent several hours speaking with Baay Diawo and several of his *muqaddam*s. Among other things, they provided a range of defenses of *yёngu* and of themselves as good Muslims and disciples. Here I analyse both *yёngu* itself and its practitioners' defense of it in terms of 'performativity,'[40] or the notion that social reality and selves are constituted through repeated performance of communicative acts. Butler's conception fuses two meanings of 'performance': Austin's[41] sense of the social efficacy of a communicative act and the more theatrical sense of performance before an audience.[42] For Butler, the norms or conditions of a performance's 'felicity' – or socially recognised efficacy – do not simply precede an act but are constantly renegotiated through acts. Social norms and identities, she argues, are naturalised through reiterated performances. Yet the same reiterative process opens up the same norms and identities to subversion and change through imperfect or subversive reiterations. Here I am concerned with how, through social acts, *yёngu* practitioners frame previously non-normative religious performances as legitimate. Beyond discursive explanations of *yёngu* itself, this process involves further performances – for example, studying Islam, building Islamic schools and mosques, raising money for Fayḍa activities, and serving Fayḍa leaders – through which *yёngu* practitioners display an excess of religious knowledge, devotion, and piety.

40   Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.
41   Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.
42   Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, 4 (1988): 519–31.

Baay Diawo and his disciples invoked a range of explanations to defend *yëngu* as part of an authentic religious practice and to respond to accusations that they were playing with God's holy name and abandoning God's law. It is striking that, for the most part, they were unconcerned with addressing claims that the practice contravenes a literal reading of *sharīʻa*. Perhaps the explanation I most often heard was that *yëngu* is the spontaneous manifestation of a spiritual state (*ḥāl*) transcending legal prescriptions. However, any observer can see that many – perhaps most – participating young people are enjoying themselves and do not seem to be in an altered state in which they lose control over their actions. Even practitioners who explain it as the result of an uncontrollable mystical state also explain dancing and drumming 'for Baay' as an alternative to drumming and dancing for more unsavory ends, suggesting strategic reasons for allowing it. They respond to accusations of profaning the name of God with the opposite claim, that they are sanctifying drumming and dancing and rescuing young people from the debauchery of night clubs and sensual traditional drumming and dancing. In a context in which everything has multiple apparent and hidden natures, one must not preclude that *yëngu* might be more than one thing simultaneously.

Discussing why God permits some things and forbids others, Baay Diawo explained that all religious prescriptions followed one basic principle: the things God has forbidden weaken one's relationship with God, while the things God has commanded strengthen it. Drinking causes one to forget God while prayer makes one conscious of God. He told me: "So anything else that can bring you closer to God, in my view, can't be wrong." As for determining what brings a person closer to God, each person has a different spiritual state (*ḥāl*) and therefore needs different activities. He does not personally decide to dance because he desires to do so, but rather "whatever my spiritual state has me do, if it takes hold within me, I do it." He continued:

> Sometimes there is someone who wants to *yëngu* and
> I forbid them, because I know it's not a spiritual state
> [pushing them to do it]. It's just dancing. I forbid them. But

> if it's a spiritual state, if I see them I let them be, and I know
> that this is a spiritual state.

My own observations led me to take this explanation with a grain of salt, as I saw many, including uninitiated children, participate apparently for enjoyment as Baay Diawo looked on. This may have something to do with his overall approach to leadership that favours guiding and advising over commanding and forbidding.

In a meeting recorded in 1997 in Kaffrine,[43] the *daayira* leader introduced the lead drummer as an Islamic school teacher who is "teaching the children of Muslims to know their religion, how to practice their *sharī'a*," showing, he continued, that in this community "*ma'rifa* [mystical knowledge of God] is working 100%, *sharī'a* is working 100%". The indirect addressee of this statement was the person who sees a contradiction between *yëngu* and *sharī'a*. The justification draws on the teaching that all Fayḍa adherents presumably accept: that the contradiction between mystical knowledge and God's law is only apparent. *Yëngu* here is presented merely as a spontaneous expression of *ma'rifa* that is compatible with *sharī'a*.

In addition to defending *yëngu* as a spontaneous manifestation of a spiritual state, both Diawo and his *muqaddam*s also describe it as a more calculated way of appealing to young people who might otherwise be doing much worse things. Diawo says:

> Also, *yëngu* has restrained young people who otherwise
> could not be restrained. Because they have to go move
> (*yëngëtu*). Because young people can't just sit and eat. They
> have to go move. If they aren't moving in God, they will
> move in something that God despises. It's inevitable.

One of his *muqaddam*s similarly explained that Shaykh Abdoulaye Wilane started *yëngu* because the *sabar* dances in Kaffrine were leading young people to engage in immoral behaviour. Wilane succeeded in getting

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43 The recording was made by my research collaborator Ady Fall.

them to "move for Baay, which they prefer over going to their dances." The *muqaddam* described Wilane explaining to a major leader from Medina Baay:

> They've forbidden us from doing *yëngu* in Kaffrine... He told him: Now, if that's not good, we'll abandon *yëngu*, and return to our [profane] drums and our dances... Now, whenever we do the *waẓīfa* (evening group litany), we drum and dance for Baay until our hearts are calm and our bodies warm, then we go eat dinner. If dancing for Baay is not good, moving oneself for Baay is not good, we'll abandon it and go back to our drumming and dancing. That's what brought about *yëngu*. [The leader] replied: That's fine.

In short, Baay Diawo and his *muqaddam*s ascribe to *yëngu* a significance diametrically opposed to outsiders' description of *yëngu* as 'playing around' (*foo*) with God's name. They defend *yëngu*'s compatibility with *sharī'a* not through legalistic justifications but through appealing to a mystical state that transcends the distinctions of *sharī'a*. They also depict *yëngu* as a strategy that serves the greater good, leading young people away from less wholesome activities.

Yet perhaps more important than either of these justifications, as far as Baay Diawo and his followers are concerned, is what might be called the 'proof of the pudding' justification: disciples in the communities that practice *yëngu* do not merely meet and dance but demonstrate exemplary behaviour, consecrate their time and possessions to Medina Baay's leadership, and support Islamic educational and devotional activities that some might think incompatible with *yëngu*. In short, they aim to demonstrate that *yëngu* contributes to what anyone would consider exemplary discipleship.

One of Baay Diawo's *muqaddam*s, while not explicitly addressing *yëngu*, more dramatically illustrated the claim that Diawo's brand of Islam was particularly suited to drawing in the largely un-Islamised people of the region. The *muqaddam*, himself an older Pulaar speaker from a remote part

of Casamance, the sliver of Senegalese land located south of the Gambia, told of traveling with a companion to the furthest villages of Casamance's bush and being astonished to find that there were whole villages there that had "no religion." (As I listened, I thought of early European missionary accounts of traveling to 'blackest Africa.') He and a companion walked on a narrow, little-travelled path for an entire day without food, finally arriving that night at a village whose inhabitants were asleep. The two camped in a field and then approached the village head the next morning and proposed to build a school to teach children the Qur'ān. The village head replied: "What's the Qur'ān?" They explained that they wanted to teach "kids to be able to study and know their religion, to worship God." The head called a village meeting and the villagers said this was a good idea and asked how they would do it. The speaker said they would bring a teacher and organise everything. One villager who had studied in Dakar told them he had attempted to do the same thing for ten years but had given up hope. He said he would thank God if they succeeded. Since then, with Diawo's sponsorship, they have opened 17 schools enrolling 3,700 children in this and neighboring villages. Students are supposed to pay tuition, but the vast majority do not. Diawo himself pays for anyone who does not pay. None of the villages had a mosque when they started, but now all do. One village had a bar that was soon abandoned and replaced by a Qur'ānic school.

This narrative of Diawo and his community as uniquely capable of speaking to and teach those lacking in religion illustrates another key aspect of Diawo's project: to champion Islamic education, especially in communities where it is relatively unavailable. Diawo and his association run dozens of Islamic schools throughout Saalum, Gambia, and Casamance. Four Islamic institutes (one only nearing completion at the time of research) offer instruction in Arabic, French, and English up to a secondary level. Diawo says they do not receive government or foreign support for these schools, in contrast to many partially government-funded Franco-Arabic schools. He says he would feel undignified bowing and scraping for money in government offices. He supported several of his closest disciples in attaining a university-level education in Arabic and

then recruited them to teach in his Islamic institutes. His community's emphasis on Islamic education, like his own history as an English teacher and his training in the Islamic Institute in Medina Baay, provides a powerful counter-narrative to the stereotype that they are illiterate and ignorant. In this sense, he is similar to *yëngu*'s founder, Abdoulaye Wilane, a scholar who also runs a network of dozens of rural Islamic primary schools that feed into the Medina Baay's Islamic Institute, which in turn feeds into universities such as Al-Azhar in Cairo. By insisting on their commitment to bringing Islamic knowledge to people unaware even of the Qur'ān's existence (a claim that may be somewhat exaggerated), Baay Diawo and his followers indirectly confront claims that they are sliding back into unbelief. Instead, they cast themselves as Islam's pioneers.

Apart from participating in *yëngu*, Diawo's disciples are best known – and perhaps no less controversial – for their many building and service projects for the Fayḍa community and its leaders. They say their trademark is giving all they have to Baay, in return for which Baay gives them everything they have. Disciples have contributed money and labour to build additions onto the houses of several of Baay Niasse's children in the Fayḍa's spiritual capital of Medina Baay. They contributed significant work and materials to the major Medina Baay Mosque renovation project completed in 2010. They regularly organise work days on the peanut and millet fields of Baay Niasse's sons. In the village of Kóosi, where Shaykh Ibrahim initiated his first disciples, they rebuilt the Niasse family compound and built a mosque. When I returned to Senegal in 2014 and contacted Diawo, I found that he and many of his disciples were spending several weeks in the village of Daaru Mbittéyeen clearing brush to create fields to cultivate for Shaykh Ibrahim's current *khalīfa*, Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī Niasse. These projects seem to have contributed significantly towards legitimizing their community in the eyes of Medina Baay's leaders who may have challenged their *sikkar* performance. More than anything else, these dramatic devotional performances demonstrate that this disciple community is not about 'playing.'

Yet even these projects do not escape criticism. While Diawo and his disciples insist that these projects benefit disciples by disciplining them,

cultivating a work ethic, and in many cases initiating them into a trade such as carpentry or masonry, I sometimes heard accusations that Diawo's projects interfered in disciples' work or studies. When I asked him, he said this had never happened and that he discusses with all his disciples what their needs and abilities are. During a group interview, several close followers provided impassioned testimonials that Baay Diawo had given them opportunities in life that they would not otherwise have had. They told of him supporting their education, finding them jobs, arranging their marriages, and providing the means to finance the marriage and establish a household.

When Diawo and his community decided to restore and rebuild the Fayḍa's historical sites in Kóosi, they first received permission from Shaykh Ibrahim's sons. However, some inhabitants perceived their massive service as a poisoned gift and suspected that the influx of exuberant disciples was part of an attempt to take over the village. Medina Baay's leaders stepped in to mediate, and the disciples managed to complete their project. Elders I spoke with in Kóosi in 2010 regretted the misunderstanding and had concluded that Diawo's intentions and projects were good. Even if some continue to see Diawo's disciples' unusually ambitious projects as evidence of fanaticism, as far as this community and Medina Baay's central leaders are concerned, these projects demonstrate that these disciples do not treat God's name as a game.

Conclusion

I would argue that such demonstrations of commitment to Islamic learning and to the Fayḍa's leaders and community contribute far more than any discursive apologetics to *yëngu*'s acceptance – even if tenuous – in the Fayḍa community. Of course, *yëngu* practitioners take part in the sometimes-intense debate surrounding *yëngu*, arguing on multiple grounds for *yëngu*'s compatibility with norms of Islamic orthodoxy. Yet it is primarily through such performances that they aim to demonstrate that they are precisely the kind of serious, informed, humble, and devoted disciples that some claim they cannot be. Their tangible contributions –

building houses for leaders, clearing fields, opening mosques and Islamic schools – seem in part designed to "hypercorrect"[44] for any perceived shortcomings and thus to disarm critics. Through such activities, they not only ingratiate themselves to those whose approval they need to remain part of the Fayḍa community, but also demonstrate publicly that they take God very seriously indeed. One might even say that their exuberance in undertaking these activities, not merely compensating for their energetic *dhikr* performances, is a reflection of precisely the same exuberant habitus and serves as an implicit argument for its value.

My discussion has sought to expand the discussion of debates over Islamic orthodoxy to include modes of convincing beyond the discursive '*sharīʿa* reasoning' that often dominates such discussions. To a large extent, Islam can be fruitfully understood in terms of an internally diverse Islamic discursive tradition grounded in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*.[45] However, numerous factors that are not easily subsumed into this concept contribute to authorising Islamic knowledge and practice. In the Fayḍa community, 'knowing Islam' extends beyond texts to sources of knowledge such as visions, dreams, intuitive mystical experience and trusted authorities. Furthermore, beyond discursive justification, winning an argument – or at least surviving one – often depends more on playing an acceptable part[46] than on logically proving one's case.

Although debate continues to surround the felicity of *yĕngu* practitioners' religious performances, their performances seem felicitous enough for their own needs. That is, despite continued opposition from within the Fayḍa community, many central leaders and other members of the Fayḍa movement now tolerate *yĕngu* practitioners and value their contributions to the community. Their service to key leaders and to the community has largely immunised them to these criticisms. Whatever one's estimation of *yĕngu*, its popularity among a wide variety of young people, including among some members of Islamic scholarly lineages, has

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44 William Labov, "Hypercorrection by the Lower Middle Class as a Factor in Linguistic Change," in *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973), pp. 122–42.

45 Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," p. 14.

46 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

contributed to the Fayḍa's transformation into a mass youth movement in Senegal.

Epilogue

In June, 2016, after this article had been accepted for publication, I returned to Senegal. Amadou surprised me by telling me that Baay Ousmane Diawo had abandoned *yëngu*. Although I did not have a chance to investigate how he made this dramatic about-face, it likely resulted from pressure from leaders and fellow disciples in the Fayḍa. A few years earlier, another famous proponent of *yëngu*, Baay Mokhtar Ka, had also renounced *yëngu* due to such pressures. Still, numerous *muqaddam*s and disciple communities remain committed to *yëngu*. This development highlights that the 'felicity' of religious performances is never to be taken for granted but is constantly renegotiated and contested in complex ways.