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_The Divine Flood. Ibrāhīm Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival._

A hagiographical narrative indicates that the eponymous founder of the Tijāniyya mystic order, Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Tījānī (1150–1230AH/1737–1850 CE) had predicted the emergence of an overflowing (fayḍa) within his Order. This prediction is believed to have crystallised in the Jamāʿat al-fayḍa, a branch of the Order which emerged in Senegal around 1929 at the hands of Ibrāhīm Niasse (1318–95/1900–75), probably the most influential and charismatic Sufi leader of 20th-century Sudanic Africa. It is the story of this universal ‘Community of Grace’, which ‘has its greatest numerical strength in Nigeria’ (p. 217) that is told in the title under review. It consists of five chapters, an enlightening prologue, and an inspiring epilogue. The introduction (pp. 6–28) analyzes Sufism as an Islamic tradition within the framework of its doctrines, experiences, and manifestations in the African locale as a dynamic spiritual and social movement in the 20th-century. Chapter 1 (pp. 29–66) discusses the early life and career of Ibrāhīm Niasse as ‘the bringer the divine flood’ (ṣāḥib al-fayḍa), the exclusive claim to which is illustriously articulated in his magnum opus, the Kāshif al-Ilbāṣ, albeit not without subsequently provoking a vociferous rejection by non-fayḍa Tījāniyya acolytes.¹ Chapter 2 (pp. 67–109) is on spiritual training (tarbiya).² But Niasse modifies this to mean the way of accessing mystical knowledge (maʿrifa) by all and sundry through the cantilation of special litanies, especially the ṣalāt al-fātīḥ, “which takes a centre stage in the tarbiya process” (p. 100) for fayḍa adherents.³ Chapter 3 (pp. 110–43) illustrates the nature of internal tensions that afflicted the ‘Community’ at its

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¹ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Maygharī’s 1981 _al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm Anyās al-Sinighālī, a detailed critique of Kāshif as illustrated by Seesemann found what is probably the strongest rejoinder in Muḥammad Ibn Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-Mūriṭānī, _Al-Radd bi-l-ḥadīth wa-l-Qurʾān ‘alā mā fī kitāb Maygharī al-Naijīrī min al-zūr wa-l-buhtān_ (Kano [Nigeria]: Zāwiyat ahl al-Fayḍa al-Tījāniyya, n.d), a title not noted by Seesemann.

² A major work with insightful materials on tarbiya among other Sufi doctrines not noted by Seesemann is Abū l-Ḥasan al-Sirjānī’s (d. 470/1077) _Kitāb al-Bayāḍ wa-l-sawād min khasaïs ḥikam al-ʿibad fī naʿt al-murīd wa-l-murād,_ which recent edition is Bilal Orfali and Nada Saab, (Eds), _Sufism, Black and White: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Bayāḍ wa-l-sawād by Abū l-Ḥasan al-Sirjānī d. ca. 471/1077_ (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

³ A comprehensive analysis of queries by non-Sufi Muslim cognoscenti in regard to various Sufi doctrines, litanies, and practices is by a great grandson of the founder of the Tijāniyya, Maḥmūd Ibn Bensalem Ibn Muḥammad al-Kabīr, _Al-Tariqat al-Tijāniyya bayna l-intiqād wa-l-ʿtiqād_ (Rabat: Maṭba'at al-karāma, 1433AH/2012).
inception and examines the ‘academic’ attacks by its opponents for which the Tanbīh al-aghbiyāʾ by Āḥmad b. Muḥammad Dem (d. 1834/1973) stands out. The folding of arms (qabḍ) in statutory prayers, ‘a visible marker of adherence to Niasse’s movement’ (pp. 111 & 221) as robustly discussed and defended in Niasse’s Raf” al-malām, his main jurisprudential work, is also analysed. Beatific visions of God (ruʾyā) in this world, ecstatic utterances (shaṭaḥāt not shaṭḥiyyāt (p. 140), among other trademarks of the fayḍa made them, according to Seessemann, develop ‘a distinct feeling of superiority toward other[s]’ (p. 119), and this in turn generated a rich literature of rejoinders and counter-rejoinders. Chapter 4 (pp. 144–70) examines the consolidation of the fayḍa as indicated by the joining of young scholars from the Arab Idaw ‘Ali family of Mauritania. Also discussed here is how the expansion to outside Senegal became assured once the local followers started to project Niasse as the ‘Supreme Saint of the Age’ (Ghawth al-zamān), and he also ‘began to see himself in this role, too’ (p. 145). Chapter 5 (pp. 171–216) scrutinizes Niasse’s travelogues, largely in poetry, and complements thereto by his aficionados as sources for illustrating the mechanism for the consolidation of his claim to supreme sainthood after his visits to the Hejaz (1937) through Morocco; to Conakry (Guinea 1947); and particularly to Kano (Nigeria) in 1951, the year marking ‘the final stage in Niasse’s ascension to Supreme sainthood’ of his Time (p. 24), and ‘the decisive turning point in the history of the “Community of Grace”’ (p. 215). The epilogue (pp. 217–30) examines Niasse’s legacy, the pattern of expansion and conflicts in the fayḍa, and indicates lines of investigation for avid explorers who may wish to bivouac in the seemingly inexhaustible strands of development within and outside the phenomenon of the ‘Community’ from 1951 to-date.

Niasse’s new model of tarbiya, emphasis on strict adherence to the shari‘a and to the principle of malāmatiyya, that is, discreetness in public transmission of mystical experiences as a check on grotesque disclosures or claims, gave the movement a distinctive identity. But then ensuring strict compliance with the rules and precepts by overzealous followers as instituted by the fayḍa curia remained “one of the constant challenges” (p. 106). It may not be amiss to state that the concept of fayḍa is not exclusive to the Tījāniyya or indeed to the Niasse’s scion of it. For example, it is a familiar topos, albeit of a different dispensation, in the Qādiriyya brotherhood, too, as can be gleaned from al-Fuyūḍāt al-Rabbāniyya fī l-maʾāthir wa-l-awrād al-Qādiriyya,⁴ a popular work among the Qādiriyya of West Africa.