Sounds of Mouridism

A study on the use of music and song in the Mouridiyya

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Abstract

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The use of music in religious traditions is a complicated subject. Some say it doesn’t have any place in religion while others see it as an essential part of their spiritual life. How one defines music, and indeed religion, can differ greatly but both of these have played an enormous role in our world both historically and today. The relationship between these two subjects is the focus of this study. I aim to analyze how music and sound is used within the Mouridiyya, a Sufi order based mainly in Western Africa, as a religious practice and in what way different forms of music is a way for Mourids in Sweden to connect with their native culture and religion in a society that is in many ways very different. The study is based on interviews and field observations and will explore themes like music as transcendence, the contents of the music, attitudes toward “secular” or more popular, contemporary forms of music as well as gender roles and segregation. I have visited one Mourid group in Stockholm and the study will be based entirely on them. To say something more general about Mouridism or Sufism are generalizations I am not prepared to make, but some of the findings do open up for these kinds of discussions and hopefully this will be but one small step into a fairly uncharted academic field of “religious music”.

Keywords: Mouridism, Mouridiyya, Sufism, West Africa, Senegal, Music and Religion, Islam, Ritual, Khassaida, Amadou Bamba, Gender
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Glossary

Al-Fatiha – *The first Sura (chapter) of the Qu’ran*

Dahira – *The word used in Mouridism for “congregation” or “group”*

Dhikr – *A common ritual in Sufi-traditions where the name of God is repeated for very long periods of time*

El Tijaniyya – *The largest Sufi order in Senegal*

Khassaida – *The central ritual within Mouridism. Collective singing of Amadou Bamba's poems*

Marabout – * Relatives of Amadou Bamba and leader-figures within Mouridism*

Mouridiyya – *West African Sufi order with origins in Senegal*

MSMITS – *The particular Mourid dahira or congregation in Sweden that is the focus of this study*

Qawwali – *Music performance/ritual common in the Chishti order*

Sama – *“Listening”. Often referred to as the ritual practice of listening to music*

Tariqa – *Another name for Sufi-order*

Touba – *The holiest site and city in Mouridism. Second largest city in Senegal*

Youssou N'Dour – *Well known singer and artist from Senegal*

Wajd – *“A state of ecstasy”*

Wolof – *West-African language spoken in Senegal and neighboring regions*
1. Introduction

1.1. Background

When Youssou N'Dour sings about “Bamba”, the average listener may not think twice about the underlying meaning of the words. His music may perhaps make you want to dance but not necessarily to contemplate or think, especially if you don’t speak Wolof, the West-African language he so often sings in. But if you start to examine the lyrics and what they are saying, one discovers that many of them deal with themes that are, for lack of a better term, religious.

It is not uncommon for people to see music as something spiritual. It is often used for relaxation or meditation, during exercise or when we feel sad. Music clearly has the power to strongly affect our emotions, and this is something that hasn’t gone unnoticed historically. During Christmas times, a lot of people may put on Christmas-themed music to get into the right mood. Would the holiday really be the same without “Silent night”, “Jingle Bells” or ”Ave Maria”? Music has an amazing ability to transform the mood or atmosphere in a room almost instantaneously. In churches one often sings and there is usually an organ playing, which adds to that classic church-feel. Composers like Johann Sebastian Bach would compose music for church ceremonies, and much of what we call Classical music has its roots in religious traditions. The Chishti Sufi-order in Pakistan uses a form of Sama (listening) called Qawwali as a way to reach a mental state closer to God, and while opinions can strongly differ on the subject, music and its role in religious life within Sufism has a long history.

Sufism and the Mouridiyya

In Senegal, Sufi-inspired Islam has (for at least a hundred years) been, and still is, the faith practiced by the majority of the population. As often the case historically, Sufism has had particular success in spreading Islam outside of the Arab world, which is why many states outside of the Middle East mainly practice this form of the religion.

Senegal is a good example of this, as over 90% of the population are Muslim (Africa Guide, 2016) and most of these belong to a Sufi Order.

The two most popular orders, or Tariqa, is El Tijaniyya and the Mouridiyya (Rosander, 2011: 28), the latter of which will be the focus of this study.

The Mourid Brotherhood, as it is also known, emerged during a turbulent time of French colonial rule in Senegal. Its founder Amadou Bamba Mbacké, who lived from around 1850 to 1927, was a religious teacher, poet and political figure and is still to this day treated with great reverence within the order (Robinson, 1991: 155-160). Indeed, he remains the central figure and aspect of the mourid faith, with the arguable exception of his mother Mame Diarra Bousso who has a strong following of
her own.

Amadou Bamba called his following the *mourid*, meaning “The seeker after God” (Robinson, 1991: 1958) and it goes without saying that the group has grown exponentially since then. It is currently the second largest Tariqa in Senegal and holds great power both politically and culturally.

The city of *Touba* is the brotherhood’s holiest site and is inhabited by around 600,000 people, making it the second most populated city in the country (Rosander, 2011: 33-34). Furthermore, it is the burial site of Amadou Bamba himself as well as the place where he had a vision of the angel Gabriel (Robinson, 1991: 158). Every year, millions of Mourids from around Senegal and the world visit Touba to enter the great mosque and be in the presence of the founder and his tomb. Many rituals are performed at the site, some of which are indeed musical in nature. One can find videos on Youtube of large groups of people singing songs while on the pilgrimage.
The music of Senegal

With the popularity of so-called ”world music” rising by the late 80’s, many people throughout Europe and North America are to some degree familiar with Senegalese music. It is not uncommon to hear artists like Youssou N’Dour or Baaba Maal being played. The former, having performed with western artists like Peter Gabriel, Sting and Bruce Springsteen, have become a well-known and popular artist around the world. And while they perform what many would call “popular music” that is in some ways more secular, as opposed to Khassaida (explained further below), they often deal with very religious themes in their lyrics. It is often said that every Senegalese artists always need to have at least a song or two dedicated to a marabout (religious leader) on every album. Fiona McLaughlin writes in an article from 1997 that:

“...the popular music that constitutes the “new tradition” is sung almost exclusively to the glory of the marabout” (McLaughlin, 1997: 567)

It becomes clear that while the music is perhaps not part of any religious ritual or tradition in a direct way, the songs that are sung by popular artists in Senegal definitely have religious themes and lyrics that praise the leaders of the brotherhood to which they belong. One of the most famous works by Youssou N’Dour is the Grammy Award winning album “Egypt”, where he almost exclusively sings about Mouridism and Islam. Song titles off the album include “Skukran Bamba”, “Cheikh Ibra Fall”, “Touba” and “Allah”. While the album does not consist of Khassaida, but rather songs played with relatively modern instruments and original lyrics, it is clearly music that has a strong connection to the Mouridiyya and its traditions.

Questions that arise as a consequence deals with the religious significance of these popular songs, and what the relationship between this form of music and the more religiously based musical rituals like the Khassida – a kind of collective singing that visually may appear similar to Dhikr, looks like. Is there a significant difference between Khassida and popular music with religious lyrics, for example? How does every day-Mourids feel about this relationship?

The connection between Sweden and West African music has grown very strong in the last few years. Many Swedish producers or artists often work with African musicians on different projects. Eric Bibb made a collaborative album with Malinese singer Habib Koité a few years back, and the renowned Senegalese artist Baaba Maal had his latest album produced by Johan Hugo Karlberg. The interest in Sweden for African music is relatively strong and it is interesting to see how West Africans living in Sweden experience this.
1.2. Aim/Research Questions

I want to examine the subject described above in order to understand the musical traditions of the Mourid brotherhood, both religious and secular, as well as the relationship between the two. By observing the Mouridiyya as they exist in Stockholm and interviewing the individuals in this group, the hope is to be able to say something about the group and its relationship with music.

Islam is often seen as a religion that has a relatively difficult relationship with music in general. At the same time, it is of course an endlessly diverse tradition, and the Mouridiyya make out a very small part of it. It is fairly common to see studies on Sufism that focus on some of the more well-known orders like the Mevlevi order in Turkey or the Naqshbandiyya. Indeed, it is often these groups that in some ways “represent” Sufism as a whole. Often when mentioning Sufism in a social situation people may ask “Are those the ones that do the spinning dance?” (Referring to the so-called Whirling Dervishes of the Mevlevi order). It is understandable, since this is the image of Sufism that we are often presented with in popular culture. In reality, the Mevlevi only represent one out of the multitude of different groups that exist within Sufism. Choosing to write about the Mouridiyya from West Africa was partly a conscious decision that was made in order to shine a light on a less known group. By doing so, I hope to make a point of diversity in a conversation about Islam and Sufism that is often plagued by generalizations.

Relevance of the subject

Moreover, while the study of religion as well as music are fairly common, the two fields have rarely been combined. As Isabel Laack explains in her article “Sound, Music and religion”, while most music, both classical and contemporary, are seen as secular they often contain themes that are based in religious thought. A lot of the classical composers wrote for church ceremonies, for example, and much of the lyrical content in modern popular music contain religious language. Furthermore, music has often played a very central role in religious practice throughout most religious traditions and cultures in the world. Indeed, once you actually start thinking about it, music and religious has (and have always had) a close relationship. Strangely, this is a particular field that hasn’t been studied much at all. As Laack puts it:

“One finds relationships between sound and music with religion everywhere once one has begun looking. Therefore, it is surprising that these phenomena have been studied only marginally to date” (Laack, 2015: 221)

She brings up two reasons to explain this:
1. Our understanding of religious being based on “a certain understanding of Christianity”, where it is defined as “a set of beliefs and doctrines incorporated in scripture and sacred texts. Which, according to Protestant habits, are primarily “read quietly in private space” (Beck, 2006: 7)” (Laack, 2015: 221).

2. The common contemporary view of religion and culture (including music) is that they are separated.

This, of course, has not been the case historically. The separation of these two concepts is a fairly new idea. This gives me all the more reason to pursue this task, as it will shed a (albeit small) light on a very significant and important aspect of religious traditions. It is a relevant discussion and one that could give us greater insight into both religion and music.

**Research Questions**

The goal of this thesis is to analyze a particular Mourid group in Stockholm and their relationship with music in order to be able to say something about their congregation and music in West African religious tradition.

Four research questions have been chosen to help accomplish this:

- **How do the Mourids use music as a way to “make Muslim space”, creating an atmosphere where they can more easily connect with their native traditions?**

- **What are the attitudes toward more “popular” forms of music and its connection to the religious traditions of the group?**

- **In what way does the division of gender affect the music/singing-traditions?**

- **In what way was is music or ritualistic singing used as a religious expression for Mouridism in MSMITS?**

These are broad questions and one could argue that each one deserves a study of its own, but hopefully by answering all of them we will get a good overview of the group in a general sense.
1.3. Author’s notes

It is important to point out a few things when doing a study that in any way involves a group of people. As mentioned earlier, the Islamic faith is incredibly diverse. To say something general about such a large group is next to impossible. There are an endless number of branches within the Muslim tradition, often with very different views and perspectives. Furthermore, all these smaller groups are made up of individuals, who themselves may have very different beliefs and interpretations.

While the Mouridiyya may be a relatively small group within Sufism and Islam, it consists of many individual men and women who come from different backgrounds and believe different things. It is always important to remember this.

For the sake of this study, some generalizations will be made about the group, but neither I nor the reader of this study must ever forget that what is being said does not in any way represent the beliefs of every single individual within it.
2. Theoretical perspective

In this chapter I will present the theoretical perspective that will be used in the analysis. When dealing with a subject that is not that well studied, it becomes hard to find an already existing theory to stand on. I have attempted to find earlier works that deal with similar subjects and that are relevant to this analysis.

2.1. “Making Muslim Space”

In the articles that make up “Making Muslim space in North America and Europe”, Barbara Daly Metcalf talks about how Muslims in Europe and North America take certain steps to make their environment “feel like Islam” through things like decorations, food and music. Much like a Swedish person living in Africa may perhaps hang a picture of Stockholm on the wall, have meatballs for dinner and listen to the kind of music they would have been listening to in Sweden, the same should (and according to Metcalf and the authors of the volume does) apply to people of other cultures and traditions.

She explains that:

“Simplest to identify are visual clues to the presence of Muslims: people distinguished by beards or head coverings, for example, and the ever-increasing array of objects distributed by Islamic shops and catalogues: posters, hangings, mugs, bumper stickers, key chains, jewelry, and so forth—a modest “commoditization” of Islam. Similarly, the outsider may look for built or altered environments—homes, mosques, shops, neighborhoods—that seem “Muslim.”” (Metcalf, 1996: 1)

Furthermore, she talks about how many Muslims who move to a different part of the world often feel alienated and a “vivid sense of displacement”, something that is often comforted by creating a physical space that feels more “Muslim” to gain a greater sense of belonging.

In one of the articles, Regula Burckhardt Qureshi talks about different ritual practices by Muslims in Canada, among them the dhikr, a common ritual within Sufism and, as we shall see in the interviews, strongly linked to the Mouridiyya. It is explained that:

"Its primary action (the rituals) has been to focus self-expression inward in order to articulate community identity to its own members, largely disregarding the presence of a larger society of outsiders. But as their sense of community has strengthened, the focus of self-expression is expanding toward self-representation vis-à-vis the larger society” (Qureshi, 1996)

In other words, rituals like the dhikr is used in order to strengthen the community identity of the
group in question. It makes a Muslim feel more like a Muslim even if he is living in a country (Canada) where his/her religion and the culture of their ancestral home seems very distant.

While this volume talks generally about the things that characterize Islam and how it is used, my study will focus on the use of song and music specifically, but the principle remains the same. I will analyze how these things are used to legitimize Mouridism in Stockholm.

**2.2. “American Dervish”**

Simon Sorgenfrei deals with similar topics in his dissertation “American Dervish: Making Mevlevism in the United States of America”. In the abstract he explains that the thesis...

“…focuses on the use of narratives, documents, garments and rituals in informant’s Mevlevi-making” (Sorgenfrei, 2013)

Much like the previous example, he focuses on authorization and the legitimizing of traditions that are seen as Mevlevi.

Moreover, when talking about the relationship between *tradition* and *innovation*, he has developed two terms and theoretical concepts to analyze it. It is explained as *deferential approach* and *inferential approach*. This relates to the use and legitimizing of rituals and theorizes that it falls into one of these two categories.

*The deferential approach* is explained as the type of legitimizing that “focuses on the expressed beliefs and practices of founding fathers in a normative past” (Sorgenfrei, 2013: 82). In the case of Mevlevism that could be Jalal al din Rumi while in Mouridism it might be Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Of course these are just two examples and the “founding fathers” may be represented by a large number of historical figures. The deferential approach, in other words, talk about how rituals are legitimized in a traditional sense – the founding fathers did this and it has been handed down through generations so we should do it as well – without any other clear justification.

*The inferential approach*, on the other hand, refers to the kind of legitimizing where the individual practitioner instead tries to find the essential point or “underlying intention behind a certain tradition” (Sorgenfrei, 2013: 82). This leaves more room for innovation in the rituals as long as the *essence* of it remains.

These two analytical perspectives will be considered and used in my analysis. When I talk about Khassaida or other Mourid rituals and how the members of the *dahira* legitimize them as Mouridism, their statements will be analyzed partly using this concept.
2.3. **Music and transcendence**

Another focus of my study is how music or song (Khassaida) is used on an individual level as a religious practice and what the aims and goals of its use are. There are many books and articles that deal with Sufi rituals and their use as spiritual expression. One of these is the book “Sufi ritual: the parallel universe” by Ian Richard Netton. In it he talks about different Sufi orders and their music rituals like the Qawwali of the Chishtiyya or the Whirling Dervishes of the Mevlevi. When talking about the later he states that:

"The Mawlawis (Mevlevi) use poetry, music and dancing to come closer to God and to bring about the trance...” (Netton, 2000: 83)

He argues in the book that the aim of performing music and listening to music (sama), much like Dhikr, is to reach a state of ecstasy or trance where the individual comes closer to God. He talks about the idea of Wajd:

"The lure of music was extremely powerful, no doubt as a potent aid to the attainment of wajd”

(Netton, 2000: 82-83)

The term is explained as a "state of ecstasy", and throughout seems to be a main component when talking about sama or dhikr and their use in Sufism.

"...sama puts man in touch with the angelic or suprasensible world” (Netton, 2000: 38)

This idea about the goals of Sama and Dhikr is something I will apply to my analysis. I will explore whether or not these ideas apply to the rituals of the Mouridiyya, like the Khassaida, and how the members feel about it on an individual level. I will compare the statements made by the individuals I interview and my observations to see if the idea of wajd being the main goal of these rites is present in the group.
3. Method

Considering the subject that I have chosen to analyze in this article, and the fact that I want to study a particular group and their beliefs and practices, the decision was made to do so using interviews and observation as my method.

3.1. Interviews and observation

Both of these methods are some of the most common in anthropological studies. Since they require a very direct and close contact with the subject(s), it is a very useful way of gaining a deeper, qualitative understanding of them.

Martyn Denscombe writes about the use of these two methods in his book “Forskningshandboken” and states that:

“…Observational methods… looks at what people do, while interviews focus on what people say they do, believe and what opinions they have” [My translation] (Denscombe, 2016: 263)

For this particular study I have chosen to combine both interviews and observation, also a fairly common practice. The reason for this is that while one of them might give us a good overview of the group, using two could only improve the results and perhaps give us a deeper and more complex understanding. If we first look at what the subjects say they do, and follow that up with observing what they actually do, we can analyze how the two interplay. The observation in this case can only strengthen the information already gathered in the interviews, and perhaps even expand it. In a situation where someone says something and does something that appears to contradict it, one can take that into consideration and analyze it as well.

I interviewed a few individuals from the Morid group in Stockholm and asked them similar questions. I chose two individuals based on their role as leader-figures in the group, as I hoped they could give a general view of how they functioned and what they, as leaders, think of the subjects I bring up. Furthermore, I also interviewed two more “random” members from the dahira (another word for congregation) to see if their answer differed, or how they, as non-leaders, experienced some of the things in their tradition. The answers will then be compared in order to come to a conclusion about their general beliefs.

Denscombe talks about how it is important for the interviewer to remain as neutral as possible. As an outsider, I have no personal connection to the group or their practices. Regardless of any previously held conception I may or may not have had about the Mouridiyya, I have remained passive and will try to present the information as objectively as possible. As Denscombe points out:
“People answer differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions” (My translation) (Denscombe, 2016: 270)

This is something that ultimately can never be fully avoided, but has nevertheless been considered while in the field and will partly be compensated by the use of observation.

Denscombe also writes about the Observational method and states that there are two kinds: *Systematic observation* – Dealing mostly with quantitative and statistical data. *Participant observation* – Often used to study particular cultures or social groups, uses more Qualitative data. (Denscombe, 2016: 293)

The latter of these two is what will be used in this analysis. I have visited the Mourids on multiple occasions and have participated in some activities while there.

### 3.2. Application/Structure

The analysis will be divided into three separate parts. First I will present my observations and how they relate to the theory, this will include in-depth descriptions of what I saw and experienced while I visited the group.

Secondly, I will present the interviews in a thematic format. They will be structured according to the theme we are talking about, as opposed to one person at a time. This way it will be easier to make connections and see the differences/similarities in what the individuals are saying.

Finally, there will be a chapter for the analysis itself. Here both the interviews and observations will be combined and discussed using the theoretical perspective I have chosen. Certain things will be repeated here but put in a greater context and analyzed together.

Having a very clear structure such as this helps both the author and the reader understand the material and how it relates to the research questions and theory much better.

### 3.3. Criticism

Both of these methods has of course been criticized, and both have their pros and cons. When it comes to interviews, a very common problem is (as already mentioned) that the information is only based on what the subject says he does. This will be avoided partly by applying the observational method as compensation, as well as the fact that multiple individuals will be interviewed. This will allow us to find things that they all have in common, and potential things that they disagree on.

Furthermore, the effect of the interviewer and his/her interpretations or previously held beliefs is also a potential problem as mentioned by Denscombe (Denscombe, 2016: 289). I have tried to avoid this problem as much as possible by attempting to be neutral during the interviews. When the person being interviewed says something I try not to show in any way how I feel about their
statement, so that they don’t intentionally say things I might want to hear. It is true that I may have had certain expectations about what it was going to be like before I actually visited the group. Having read about Mouridism in preparation there was a lot of things I felt I already knew. For academic reasons, I still asked questions to my informants even though I felt I knew what the answer was going to be. In many cases I was right, but there were instances where I was not.

When it comes to observation, Denscombe brings up problems of access, and personal risks for the observer (Denscombe, 2016: 315). None of this has been a problem for me, as I have had fairly easy access to the group and been welcomed with great kindness and understanding. I never felt during my visits that I was at risk or unwelcome in any way. Moreover, another problem with observations is the fact that the observer always interprets what he/she sees and hears according to his own background and perceptions. I have tried to avoid this by being as objective as I can, and also hope that the interviews will compensate for this problem. Sorgenfrei again talks about similar issues in his dissertation:

“...it is still important to find a balance between emphatic attitudes toward the subject of research and an analytical distance” (Sorgenfrei, 2013: 84)

3.4. Manhaju Sulouk Mouridoul Iahi Touba Sweden

The group or dahira that will be the focus of this analysis is”Manhaju Sulouk Mouridoul Iahi Touba Sweden” (MSMITS), sometimes called just “Dahira Touba Sweden”, a Mourid congregation centered in Stockholm. They meet every Saturday in Solna, which is where I have visited them, where they sing the Khassaida, pray together and read from the Qu’ran. According to Serigne Balla Lo, one of the leaders in the group, they have been around for about 25 years. It was started in the 1980’s by Malik Sosseh, who is no longer alive. When I knew I wanted to write about Mouridiyya in Stockholm, my supervisor Simon Sorgenfrei put me in contact with Mamadou Sene, who in turn invited me to come visit them during one of their services. As my gatekeeper, he introduced me to the group and Serigne Balla Lo, who also became an important person in helping me get the material I needed. They assured me that I could visit any time I wanted and gave me the opportunity to interview other members of the group. According to Balla, MSMITS, and indeed all of Mouridiyya, subscribe to the Maliki Madhhab, one of the major schools of thought within Sunni Islam.
I visited the group three times. Once in Häggvik, near Sollentuna, for a special ceremony and twice in their regular meeting place in Solna. They were always aware of my presence and my role as an observer. I interviewed four people in total for this study - two main informants, as mentioned above, and two other individuals whom I spoke to as well. There were many causal conversations I had with members of the dahira but they were not in a controlled environment and will only be mentioned briefly if they are relevant to the discussion. Mamadou and I had many long discussions about music, as we are both musicians and have friends in common. Since the main topic of this study is music and sound, some of these conversations may be hinted at and referred to.

Most of the observations were made during my first visit in Häggvik, as I was often busy asking questions and speaking to people during the other two visits. However, I tried to observe as much as I could even then.

Moreover, when the dahira is mentioned in the analysis it will be under the abbreviation “MSMITS”, having the full length of the original name would take up unnecessary space and may be confusing to the reader.

I should also note that I have given all my informants the opportunity to be referred to under a different name and remain anonymous. Out of the four individuals I interviewed, only one of them expressed a wish for me to do so and will therefore be referred to only as “John” for the remainder of the analysis.
4. Examination

The following chapter will present the information I have gathered through interviews and observations. Each method will be given its own chapter and I will end with an “Analysis” chapter where all the information is discussed and processed.

4.1. Observation

**Day 1**

I met Mamadou Sene on the first Saturday at the central station in Stockholm. He was wearing what appeared to me like traditional West African or Mourid clothing. Only wearing Jeans and a nice shirt myself, I asked if I perhaps should have dressed more formally for the visit. He said no and assured me that most people arrive in sneakers and t-shirts, and that this is just what he wears on a regular day.

Our first destination was an apartment that belonged to one of Mamadou’s friends. The ceremony this day would not take place in Solna, as it usually does, but in Häggvik. It was a special occasion of some sort.

Once at the apartment I immediately noticed signs that pointed to the tradition they belonged to. In the hallway there was a large framed picture of Amadou Bamba (the only picture that exists, and a very famous one).


There were photos from Mecca and the Kaba, Arabic texts (Qu’ran or Khassaida) and old images of what I guessed were relatives.

I greeted a man sitting on a couch in the living room. He appeared to be the husband in the household. Mamadou pointed to a photo on the wall.

“See that man in the photograph?” he asked.
“That’s one of Amadou Bamba’s sons.”
He then pointed to the man on the couch.
“It’s his father.”
It dawned on me that the man I just greeted was the grandson of Amadou Bamba and a Marabout. This explained all the photographs. Not only were they relatives, but Marabouts and important figures within Mouridism. I would have loved to interview him, but we were in a hurry to our next destination and he was not coming along.

Before we left, one of the men gave us some sort of scented cream. Each of us held out our hands and he smeared some of it on our palms. I watched as the others then apply it to their necks and face, and did the same. It had a very distinctive and strong scent, one that I somehow recognized but couldn't put my finger on where from.

The whole company of about six people, including myself, then squeezed inside a car and we took off toward Häggvik and the place where the ceremony was being held. I immediately noticed that the car radio was on, but it wasn't playing music. Instead, throughout the twenty-or so-minute ride, we listened to recitations of the Qu'ran. I wondered if this was usually the case or if this was a particularly devout individual. It seemed already like the group had a very interesting relationship with music. In the car there was a driver who only listened to Qu'ran verses on the stereo, and next to him sits a man who works professionally as a musician.

We arrived at our destination and approached the building, it was a small place in connection with an apartment complex, the kind of place you might have had your birthday parties as a child in. Perhaps not the kind of place you would associate with West Africa or religious ceremonies. Once outside, however, I started hearing the distinct sound of singing. Having watched videos on the internet, I immediately recognized it as Khassaida.

Inside the room itself I noticed it was decorated with rugs, both on the floor and smaller ones hanging on the walls. In the center of the room were the singers, sitting in a circle, rocking slightly back and forth as they read the poetry of Amadou Bamba through the characteristic melodies of the Khassaida. Because of the singing, the decorations and the smells, the room had a completely different feel than what one expected when on the outside. It did not feel like one of my old birthday parties at all, but something I would associate more with West Africa and Mouridism.

I was offered “Senegalese coffee” and we ate a smaller meal consisting of oat meal and yogurt. “The coffee is strong” they told me. It wasn't a lie. The coffee had a very strong and unique taste. We observed the Khassaida as we ate and drank. The circle of individuals singing seemed very focused, many of them having their eyes closed throughout. They were all dressed in traditional clothing which added to the authenticity and atmosphere in the room.

There seemed to be a pattern to the singing. A melody would often be repeated over and over again
for minutes at a time before switching to a new one that in turn was repeated for a while. The intensity of the singing also varied, sometimes being an almost mumbling sound and at other times very loud and powerful. I thought I could make out some correlation between the phrases being sung and the level of intensity.

Next to the main circle of singers there were a group of men, sitting and seemingly just listening to the Khassaida without actually singing themselves. Despite this fact, they still appeared to be almost like in a state of trance, rocking back and forth with closed eyes.

Another detail I noticed was the fact that no women were part of the Khassaida or the group sitting next to them. In fact, there were only a handful of women in the room at all and they all sat together at a table in the back of the room. The men were clearly in majority, at its height the room contained up to 30 individuals, while the group of women never grew larger than 6 or 7. They mostly kept to themselves.

Shortly after 7pm or so (19:00) the Khassaida stopped, the singers closed their books and stood up to stretch their legs. I had arrived around 5 so they had been singing for at least three hours. As one of them greeted me I asked how long they had been singing for. He explained that they started at 1pm, which meant six hours of continuously singing.

“Do you get tired?” I asked.

“Our legs hurt, but other than that it’s a nice feeling. You feel much better afterwards, your whole body does”.

“It’s almost like meditation”, he continued.

At this point everyone started sitting down at the many round tables that were placed in the room. We were given a spoon each and they brought out an enormous plate of food to each table. This was classic Senegalese food, they assured me. Rice and fish with various vegetables and sauces.

“This one is very spicy” one of the men said as he pointed to the plate. I started thinking if there is some common conception that Swedish people can’t handle spicy food? Maybe it’s true. In any case, I politely thanked him for warning me and we ate.

After the food was gone and the plates taken away, the core group of men gathered once again on the rugs in the center of the room. Serigne Balla Lo, who is the Qu’ran expert and “preacher” of the group, sat down with them. Mamadou started speaking and introduced me to the whole group. He spoke Wolof, so I didn’t understand the words but he summarized for me how he told everyone who I was and why I was there. After Balla Lo had welcomed me, he started talking for maybe 15 minutes or so. On my second visit I had the speech translated and understood that it is a form of preaching, he is talking about how they should live as Mourids and what is important in life.
After he finished talking the group started praying together.
“Let’s recite the al-Fatiha” Balla said and they all held out their hands with the palms facing upward, closing their eyes and whispering the words of the first Sura. This was the end of the day’s ceremony, as they all started changing into their every-day clothes and leaving after finishing the prayer.
I thanked Balla for the hospitality he had shown. Mamadou showed me outside and to the bus stop. We parted ways here and I went home with a lot of impressions to process.

Khassaida-performance in Häggvik, Stockholm.

Day 2

The second time I visited the group was in their regular meeting place in Solna. Once again Mamadou showed me the way and I took the chance to interview him.
Once there most things were familiar – the rugs on the floor, the traditional clothing, some of the smells and, of course, the Senegalese coffee. Still very strong.
Again there were mostly men there, only two or three women and a couple of children.

The ceremony began with the men performing the traditional Muslim prayer – kneeling and pressing forehead against the ground while facing Mecca.
After this the group again gathered in a circle on the floor and started singing. I recognized the melodies from my last visit, they appeared to be the same. Once again I noticed the structure of the melodies and the repetition. I asked about this in my interviews which will be presented below.
The singing went on for a while, an hour or two, not nearly as long as on the previous occasion. As they were singing, the children were running around playing, sometimes even sitting down with the
group and attempting to sing along. It was a fairly relaxed atmosphere all together, the singers did not seem to mind or be disturbed by this. They were again in complete focus on the words and the singing, seemingly in a different place than the rest of the room.

As I was talking to Balla during the Khassaida, he pointed to a man observing the ritual, I didn’t recognize him.

“He is the great grandson of Amadou Bamba. He’s visiting us today from Senegal”

The man sat by himself on a chair with prayer beads, listening to the singing. I later had the opportunity to ask him a few questions.

When the singing finished, they all greeted the Marabout and he started preaching. Some wanted to take pictures with him, and it seemed they were generally exited to have him there. As he finished speaking he gave the word to Balla Lo and suddenly left. I couldn’t help but wish he had stayed a little longer so I could do a proper interview. Nonetheless, Balla started preaching as he did in Häggvik and this time Mamadou took the time to translate it for me. He spoke of how we should treat animals and the environment, how one shouldn’t do operations to change your appearance but be happy with what God has given you, and that you should not eat with your left hand, among other things.

I had been in a Baptist church not long before this and was amused by the difference in approach to the preaching. The pastor in the church would speak loudly, almost yelling at times, while he walked around the room. Balla, on the other hand, sat in a chair and spoke with a very calm, conversational voice. It might not say anything about the differences in these two traditions (since the large diversity in them both) but it was an interesting comparison to make at the time.

Again they recited al-Fatiha after the preaching which concluded the ceremony. I observed many similarities between this day and my first visit, but there were also some smaller differences. The length of the Khassaida was much shorter this time, and there were no large plates of food for us to eat, but instead dates and sandwiches. The fact remained, however, that many things were done by the group, consciously or unconsciously, to make the room feel less like Stockholm and more like Touba or Dakar. The singing, the clothing, decorations, smells and coffee all added to this fact.

**Day 3**

My third and last visit was also in Solna. I realized as I was on my way there (alone this time) that I hadn’t announced my plan to visit. Quickly I sent a text message to Balla asking if it was alright if I stopped by. He didn’t answer, so I waited outside the building for confirmation. Part of me thought that “maybe it’s a good thing I show up unannounced and see if there is any difference in behavior” but my politeness stopped me from just waltzing in. Furthermore, the door was locked so I couldn’t even If I wanted to.
Eventually, another man whom I recognized came outside, he was getting something from his car. He saw me.

“Hey, do you want to come inside?”

“Yes, if it’s okay?” I replied.

He waved for me to follow him and guided me to the room where the group gathers. As soon as I entered I noticed something was different. The otherwise open space was filled with rows of tables and there were no rugs or decorations of any sort. I saw Abdoul Aziz, one of the men I interviewed previously, and he greeted me in the Mourid way – first a normal handshake, followed by both individuals putting the other person’s hand on their forehead. He had explained to me that this was a way of showing respect, that “If you ask me to do something for you I will”. I had noted the previous visit that when people were greeting the Marabout, he did not return the gesture. Symbolically this meant that since he is a leader in the Mourid faith he has a higher stance.

Abdoul Aziz and a friend of his were listening to Khassaida-recordings on a smartphone. They discussed the different melodies and phrasings, and tried to imitate it. It was like they were rehearsing and discussing how they can improve their own Khassaida-performances. Aziz confirmed my suspicion.

“We rehearse the khassaida twice every week, once on Sunday and once on Saturday”

I was still confused about how the room looked different and the fact that there weren’t a lot of people there at all. I asked Aziz and he explained that today was not a regular ceremony but a management meeting.

“So there is no singing today?”

“No, not today”

It was interesting to see how different the room felt without the music, clothing and rugs. The Senegalese coffee was still there, but that was the only similarity aside from the people. As the meeting started I got to sit at the table and listen. It was in wolof but John, who sat next to me, translated some of it.

They discussed everything from issues of health and immigration to financial aspects and a campaign to translate Khassaida into different languages to reach more people with their faith. The meeting lasted for two hours and after we finished I stayed with John and conducted my interview with him.
4.2. Interviews

I was given access to a few individuals that I could interview. (I should note that all the interviews were conducted in Swedish and I have translated them to the best of my abilities for this analysis). The interviews will here be presented according to theme and subject of discussion, rather than transcripts.

Sufism

An interesting subject that unexpectedly came up during the interviews is the connection between Mouridism and Sufism. Before our discussions I had always assumed that the Mouridiyya was a Sufi tariqa (order) and that they clearly followed the Sufi tradition. But when I spoke to Mamadou he mentioned the Baye Fall movement and how “they are more similar to Sufism”. I asked him further about it and whether or not the Mouridiyya see themselves as Sufi’s or separated from it:

Mamadou: Sufism is usually a bit more tolerant than us. As I said, one of Amadou Bambas disciples started his own group who are a little more similar to Sufism.

F: So you don’t really view yourselves as Sufis?

Mamadou: No, they are more tolerant, but Amadou Bamba read about Sufism as well so there are some influences there.

During my interview with Serigne Balla Lo, I asked him the same question since I had been so surprised by Mamadou’s statement. He had a very different answer:

Balla: No, we are Sufi. Mouridiyya is part of Sufism. Many of our traditions come from there.

It was certainly interesting that they both had such different views on this subject. Mamadou referred me to Balla if I had questions because he “knows more about Mouridism and the Qu’ran”, but it seems like there is some difference in how they view Sufism and how their group is connected to it.

Khassaida

The Khassaida is one of the main rituals of Mouridism and a main aspect of this study. I asked all my informants similar questions about the practice, its goals and how they personally felt about performing or listening to it. The all confirmed that the texts are all in Arabic and written by the
founder of Mouridism, Cheikh Amadou Bamba. The melodies have also been handed down through generations and have remained mostly the same since the time of his life.

**Mamadou**

I asked Mamadou about the contents of the ritual and he explained:

*Mamadou*: *It is poems that Sheikh Amadou Bamba wrote. But he wrote a lot about the Qu’ran too, so some of it is about Muhammad and such things.*

He went on to explain that Khassaida is like a prayer and that those who read and listen to it will get a high reward eventually.

*Mamadou*: *It feels very good. It's almost like meditation.*

**Serigne Balla Lo**

When I spoke to Balla on my first visit in Häggvik, the singers had just finished their performance after six hours and I asked if it wasn’t exhausting to be singing for such a long time. He explained that while your legs hurt a lot after a while, it is mostly a very positive feeling. He echoed what Mamadou had said earlier:

*Balla*: *...it is like meditation...you feel good and relaxed afterwards.*

He also talked about how those listening to the singing are supposed to experience the same feelings.

*Balla*: *Some start jumping around and really get affected by it, but it is often hard to get people to relax like that. It doesn’t happen too often.*

What Balla most likely is talking about here is *sama*, the ritual of *listening* to the singing which can have similar effects to those experienced by the performers.

He also compared khassaida with dhikr, stating that “*khassida is a form of dhikr. It is like a prayer where you are looking for a connection with God. You focus on the text and try to reach a state of trance by thinking about life and the world*”

**Abdoul Aziz**

Interestingly, when I spoke to Abdoul Aziz he seemed to have a different perspective on the ritual. Instead of talking about the effects of the singing or how it feels, he explained simply that Amadou Bamba had said that the Mourids should sing the Khassaida and that is why they do it.
Abdoul Aziz: Everyone who is Mourid have to read Khassaid a little bit every day.

These answers reminds me of the deferential approach from Sorgenfrei’s dissertation. The way he simply talks about how the founding father of their tariqa said something and how that is justification enough fits perfectly into this concept.

I wanted him to answer on a more personal level so I asked him how he feels when he is singing. “It is the greatest feeling for me” he explained. After a long week at work the Khassaida is like a way to relax and refresh your mind. It is a moment where you concentrate and think about Muhammad and Amadou Bamba’s love for him.

“Khassaida is like prayer” he adds.

He and the rest of the group meet and rehearse twice every week so that the singing will sound as good as possible. It’s almost like any other music group or band that regularly meet for rehearsals.

**John**

Like the other three, John explained that the texts of the khassaida talks about what the prophet Muhammad said and the Qu’ran. On the subject of the aims of the rituals he said that it gives the performer inner peace and makes him a better person.

“Sufism is a cure for violent forms of Islam”.

He told a story about a woman who had once visited the group. She was a documentarian who wanted to film their activities. When she was shooting as they sang she began to cry “like a baby”.

“She was so touched by the khassaida that she started to cry”. John expressed how the singing, both for performer and listener, has a profound effect on the soul.

**John: Dhikr is like meditation. They practice it every Saturday and Sunday.**

I felt it was interesting he used the word “dhikr” and asked him whether or not khassaida is a form of it.

**John: Yes, khassaida is a form of dhikr. It is the Mourid way of dhikr.**

All four of my informants stated very similar things about the nature of the ritual and how it affected both the listener and the performer. It isn’t until we started talking about other aspects that the answers started to vary.

**The use of instruments**

I wanted to know whether or not instruments were ever used in performances of the khassaida-ritual and if my informants had different opinions on the subject.
Mamadou

Even though Mamadou works as a professional musician, he had a very clear answer.

*Mamadou: No instruments, just singing and poems. Some people have used drums but we don’t.*

Serigne Balla Lo agreed with him. He told me that there are no instruments used.

“Some groups in Senegal do that but it is usually not appreciated”.

Abdoul Aziz said that instruments are never used in the *khassaida*, it has always been just the human voice.

“No one can sing khassaida with instruments. It is forbidden”.

John talked about the branch of Mouridism called “Baye Fall”, a group that was started by one of Amadou Bambas disciples. He said that people in Baye Fall use drums during their *khassaida*-performances, but other than that it is just singing.

**Popular music**

The subject where the answers varied the most was on the topic of non-religious music, their relationship with it and how they think Islam views music in general.

Mamadou

As mentioned previously, Mamadou works as a professional musician. He has played on everything from traditional West African music to rock, disco and pop. I was particularly interested in how he viewed the connection between Mouridism and these more “secular” forms of music.

He explained that in a religious context (meaning during Mourid ceremonies or gatherings) there is usually no music other than khassaida.

*Mamadou: I make a clear distinction between culture and religion. When I work as a musician, that’s one thing, and when it comes to religion it’s another. There are some people who like to mix the two but I personally choose to separate them.*

When I asked him about listening to, or performing music, outside of the religious context he talks about, he says that “Religion is private”. He holds the opinion that some people force others to do certain things, or act in certain ways. He feels that religion is about the development of the self and it is up to each and every one of us to choose how we act and think.

“If you point fingers at someone and tell them that they are bad, it is you who is really bad”.

He clarifies by saying that even if the Qu’ran does forbid certain kinds of music, it is really about how to get closer to God, and if you can do that and play music there is no problem.
Mamadou: As an artist, when I write songs, I think a lot about what I write. It is important to me that my songs mean something. I don’t just sing because I think it’s fun.

Serigne Balla Lo
Balla almost seemed a little confused and uncomfortable when I asked him questions on this subject. “Islam does say that it is forbidden” he says and continues to tell me that he has danced to music in his life and how that is not a big deal.

Balla: Even if I like something that Islam forbids, that doesn’t mean that I don’t believe in God.

I assured him that that was not my intention with the question. He explained again that even though he accepts the fact that Islam forbids music, he can still enjoy it. He echoes one of Mamadou’s statements:

Balla: You shouldn’t point fingers at other people, but think about yourself. Islam focuses on the individual. If everyone just tried to be good themselves then everyone would be good.

He seems to have a slightly different view on the subject than Mamadou. While he does believe that Islam forbids music, he has the same opinion when it comes to individuality and the importance of thinking about your own spiritual development as opposed to telling other people how to be Muslim.

When I mention Youssou N’Dour and the fact that his lyrics often deal with religious themes related to the Mouridiyya, he laughs.

Balla: It is always like that! All artists in Senegal have songs where they sing about things like that.

When I then ask whether or not that kind of music is separated from the religion itself despite its lyrical contents, he confirms that “Yes, there is a difference”.

Abdoul Aziz
Abdoul Aziz had a more restrictive approach to music (aside from khattaïa). He does not listen to music at all. Not on his phone, not at home.

Abdoul Aziz: If I am at a friend’s house and and they are listening to music, I will listen. That is not a problem. But I chose to not listen to music myself.

Even though he has this restricted view it seems, based on this quote, that he also puts focus on the individual. It is fine if his friends listen but he does not want to personally.

Abdoul Aziz: I cannot be a serious Muslim and at the same time listen to music.
I ask him further about Mourid artists like Youssou N’dour and his lyrics. He states that there are many artists in Senegal who are Mourids but they are “not really believers”. According to him, a serious Mourid or Muslim cannot be a musician, and he holds a very firm belief that music is forbidden in Islam.

**John**

Similar to Mamadou, John explained that the point of Mouridism and Islam is for the individual to get closer to God.

*John: Those who have come closer to God can see God in everything.*

He says that if you are close to God and a good person you can listen to music like Youssou N’dour or other kinds of music without problems. Furthermore, even in these cases you can have almost religious experiences.

*John: Even if you listen to Youssou N’dour you can get a feeling of God, you can almost enter a state of ecstasy.*

There is a very clear difference between Abdoul Aziz’s statements and those made by John. In the former music is not allowed if you are a Muslim, but John says that if the person listening is “good” or “spiritually developed” even non-religious music can help you connect with God. According to John, if Islam forbids music it is so that people will not end up on the wrong path in life. But, as the other three informants also stated, it is up to the individual to make sure he/she is a good person, and that is the essence of their religion.

**Gender roles in Mouridism**

I was unsure whether or not I should have a part about gender roles in the group unless I actually interviewed women. I did, however, ask two of my informants about this subject and they did provide me with some interesting answers.

**Serigne Balla Lo**

When I asked Balla the question whether or not women ever perform in the *khassaida*, he explained that since Mouridism follows Islam they do not mix the genders.

*Balla: We usually don’t mix, both have their own places.*

He mentioned something about women having their own meetings or ceremonies, but when I asked
him about again later, he retracted the statement.  
“They don’t sing, they have other things to do”

**Abdoul Aziz**

Abdoul Aziz had similar things to say about the role of women in the group. He agreed that they never sing khassaida - that is a ritual that only men perform. He also brought up the fact that Mouridism is a Muslim tradition and that Islam separates the two genders.

*Abdoul Aziz: Since we are Muslim, and it says in the Qu’ran that women should not speak loudly, for example, we don’t mix the two.*

He went on to clarify that this doesn’t mean women are treated poorly in Mouridism, but that they have different roles to play.

*Abdoul Aziz: Women play a big role in our religion, but in different ways than men.*

This is a classic argument that can be heard throughout different cultures and traditions. Women are not considered less valuable than men but that the two genders have different roles to play in society.
4.3. Analysis

In this part I will analyze both the interviews and the observation, compare them and see what the similarities and/or differences are.

Bellow follows a graph that tries to summarize the views expressed by my informants in the interviews above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Khassaida</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Popular music</th>
<th>Gender roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mamadou</td>
<td>It’s prayer, meditation</td>
<td>Just song and poems.</td>
<td>“Religion is private”. Everyone</td>
<td>No comment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high reward for performer and listener.</td>
<td>Some use percussion but not us.</td>
<td>chooses for himself, don’t point fingers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balla Lo</td>
<td>A form of dhikr. Like a prayer.</td>
<td>Some groups use instruments</td>
<td>“Islam does forbid music but I can enjoy it anyway”</td>
<td>Islam does not mix the genders. Both have their places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to reach a connection with God and state of trance.</td>
<td>in Senegal but it is not appreciated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdoul Aziz</td>
<td>Amadou Bamba told us to sing</td>
<td>Never any instruments.</td>
<td>Does not listen to music.</td>
<td>Women play a big role but in different ways than men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The greatest feeling for me”.</td>
<td>Just singing.</td>
<td>“I can’t be a serious Muslim and listen to music.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like prayer.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Inner peace, one becomes better</td>
<td>“Baye fall” uses percussion but</td>
<td>If you are close to God it doesn’t matter if you listen to more secular music.</td>
<td>No comment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>person. Khassaida is dhikr, dhikr is like meditation.</td>
<td>otherwise it is just singing.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Khassaida**

Based on the interviews, all informants seem to have generally the same opinion about the goal and aim of khassaida. When Netton talks in his book bout “wajd” and that the primary goal of Sufi rituals and dhikr is to reach this state.

According to two of my informants, khassaida is a kind of dhikr and all of them talked about how the reason they are performing it personally is to reach trance, ecstasy or a connection with God.

Since Netton’s book defines wajd as a state of ecstasy, it fits with these statements almost perfectly. The deferential approach of Sorgenfrei’s dissertation comes to mind in the case of Abdoul Aziz and the fact that he first answered that “we are doing it because Amadou Bamba told us to”. He didn’t
provide any other clear justification, with the exception of comparing it to prayer and that it is a
great feeling for him personally to perform and listen.

When I visited the group and saw the khassaida twice, I observed how the performers would often
close their eyes and rock their bodies back and forth as they were singing. It did seem like the
performers where in a completely different place. Furthermore, the people sitting on the floor next
to them acted very similarly, even though they were only listening (sama). Balla had told me about
sama briefly:

Balla: Some start jumping around and really get affected by it, but it is often hard to get people to
relax like that. It doesn’t happen too often.

While none of this actually happened while I was there, I did notice how affected by the singing
people were, sitting for hours with closed eyes.

Both my interviews and observations seem to confirm Netton’s theory about wajd and that
khassaida, like similar Sufi rituals, have the attainment of said state as their main goal. Some
informants stated with the exact words used by Netton.

Balla: It is like a prayer where you are looking for a connection with God. You focus on the text and
try to reach a state of trance by thinking about life and the world.

While the term wajd itself was never used by any of the informants, or ever mentioned while I
visited them, the definition of the concept according to Netton’s book fits the answers and the
observations.

Moreover, if considering the texts “Making Muslim space” and “American Dervish”, it becomes
harder to find concrete examples that deal especially with music. Whether or not khassaida is
considered music or not is up for debate, but for the sake of simplicity it will be considered a form
of music here.

There were many factors I noticed that fit the description of people using different measures to
make a space feel more “Muslim” or “Mourid”, but not much about music specifically. The rooms
where the ceremony was held was often decorated with rugs, the people singing had traditional
clothes on. They would serve Senegalese food and drink Senegalese coffee. All these things
contributed to the room feeling more like West Africa than a small locale in Stockholm. It seems to
fit Metcalf’s description. However, when it comes to music there wasn’t much to observe. There
were never any music, aside from khassaida, played during my visits. Even on the car ride there
they were listening to Qu’ran recitations rather than music. That it itself can be a way to connect
with your culture if you are a Muslim. There are few things more Muslim that the Qu’ran, and the
recitations did change the mood in the car to something I wasn’t very used to.

There seems to be a somewhat tense feeling toward music in the group. The only music that is ever
present during any Mourid ceremonies is Khassaida, and it is never performed with any musical instruments.

The ritual itself is the only form of music that can be studied here, as it is the only form of music that was ever present during any of my visits. Abdoul Aziz talked about how he loved to sing after a long week at work so that he could relax for a while and feel refreshed. The fact that they are wearing traditional clothes as they are singing speaks to the fact that this is some way of connecting to their native culture. The music and the clothing does affect a “space” drastically, and these two factors plays a big role in what this means to the members of the dahira to be Mourids.

When it comes to musical instruments, all informants seemed to agree that such things are never used in khassaida performances. Some of them told me that Baye Fall does use percussion sometimes, but never they themselves. This stands in great contrast with other tariqa like the Chishti-order and their Qawwali-music. Here, a multitude of instruments are used in the rituals, some of them relatively modern. MSMITS appears to have a more restrictive attitude towards instruments and music. When I did my observations I did not notice any instruments and the only time it was mentioned is when I asked about it or when Mamadou pointed to one of the men and informed me that he was a great percussionist.

**Popular music**

The subject of popular music/non-religious music/secular forms of music was perhaps the most diverse during my interviews. My informants had some very different things to say about the topic. Mamadou explained how it is up to everyone to choose whether or not to listen to music. “If other people tell you what to do they are wrong”. He does not believe that Islam forbids music, and if it does, it only regards a specific kind of music.

Balla, on the other hand, does hold the opinion that music is indeed haram, but in spite of this he explained that he can enjoy music. “I have danced to music on some occasions” he said. It seemed confusing to me and not entirely clear to him what his reasoning was. He told me that “Just because I do something that is forbidden, that doesn't mean I don't believe in God”. I think this is comparable somewhat to the things Mamadou (and later John) was saying, that it is up to the individual to chose how he lives his life.

Abdoul Aziz seems to have the most restrictive view on music out of the four people I interviewed. He considered it to be a sin and something he does not do. He never listens to music or plays any music, aside from khassaida.
Abdoul Aziz: "I cannot be a serious Muslim and at the same time listen to music"

On the other hand, he did talk about how it is fine to listen if he is visiting a friend. This may also be an example of the group focusing largely on the individual, and that he himself has chosen not to listen to any music but doesn’t mind when others do.

It was very interesting to see him on my third visit, listening to khassaida on his phone and rehearsing with one of his friends. Since he had stated that he has no music on his phone, this must either mean that he clearly does not view khassaida as music, or he was not telling me the truth. The whole situation did remind me of pop bands who rehearse the music they are about to play, which leads to further questions about the role (or lack thereof) of khassaida as music.

John also took quite a different stance compared to the others. He stated that if a person has a close connection with God, it doesn't matter what he listens to. Indeed, he even explained that people listening to popular music like Youssou N'dour can also reach a state of ecstasy or wajd as long as they are good people and close to the divine.

There seems to be a huge difference between what John says and what Abdoul Aziz says. One doesn't listen to music at all and views it as haram, while the other states that any music can help a person attain a higher sense of being.

During my visits to the group I noticed that there was never any music playing on any radio or being sung by anyone. If we try to apply Metcalf’s theory here we run into a few problems. Since there was no music present, it couldn't have been used to create “Muslim space”, unless we include khassaida in the equation. Other factors such as clothing or food is a much clearer example of “Making Muslim space” but the only music present was the singers.

This lack of music can be an answer in itself, however, since it says a thing or two about the group and hints at the fact that there may be a very complicated relationship between the religion and music.

What is a common thread throughout all this is their focus on the individual. Even though all informants gave me very different answers, this concept remains. You are not supposed to point fingers but focus on yourself. When I visited I was told that many of the people in the room were musicians of some sort. Aside from Mamadou there were a few percussionists. They never talked about it though, and certainly never played anything. It seems that music is a big part of many people's lives but when it comes to the Mouridiyya and their ceremonies it is put aside and ignored, both by the individual himself and by the other people in the dahira. The common idea of religion being “private” seems like a recurring theme here.
Gender roles in Mouridism

Gender and women's rights seems like a sensitive subject within the Mouridiyya. Having read ”Nyckeln till Paradiset: Senegalesiska kvinnors livsvägar” by Eva Evers Rosander, I went in with certain expectations on what I would see and hear. According to the book, a lot of women are marginalized, and it appears that Senegalese and Mourid culture is very male-dominated in general. I originally wanted access to a few women in the group I could interview but the opportunity never came about. Instead, I asked two of my male informants about this issue as well as observed the room when I visited.

Both Balla Lo and Abdoul Aziz used similar arguments when describing the role of women in their group. They both brought up the fact that they are Muslim, and both held the opinion that women and men are supposed to be separated (in many contexts) according to Islam. They never partake in any khassaida rituals and they do not pray together.

“Women play a big role in our religion, but in different ways than men” Abdoul Aziz explained, but never gave any clarification on what those “different ways” were. Based on what I say when I visited the group, the few women that were there (and they were always clearly in minority, only a handful at most) usually kept an eye on the children and prepared the food. Without generalizing too much, it appears that there is some separation in the group between men and women.

An interesting detail I noticed was some of the younger girls sometimes joining their fathers during the khassaida and sit with them in the circle. There was a relaxed atmosphere overall in the room and it didn’t feel like there was any specific tension between the sexes. During all my visits, the women kept to themselves in a corner of the room, except for my third visit when I didn’t see any women present at all. The things Abdoul Aziz and Balla Lo is saying about the segregation is strengthened by my observations.
5. Conclusions

The information I have gathered through my interviews as well as the observations I made during my visits has led me to a few conclusions. In this last chapter I will try to answer each of my original research questions in sequence and with the help of the findings I’ve made in my analysis.

1. How do the Mourids use music as a way to “make Muslim space”, creating an atmosphere where they can more easily connect with their native traditions?

It appears that music and the Mouridiyya have a troubled relationship. Popular or non-religious music is never used in a religious context (during ceremonies or religious gatherings). There is a fairly strong musical culture in Senegal and West Africa, however, and many of the members of MSMITS are musicians who perform professionally. There seems to be a separation between this kind of music and the religious traditions and contexts in which the individuals sometimes find themselves.

The only form of music used during ceremonies is the khassaida, based only on the human voice. Some does not consider this music but prayer (much like Qu’ran recitation is not considered singing by many). The Khassaida does, however, seem to be a major part of the traditions of the group. They practice twice every week and it is the center-point of the weekly ceremonies. During these performances the singers dress in traditional clothing and sing the same melodies and texts that their ancestors did, all the way back to Amadou Bamba himself. It seems that this ritual and all the aesthetics surrounding it is a clear way of “making Mourid space” to use Metcalf’s term, a way for the group to feel a stronger connection to their native culture and religious tradition, both on a social and on an individual level.

2. What are the attitudes toward more “popular” forms of music and its connection to the religious traditions of the group?

As mentioned above, there is a slightly troubled relationship between the group and popular music. It is never used in religious contexts but many of the individuals listen to it in their daily lives and some even have it as their profession. Opinions on Islam and its view on music differs from person to person. Some think that music is haram or forbidden, while others believe that it can be a way to reach a closer connection to God. What most seem to agree on, however, is the idea that Mouridism and Islam teaches that you should focus on your own spiritual development, that even if you think music is forbidden you should not tell others how to live their lives but make decisions for yourself only. The great diversity in these attitudes can perhaps be traced to this idea and that different individuals have chosen to interpret things in different ways.
3. **In what way does the division of gender affect the music/singing-traditions?**

It seems, based on my findings, that there is some segregation between the sexes within the group. Not many women were ever present and those that were kept to themselves and dealt with things like food and children. This separation also means that no women ever perform the *khassaida*. It does not appear that they have any other similar rituals either but, according to my informants, have other roles to play in the group.

There are of course female singers and artists from Senegal and in Mouridism, but in this specific group I did not see any traces of such a thing, especially not music in any religious context.

4. **In what way was is music or ritualistic singing used as a religious expression for Mouridism in MSMITS?**

All the material gathered points to the fact that khassaida, both through performance and *sama*, is a way of reaching a higher state of being. Some call it trance, others ecstasy. Netton uses the term *wajd* in his book and this concept seems to fit perfectly into the descriptions and observations. One informant even stated that other music, such as Youssou N’Dour, can also help an individual reach *wajd*, depending on how spiritually developed he/she is.

Just like other forms of *dhikr*, the performers and listeners try to reach a direct connection with God through *wajd*, and they describe it almost as meditation. According to my informants, you feel relaxed afterwards, and gain a feeling of inner peace.

This is similar to other forms of *sama* or music within Sufism, like the *Qawwali* or Whirling *Dervishes*, where the goal of attaining *wajd* is present as well.

In conclusion, there seem to be a few general things that are true throughout the group. There is a very interesting relationship with sound and music here, even if it differs dramatically from person to person. Khassaida seems to be the thing that binds it all together, it is the central aspect of their religious lives and could be considered a form of music. At the same time, their views on contemporary popular music varies from *haram* to potential religious experience.

It seems that, like with any religion or culture, it is hard to say something definite about the group or Mouridism since it is made up of individuals with different opinions and beliefs. Perhaps it is as Mamadou said:

“Religion is private”.
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