

# JIHAD FOR PEACE

EXPLORING Sheikh Ahmadou  
Bamba's PHILOSOPHY



By

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*" Beyond the value of Bamba's life and teachings for specific ethnic groups, he is a reminder of the adaptability and universality of the religion to different cultures and peoples through its inner tradition...*

*Further study into the contribution Bamba made in the cultural and spiritual revival of his people will demonstrate the significance his universal message and nonviolent struggle has for attaining peace in the world today."*

Michelle R. Kimball



Sheikh Muhammad Mourtada Mbacke,  
son of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, reading the Qur-ān

# Preface

I wish to dedicate this work to the late Sheikh Muhammad Mourtada Mbacke, who never spared any efforts and any pains to spread peacefully the true word of Islam throughout the world, in spite of his old age. This translation is the right outcome of his work. Thank you *Goor Yàlla*.

I wish also to acknowledge all who contribute in whatever form to the publication of this book. May they all be eternally rewarded thereof by the Almighty Lord.

This book was written in Arabic by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba during his thirties, before he became famous, owing to 33 years of tense relationship with the French colonial authorities. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is an African Muslim Sufi master, born in 1853 in Senegal (West Africa), during French colonization, just after the official abolition of slavery in the colonies. He was born into a renowned Muslim clerical family, the Mbacke, well-known for their deep-rooted attachment to learning and teaching religious knowledge. Islam had then nearly a thousand years of history in Senegal.

Showing precociously gifted inclination towards learning and imitating the noble devout Sufis he heard about, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba started, in his early youth, to write books devoted to the fundamentals of religious knowledge any believer is compelled to know—Islamic Law (*Fiqh*), Theology (*Tawhīd*), Spiritual education (*Tarbiyya*), Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) etc. His high concern to preserve and to spread in an easier form true knowledge and the valuable Islamic principles among his people led him to put in verses many of the reference prose books of that time he found too hard-learning for most of his contemporaries.

After his father's death, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba founded the first Muslim brotherhood ever been founded by a black man in all

Islamic history (the Muridiyya) and settled new forms of teaching he thought more suitable to his disciples and more likely to rekindle their human dignity depreciated by long years of political and intellectual domination. Many from all around the country, from all social classes, came to join the revival movement he initiated through teaching and worshipping God in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH) and with the rules of Sufism. Thanks to his charismatic virtues and to the spiritual lights his disciples were shining, his reputation soon expanded and crowds towards his *daaras* (schools) fast took larger proportions.

Such a trend aroused a libelous campaign against Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, from some native colonial representatives, and provoked strong mistrust to the French colonial power who suspected him of preparing his disciples to *Jihad* (holy war). This bias was all the most unfair if we consider the nonviolent philosophy of the Sheikh as well as his concept of *Khidma* (Rendering Service to the Prophet) which excluded any violence, even against the vilest creature. Indeed the kind of spiritual and intellectual *jihad* the Sheikh was carrying on was quite different from all what was known by western people about Muslim leaders' resistance. The Sheikh wrote on this purpose: **"I am waging my Jihad through Knowledge and Fearing the Lord"**. However, regardless of such kind of concern, the colonial authorities decided to arrest and deport him to Gabon (Central Africa), in September 1895. After eight years of a very trying exile, during which the Sheikh wrote, in loneliness, an impressive number of poems all dedicated to the Lord and His Messenger (PBH), the French decided to let him go back home, in November 1902. But, in fearing his growing charisma over the masses aroused by his success, they exiled him again to Mauritania, afterwards they maintained him in house arrest in Senegal until his death in 1927. However history proved later that colonial strategies of "containment" did not succeed in holding back Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's teachings and work from shaping deeply the thoughts and the culture of his nation and of millions of people all around the world.

Abdoul Aziz Mbacke  
*Touba, January 2009*

# Abbreviations used

d. = date of death.

h. = year of the Hijra (the beginning of Islamic Calendar); usual subsequent date put in brackets represents the corresponding year in Christian calendar.

p. = page.

Qur-ān xx. 25 = *Sūrah* 20, Verse 25 of the Holy Book.

*Cf.* = compare.

PBH = Peace and Blessings be upon Him (the Prophet).

lit. = literally.

“The Sheikh” and “the Servant of the Prophet” refer to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Transcription of Wolof and Arabic nouns follows sometimes the usual forms better known.

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## Disclaimer

When I started this text, it was just with the purpose to write a short introduction in the front of the English translation of the *Ways unto heaven* I had just finished. Some friends who read the manuscript, among who my publishers, suggested me to take advantage of this introduction to present some aspects of Bamba's teachings to English audience who are not familiar with Sufi philosophy, especially African Sufi masters. I started then to expose the nonviolent philosophy of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and its relevance in the world today. One thing leading to another, I unconsciously get immersed in an immense *Ocean* I hardly imagined the infinite and fertile depths before—Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thinking. Before I realized it, I had already written almost one hundred pages about highly amazing and unforeseen perspectives of Bamba's philosophy I had never suspected hitherto, and which would really puzzle many scholars of the Muridiyya who thought they have already got the bulk of its doctrine.

So, this study is just an accident and is not at all willful. I have simply let my boat be dragged along by the current of some ideas of mine and the groundswells of some scholarly material. During this strange trip, I had sometimes very unexpected encounters, I may assure you. Nevertheless, I am far from pretending to put a complete and academic book in your hands. Not yet, at least. And I neither intend, through this reflection, to lay a claim to a PhD. These are just the few corals I happened to found here and there in exploring the depths of an *Ocean*. Well, it's up to you to see if we can get some pearls out of them.

*Bamba di geej*

*Gu tàbbi geej*

*Fekk fa geej*

*Gu ne ko ngiij*

Bamba is an Ocean

Who melted into an Ocean

And found therein an Ocean

Who blended with Him

*In the poem Xarnubi*

*By Sheikh Moussa Ka, a Wolof poet.*

# Wave First

## A Message for Humankind

*Masālik-ul-Jinān* is a book about Sufism, written by the African Muslim master, **Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba**, who wrote it within 1883 and 1887 (1300-1304 h.), at the beginning of his thirties. This corresponds to the period following his father's death, when he started expressing openly his profound leaning towards the pattern of the Pious Ancients. "Ways unto heaven" is an exhaustive digest of the highly valuable teachings bequeathed by the old Sufi Masters, which are expounded and explained with a rare genius by the Sheikh in this book entirely versified in Arabic.

However, we have to bear in mind that a Sufi author surpasses an ordinary scholar that is displaying his theoretical knowledge about spiritual questions. Indeed, we may feel through the notable synthetic mind of his verses that the *Servant of the Prophet* was one who was putting into rigorous practice the principles that are in this book - which was amply demonstrated later by his very existence - and one who have got preciously a keen experience of Sufism (Cf. The Biography of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba - Tome IV, Appendix 1).

*Masālik* is mainly based on a previous prose work, written by Al-Yadāli<sup>1</sup>, a Mauritanian master, entitled "*Khātimatu-t-Tasawwuf* " (The Seal of Sufism), which content is supplemented here by a wide range of writings of other Sufi Masters, admirably summarized by the Sheikh. However, notwithstanding the high significance of reliable and accredited sources in Islamic theology - which commonly compels Muslim writers to fasten to the *taqlīd* (the opinions of the Ancients) – we must not infer therefrom slavish plagiarism or lazy eclecticism. Because such knowledge as *Tasawwuf* consists not in mere academic learning or formal quotations, but it has to be individually experienced and lived, so as to be fully understood. This explains most certainly why Sheikh Muhammad Bachir Mbacke (1895-1966), son and biographer of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, was keen to point out in the biography he devoted to his father <sup>2</sup>:

*“Our Sheikh – may God be Satisfied with him- has revived Sufism inasmuch as he revived Sufi practice and Suluk (commitment in the spiritual path). He composed [in this purpose] **Masālik-ul-Jinān** (Ways unto Heaven), which is a versification of Al-Yadāli’s Khātimatu-t-Tasawwuf, and he put in that book a great number of rules and recommendations - sometimes summarized, sometimes detailed - so as to let people know that it is a versification of Al-Yadāli’s book, in respect for its noble author. But there is no doubt that [Ways unto heaven] is far richer than Al-Yadali’s original text. Yet, his deference prevented the Sheikh from separating distinctly his personal thoughts from that text [in which case his book would no longer be called a versification of Al-Yadali’s book]...While putting a previous prose book in verse, [the Sheikh] never failed to insert into his writing what was springing out of his vast intelligence and out of his heart, that is; renouncing this vile world, loving God and preferring the Future Life.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Annex of the authors (Tome IV, at [www.majalis.org/masalik](http://www.majalis.org/masalik)). See also all references of our quotations at this same URL.

<sup>2</sup> Entitled *Minanu-l-Bāqi-l-Qadim* (The Favors of the ETERNAL GOD) in which are gathered highly valuable biographical accounts relating to his father’s life, some he personally witnessed.

Through *Masālik*, we are given a comprehensive idea of the moral and spiritual attitudes enabling man to get round material obstacles and countless worldly temptations which prevent him from getting nearer to the Lord. Thus, it constitutes “*a remedy for any such whose heart has been dulled by earthly lusts*” (verse 27) and a first-rate viaticum for all who aspire not to yield to the luring mermaids of modern life and to purify their hearts. This is part of the reasons why we felt the necessity to undertake the translation of its 1563 verses in English, so as to allow English-speaking people to get to know the priceless contribution of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba in Islam, in upholding and handing down to present and future generations the very "substance" of the Eternal Message. And books like *Masālik* provide us with the essential keys to enter the kingdom of this universal and timeless Message.

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<sup>3</sup> All the references of our quotations are available at this URL;  
[www.majalis.org/masalik](http://www.majalis.org/masalik).



# Wave Two

## Muslim Nonviolence

Indeed this universal message of peace and worship of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba to humankind is nowadays worthier than ever of careful thought. The world today is threatened by growing ruthless collision between Western conception of life and the Islamic approach of human freedom endorsed by a group of Muslims labeled as “extremists” or “terrorists”. Recently, such a worldwide coldblooded struggle reached horrendous heights with September 11 attacks, the thousands victims of Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and never-ending armed conflicts in the Middle-East and all around the world.

Beyond real geopolitical and strategic or even strictly “religious” motivations, we contend that the deepest driving forces of this conflict are to be sought as well in the differing perspectives of the two systems, schematically taken, about *human rights and duties*, their true meanings and their limits in the universe. Such a “cultural” discrepancy is exacerbated by blatant lack of balance and of appositeness shown on either side in opposing their variances in the field of political interests. Western fanatic materialism and excesses - which led man to lose track of his own meaning and reality in the universe - is facing fierce religious activism - which went also far astray beyond the limits imposed by minimum respect for human life. Every disproportionate stance of one side produces unbalanced

responses from the other side, thus providing higher levels of hatred and misunderstanding to the dreadful escalation—unfairness always calls for unfairness. So, what both sides need is more balance and more clear-sightedness. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s teachings and spiritual perspective of Islam offer this unhoped-for balanced model.

### **The Jihad of Knowledge and Worship**

*“And let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God.”*  
(Qur-ān v. 8)

In practicing such a Divine Order, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba made clear the true nature of his fight in a poem written in 1903, on the point of leaving for his second exile to Mauritania:

*“ [O ye my persecutors!] ye banned me on the pretence that I am waging a war (Jihad) against you. Indeed ye are right because I am really combating for the Countenance of the Lord. **But I am waging my Jihad through Knowledge (ulūm) and Fearing the Lord (taqwā),** as [an humble] subject of God and the servant of His Prophet; and the Lord who oversees everything may assuredly bear witness thereof... While others hold material weapons to be feared, my two weapons are [knowledge] and [worship]; and this is surely my way of fighting.”* (Cf. his poem “O ye People of the Trinity!”).

Indeed, it may be somewhat unexpected to many, in our context of tarnished perception of Islam, widely portrayed, through mass media, as intolerant and intrinsically violent, to hear a Muslim leader, who was yet victim of glaring injustice from unbelieving rulers during 33 years, defending nonviolence, forgiveness and love for humankind. The following verses, taken from some Bamba’s poems, may assuredly show how Islam, if really understood and lived, can be tolerant and how it integrates *organically* all the high morals which lead man to surpass himself:

*"I have forgiven all my enemies for the Countenance of the Lord who turned them away from me for ever, because I feel no resentment against them."*

*"O Supreme Master of the universe! O Thou that art beyond any resentment, grant Thy mercy to all the creatures, o Thou who guide those who go astray!"*

*"May all humankind benefit from me, o Lord!"*

*"Make me a source of bliss for all, black and white"*

*"Spare me ever damaging Thy creatures, be they living near me or afar, be they Muslims or unbelievers."*

*"O Lord! Lift me to the rank of Renovator of the Path of Islam, out of any hostility and war."*

*"O Lord! Spare me ever harming any of Thy creatures and protect me from their harm as well."*

*"O Lord! To whomever that is blaming me or who has offended me, forgive him and may he submit to Thee."*

*"Impart Thy Guidance, thanks to me, to the people of my time and to coming generations"*

*"The true warrior in God's path is not he who kills his enemies, but he who combats his ego (nafs) to achieve spiritual perfection"*

*"Indeed, the toughest Jihad consists in hindering one's mind from ever involving in aught that is not proper."*

*"Always cherish good feelings for all the creatures of God."*

Such a peaceful and high attitude led Michelle R. Kimball, founder of the International Peace Project, to entitle **"A Muslim Peacemaker of the Twentieth Century - Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba"**

her introduction to the book “Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba and Qur’anic and Sunnah Foundations of the Muridiyyah Order”. She wrote:

*“Amidst the heightened state of turmoil in the world today, associated with the apparent clash between Islamic and Western cultures, the life of one Muslim peacemaker warrants recognition - a Muslim saint who led a successful and completely nonviolent struggle for peace within the last century...Beyond the value of Bamba’s life and teachings for specific ethnic groups, he is a reminder of the adaptability and universality of the religion to different cultures and peoples through its inner tradition...Further study into the contribution Bamba made in the cultural and spiritual revival of his people will demonstrate the significance his universal message and nonviolent struggle has for attaining peace in the world today.”*

In another article of “The Economist”, titled “Faith in the market” (December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006) and devoted to Murids’ economic doctrine and industriousness, the author concluded:

*“Little known as they are, the Murids might have a lot to teach the rest of the world—not only about how to respond to globalization, but how to practice religion in a peaceful way.”*

Indeed, hitherto very little is relatively known about the richness of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s philosophy and teachings in the world today, particularly regarding his method of nonviolent resistance. Bamba succeeded in combining perfectly standing up for his faith and for his moral principles with acknowledging to others the right to live peacefully, as long as they try not to constrain him violently to give up his faith. Such a philosophy warrants certainly a certain examination so as to know its doctrinal and historical grounds.

### **Divine Guidance vs Human Strategy and Wisdom**

It is noteworthy that the kind of nonviolence advocated by Bamba is quite different, to many extents, to that claimed by Gandhi or by Martin Luther King. As some have noticed it, both Gandhi and Martin

Luther King were killed through *violence*, although their being calling publicly for *nonviolence*. According to the Muslim perspective taught by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, this is not at all contradictory since, as worthy and as wise as Gandhi and King's strategies might be, they are just human and rational *strategies* issuing from their only reasoning and beliefs. Even the deep spirituality referred to by Gandhi, although morally valuable and praiseworthy, it has no ultimate effectiveness and a *spiritual* value in the pure Islamic view. Since the principle of *Ahimsa* (the avoidance of violence) he was claiming originates from the religions of ancient India (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism) which are ranked among pagan and polytheistic beliefs or among mere philosophies by Islamic orthodoxy. *Ahimsa* notably emphasizes vegetarianism and bans hunting and ritual sacrifice, contrary to Islam. As for M. Luther King's nonviolence, it was primarily a useful strategy, inspired by Gandhi's struggle and philosophy. Besides, it is known that King was counseled to adopt this strategy by Bayard Rustin, an African American civil rights activist, who has studied Gandhi's teachings and who was well-known for his open homosexuality and his former ties with the Communist Party USA.

Human rational wisdom and rationality may well lead to success as it may lead to failure or to transitory setbacks which could end in future success. But, according to the Muslim beliefs and Sufi philosophy referred to by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, man has to submit his entire will to his Lord and to worship Him perfectly, in purifying his heart from all worldly vanities and desires aside from God, so as to attain true spiritual perfection which enables him to benefit from direct Divine guidance.

*"Fear God and God will teach ye."* (Qur-ān ii.282)

*"O ye who believe! If ye fear God, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong)."* (Qur-ān viii.29)

*"This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God."* (Qur-ān ii.1)

*“And those who strive in Our (cause),- We will certainly **guide** them to our Paths: For verily God is with those **who do right.**” (Qur-ān xxix.69)*

*“So persevere patiently: for **the End** is for those who are **righteous.**”  
(Qur-ān xi.49)*

According to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s philosophy, God’s direct teaching goes far beyond any rational strategy or human wisdom, and leads inevitably to ultimate success. In fact, that is real wisdom and clear-sightedness. Man can attain it only through Fear of God (*taqwā*), which is defined by the masters as “complying perfectly to God’s Orders and avoiding all He forbids”. (Fear of God is often equivalent to worship and to good deeds, in Muslim vocabulary.)

Thence, the kind of spiritual Jihad promoted by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is quite different from that advocated by many modern Muslim “activists” as well. Inasmuch as the Sheikh wishes that Muslims may first perfect their faith, their trust in the Lord, their commitment to knowledge and worship, their behaviors and their morals through education and clear-sighted determination (*himmah*). Otherwise, their faith would remain a void principle which could not in the least shield them from being dominated by other civilizations and from losing their spiritual strength, whatever arms they may use. The real quintessence of Islam, which gave Muslims power and success in every domains, in the past, was unfailing fidelity to the spiritual and moral principles taught by the Holy Book and by the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH), revived and further theorized through Sufi masters’ teachings. God promises His help only to the true believers who fear Him really, not to zealous formal worshippers; as He asserted “*Verily God will defend **those who believe***” (Qur-ān xxii.38). Such a dialectical principle of Faith-Guidance is the spiritual basis of Bamba’s thinking, as implied by his writings;

*“[O Lord!] Impart me **Righteousness** and Thy **Guidance**, protect me from blame and grant me Worthiness by the Grace of the Prophet.”  
“God, the Creator, has **guided** me [on His Path] and has led me to Him through all kinds of wonders. The Matchless Lord has freed me*

*from anything but Him and has led me [on the Right Path].” “I render thanks to the Supreme Protector who has protected me from all my enemies.”*

Because, in Bamba’s view, that is Divine Guidance which has provided him protection and which has ensured his success, unlike preceding Muslim resistance fighters in Senegal who all failed to oppose to French colonizers, because they did not attain such a spiritual degree.

Although Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba did not dismiss absolutely or exclude the possibility to use material weapons, in case of self-defense or under the special circumstances provided for by Islamic law, his spiritual degree inspired him to use instead other kinds of *weapons* more suitable to his space and time—combating his own soul, purifying his heart and consecrating his entire life to raise the Divine Word and to benefit all humankind (*khidma*) so as to be guided and protected by the Creator Himself. According to this new perspective, if the Prophet (PBH) decided at a certain point to take up arms and to combat unbelievers, it was only after clear permission was given to Him by the Lord Himself, but not just through personal strategy or human aggressiveness. The word *jihad* itself conveys a wider etymologic meaning, that is “efforts” made in God’s Path.

Was it not such a mystical perspective, the Sheikh could have certainly followed the same violent model chosen by many previous Sufi resistance fighters who combated French colonialists through arms. Is evidence thereof what he said after the trying and frustrating hardships the French Governor of Dakar made him undergo on the way to exile (September 1895):

*“Whenever I recall my sojourn in such a [awful prison] they put me in, and the [misbehavior] of that unfair governor, I feel like taking arms [to combat them]. But **the Prophet himself dissuades me therefrom.**”*

This verse is an evidence of the spiritual perspective Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba gave his nonviolent struggle, which goes beyond mere human reaction of indignation and of revolt against glaring injustice, and which takes its roots from mystical motivations. Books like *Masālik-ul-Jinān* (Ways unto heaven) provide us with the vital groundwork to better understand the basic principles which can lead to this kind of spiritual philosophy.

### **Conditions of Global Peace and Humanism**

However, contrary to the theory of Utopian peace and unconditional fraternity, Bamba is convinced that negative and destructive human conceptions are to be fought, in the suitable forms. So, unrestrained materialism promoted by Western modern way of life and thinking are held by the Sheikh as highly detrimental to piety and to humankind as well. Insofar as it has led man to forget the ultimate purpose of his stay on earth and his intrinsic meaning, because of his spiritual and moral emptiness. He criticized such a lack of spirituality in one of his poems:

*“[Many of the Western] are devoting themselves to what displeases the Lord. Satan has deluded them towards disobedience, audacity, and spiritual ruin. They are so lost that now they are wandering all around the world and have set themselves to oppress [peoples]...[As for Black natives], they have set themselves to imitate them, through dissoluteness, disloyalty and other immoral vices.”* (Ilhāmu Salām, v. 12-14,18)

Such a lack of moral sense, criticized by the Sheikh, is endangering humankind themselves insofar as it has taken them to the two deadliest wars in history, to the latent destruction of their ecological environment, to fashion a highly unfair and inhuman global economic model, to promote global approval of homosexuality and of other immoral values. Today, the only *gods* who are really worshipped by most people and who are supposed to fill their spiritual emptiness are sex, entertainment, and money. Worldwide standards promoted by Western materialism are furthermore morally

undermined nowadays by the policy of “double standards”, as Huntington labeled it in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* :

*“Hypocrisy, double standards, and “but nots” are the price of universalist pretensions. Democracy is promoted, but not if it brings Islamic fundamentalists to power; nonproliferation is preached for Iran and Iraq, but not for Israel; free trade is the elixir of economic growth, but not for agriculture; human rights are an issue for China, but not with Saudi Arabia; aggression against oil-owning Kuwaitis is massively repulsed, but not against non-oil-owning Bosnians. Double standards in practice are the unavoidable price of universal standards of principle.”*

Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s nonviolent struggle intended to show, through “knowledge and worship”, that such a materialistic perspective is a dead end for humankind and that only worshipping duly the Lord and complying with moral and spiritual rules may lead them to happiness in this world and in the Hereafter. Thus, in Bamba’s view, nonviolence does not mean unquestioning approval of all human misconceptions. For him, time is not at all money neither pure leisure, as the modern saying goes, but **time is worship** and seeking God’s Light instead.

*“Any time [as brief as] a human breath will be worth a precious jewel with which one would be able to buy a Wondrous and Eternal Treasure [on the Last Day]. Losing such a time without worshipping God shall entail great loss on the Last Hour. But if ever thou spend it in transgressing [the Heavenly Orders], that is an irretrievable disaster.”* (Masālik, v. 138-141)

*“[O my Brother! know that] the greatest wish of the dead is coming back to life so as to spend on earth were it only the slightest lapse of time and to perform a single good deed liable to entail some benefit for them once back to the Hereafter.”* (Masālik, v. 133-134)

For Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, human *rights* can be perfectly achieved on earth only in complying first with human *duties*, which are, in reality, **God's Rights**. Because every right claimed by a human being corresponds in fact to a duty incumbent on another human being. And the only ultimate motivation which can prevent man from putting his egocentric interest over others' is faith in a Supreme Power. Then, true humanism must start from God so as to attain really human beings. But any humanism which claims to exclude God from its sphere of reasoning and to use pure rationality alone is condemned by the inherent limits of human nature itself. According to Bamba's religious vision, God has to be restored in the Axis of the universe where the humanism of the Enlightenment excluded Him. Bamba described his conception of human rights in these admirable verses:

*"Take great care of God's Rights through your duties towards His creatures...Be always mindful of your duties towards your fellow men, instead of their duties towards you."* (Nahju Hadāil Hāj, v. 55, 57)

For Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, global peace and nonviolence can be attained only through mutual respect, ethics and worship. His conception of humanism makes of faith in God the medium of human relations and fraternity which can be classified in the three categories of rules of Ethics everybody is compelled to abide by:

*"[The three basic principles of] Ethics are (1) showing mercy to anyone that is younger than you, (2) showing respect to anyone that older than you, (3) treating your fellows as you would like to be treated. Mind to do all of this for the sole Countenance of God, the Creator to whom belongs the Majestic Throne."* (Nahju Hadāil Hāj, v. 55, 57)

For Bamba, true human freedom is worshipping the Lord alone and conforming to His rules, but it is not most certainly claiming theoretical self-determination while one is enslaved by his basic instincts and by his animal urges.

### **Back to the Sources of Bamba's Nonviolence**

However, we cannot grasp fully the true significance of this kind of “Muslim nonviolence” advocated by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba unless we get back to his own intellectual and spiritual sources, and to some special circumstances which shaped durably his way of thinking. The main referring sources which influenced significantly Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba are the Qur-ān, the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH) and the teachings of the Sufi masters. Other important and determining factors which must be taken into account are the historical background the Sheikh inherited from his family and from his social milieu, his own biography, his personal tendencies and his individual spiritual experiences through his mystical relationship with the Lord and His Prophet (PBH).

To explore extensively all these fertile research fields, we would certainly need to study each of them separately or in interconnection, to look for clues liable to back up his thinking. In this instance, we could try to bring out koranic verses and hadiths specifying the prerequisites of legitimate jihad and their limits. It could be also very interesting to review the historical and political issues raised by the dissensions within Muslim leadership factions after the death of the Prophet (PBH) and their lasting impacts in the overall perception of political neutral stance, theorized later by some Sufi masters. We could likewise investigate the historical background of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s family, through the very old Senegalese tradition of peaceful coexistence and of political neutrality between the rulers and some categories of clerical families (*Serigne Fàkk-taal*) to which belongs the lineage of the Sheikh (*Cf.* the book “Fighting the Greater Jihad” by Cheikh Anta Babou). In this trend, it would be also very edifying to examine the biographical path of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and its various circumstances, as did, quite relevantly, some biographers and historians who tried to show how key events that occurred in his life affected his way of thinking.

All of these areas deserve, of a surety, careful and thorough examination to show how their combination contributed decisively to the nonviolent philosophy of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. However,

prior to scrutinizing the gestation process of Bamba's thinking, one may be tempted to wonder a quite relevant question—considering the valuable teachings of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba about “Muslim nonviolence” and their great significance, particularly in our world today endangered by frenzied materialism and indiscriminate extremism, how is it that serious studies haven't been carried out on this topic yet?

# Wave Three

## The Shortcomings of THE “Short-Sighted” Scholarship

Here are a few causes which could explain, in our view, this strange gap. The Muridiyya has been subject to research very soon and substantial material was devoted to this organization since the late 70's. However the bulk of this scholarship focused on political, social and economic approaches, and disregarded very often its ideological original basis inspired by the teachings of its founder. As noted by the historian Pr. Cheikh Anta Babou, specialist of the Muridiyya and author of “Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913” (Ohio University Press):

*“Although the scholarship on the Muridiyya has increased considerably, particularly since the mid-1980s, this work has mostly focused on the political and economic dimensions of the organization. Three major trends can be discerned in the literature on the Murids.*

*Some scholars have concerned themselves with explaining the role of the Muriddiya as an instrument used by the Wolof ethnic group (the majority of the Senegalese population) to adapt to French colonial rule. These same scholars also have strived to demonstrate how, in the postcolonial era, the Murid order continued to perform its political*

*function by helping foster a "social contract" that mitigated the new rulers' lack of legitimacy in the eyes of rural masses and provided stability to the State... A second trend has concentrated on the economy and particularly on Murid contributions to the expansion of the colonial cash crop of peanut... Other scholars looked at the ways in which the Murid work ethic and values helped rural disciples shift from agriculture to trading and international migration...The religious dimensions of the Muridiyya has attracted some scholarly interest, especially among Senegalese and French specialists of Islam. These scholars have examined some of Amadu Bamba's writings to verify the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of Murid beliefs and the ability of the Muridiyya to adapt Islamic concepts and values to the local cultures."*

Another common factor of most of this scholarship is its ideological and methodological biases deriving sometimes from its Marxist approaches, held today as too materialistic by the newest scientific trends. Other biases originate from unspoken political concerns and from negative clichés about Islam or even from some fashionable racist theories. Such a disproportionate concern over material issues, combined with certain preconceptions, caused real inadequacies in exploring the key research fields which are yet essential to understand the ideology of the Muridiyya.

This was notably the case regarding the striking lack of scholarship on the history of the Muridiyya and of its founder. Because, as noted by Cheikh Babou, "*Despite the relatively abundant body of literature on the Muridiyya, there is a real dearth of **historical** scholarship on Amadu Bamba and the early formation of the Murid tariqa*". Thus, very little was really known about the historical background of the Sheikh before his confrontation with the colonizers, and few was scarcely investigated about his family's history, as well as about the main events which affected his psychology during his youth. The recent works of Pr. Cheikh Anta Babou provided essential data to fill this crucial gap, in confronting untapped new historical material, internal and external, necessary to understand better the Muridiyya and its founder.

However, though greatly valuable and critical, it is our contention that such a step in history is not enough in itself to build completely the bridge which will help us to get across the ideological Grand Canyon dug by decades of oversight of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's true teachings. Because another serious limit of the existing scholarship on the Muridiyya is that very few scholars have actually attempted to study the numerous **writings** of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba himself, which embody yet the core of his thought and of his attitude, as he asserted himself: "*My writings are my true miracles*". Thus, Babou's efforts "*to render Murid voices more audible through the exploration of sources hitherto inaccessible to scholars of the organization*" must necessarily be completed by another effort to render the *voice of Bamba himself* more audible to the existing scholarship. And there is no source more entitled to play this role than his own writings, in our view.



# Wave Four

## Working Written miracles

Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is certainly one of the most prolific writer of all Islamic history, as David Robinson writes, "*Bamba became one of the most outstanding poets and mystical leaders of the last 100 years.*" His poems (qasidas), books and correspondences, outnumbering by far one thousand<sup>4</sup> and tens of thousands of verses and prose lines, can be divided into these main categories:

1. Theology (*Tawhīd*),
2. Islamic Law (*Fiqh*),
3. Sufism (*Tasawwuf*),
4. Spiritual education (*Tarbiyya*) and literary sciences,
5. Admonitions,
6. Reminding and invoking God's Holy Names (*Dhikr*),
7. Praising God (*Shukr*),
8. Call for blessing upon the Prophet (PBH) (*Salātu 'alā Nabī*),
9. Panegyric of the Prophet (*Madh*),
10. Pleas (*Du'a*).

In spite of his very arduous living conditions, imposed by his successive exiles (Gabon and Mauritania) and his house arrests (Thiéyène and Diourbel), the Sheikh seemed to have spent all his lifetime in writing and in teaching people. We can say that writing

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. our inventory of the available qasidas at [www.majalis.org/choixq.php](http://www.majalis.org/choixq.php).

was with him a kind of second nature. In his numerous poems, he continuously revealed his feelings of the moment, his states of mind, his ideas and thoughts. His pen and his sheets were the confidants to which he was confessing all his love for God, his admiration for the Prophet (PBH), as well as his hopes, his weakness and his unwavering faith in the Lord. But with Bamba, pleas are not mere pleas, praise-poems for the Prophet are not mere praise-poems—they are acts of worship and the stairs lifting him, mystically and intellectually, towards the Lord. They convey all his philosophy of life. Thus, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's *qasidas* (poems) are the most valuable raw material from which we can extract the substratum of his real thought. Of a certain, the Sheikh cannot be regarded as an "ordinary" poet, composing verses for the sole sake of artistry and esthetics, or to just relieve himself of some hardships. He claimed so to be rather a *nāzim* (an author who opts to write his books in verses) instead of a *shā'ir* (an artistic poet full of flippancy). Though the quality of his poetic work is one of the most outstanding and most creative in all Islamic literary history. The Sheikh chose to never write about themes devoid of any spiritual use, because his deep conviction is everything outside the Lord is doomed to vanish and to be detrimental on the last day. To pure theory and ethereal mystical reasoning, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba preferred often pragmatical teachings or pleas liable to educate his people and to lift their spiritual degrees. Even in writing grammar books (like *Sahādatul Tulāb*), he could not help using examples endowed with a certain religious use (instead of using as an example "John is walking back home", he would prefer to say "John is walking fast to the mosque, so as to pray at the prescribed time"). We can also noticed that even particular God's names or words he used in his verses are not chosen at random— all are endowed with certain subtle significance we may do not grasp at first glance. For instance, he prayed in his poem *Mawāhibu Nāfih* (The Favors of the Beneficent Lord, v. 25):

[O Lord!] Grant me Uprightness,  
Safeguard me from blame,

Grant me Worthiness,

## In the Name of who that holds the Standard

Though being a mere plea, this verse can give a certain idea of Bamba's philosophy of life about which books can be written. This verse implies that man cannot attain perfect *uprightness* by his own self, unless the Lord helps him. And that is such uprightness and honesty which can only protect him from Divine and public *blame* and which can, contrariwise, grant him real honour and *worthiness*. And this quality is what gave to the Prophet (PBH) his worthiness and his leadership over humankind (embodied by the *Standard*). Because such a quality enabled him to accomplish his outstanding work, the reason why all Muslims have to learn his virtues and to take him as a Model. The subtle relation of causality between these notions is in itself a complete ideology which effects can be extended to every domain of life and thinking. And Bamba's writings are full of examples of the kind only thorough examination can unearth.

The Sheikh had a very special and rare notion of his writings, which goes beyond their mere social role and even beyond the spiritual function some earlier Sufi writers assigned their writings. Because writing was at the heart of his *khidma* (work in the service of God and of His Prophet) and the key tool of his spiritual reform, as he asserted often:

*"My writings are my true miracles."*

*"My writings outshine the other good deeds and surpass all kinds of spiritual masters."*

*"I have reawakened the writings of the Noble Ancients so as to benefit [my fellow creatures] for the sole Countenance of the Lord ."*

*"I set myself to composing writings through which every believer, except a Prophet, can be guided to the Right Path, if God wills."*

*"Thanks to my writings, my Lord lead to the Right Path [whoever He pleases] ."*

His first biographer and son, Sheikh Muhammad Bachir Mbacke, understood so well that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thought is hiding inside his writings that, to show the progress of his spirituality and of his way of thinking, he undertook, in his key work, to compare the subtle swings noted through time in his different poems and to collate them with particular historical events of his life. So we can safely argue that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's qasidas convey the core of his thought insofar as, through the methodical analysis of his pleas, of his advice, of his personal feelings, of his praises to the Lord and his Messenger, we can penetrate his social, ideological, spiritual and political views.

It is obvious that Cheikh Babou has also the merit to include in his historical sources Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's own works along with other Murid internal sources (oral tradition, hagiography, written sources). And Babou felt as well the high potential of studying Bamba's writings, when he noticed, for instance:

*“Other writings, including most of Amadu Bamba's own works, deal with abstract and esoteric religious and spiritual subjects that, at first glance, may seem of not much use to **the historian seeking to document historical events**. But buried in this sacred literature is precious information that is useful in unearthing what proponents of the Annales school would call an *histoire des mentalités* (history of mentalities or states of mind). Because of their ethical nature, some of Bamba's religious writings reveal as much about his Sufi orientation and beliefs as about his perception of the mores and social practices of his time.”*

The main progress we advocate, and which differentiates our two approaches, is that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's writings may indeed be used by *the historian seeking to document historical events*, but they must also be fully used as the original **ideological** and **theoretical** basis of the organization he founded; the Muridiyya. So, Bamba's writings are not just useful in giving a better picture of his *mentalité*. But they are the most reliable reflections of his authentic

thoughts and the ultimate theoretical basis which may enable scholars to grasp many aspects of the Muridiyya today. Through Bamba's writings and the analysis of his life, we can better penetrate the richness of his thinking and the beneficial new perspectives it offers to the world today. This implies, not just referring, when needs be, to some verses or quotations considered as suitable to supplement or to explain particular historical, social, economic, or political facts, as scholars often do. But it entails taking Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's entire literary oeuvre **as a whole** and studying it methodically and systematically, confronting them with other crucial elements, so as to draw therefrom his true thought. And we must genuinely admit that many preliminary specific tasks, which are necessary to achieve this objective, haven't been carried out yet to date.

### **The Mysteries of Touba and of the Murid Labor**

Let us give just two examples, in addition to nonviolence, which can better illustrate the important principle to refer to Bamba's writings in order to extend the scope of the scholarship on the Muridiyya.

#### The Muslim Utopia

The holy city of Touba, founded by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba in 1887 and which is considered as the epicenter of the Muridiyya, has always raised many questions and aroused much passion. Some external observers of the Muridiyya and advocates of French republican secularism seem often to be greatly shocked by Touba's self-government and administrative autonomy which gives it, de facto, the status of *Etat dans l'Etat* (a state within a state). The relationship between the Murids and the State, which is largely dependent upon the support public authorities provide to their urban projects, has also fueled strong hostilities towards the Murids, held as unjustly favored by the vote-catching State and feared by politicians. Touba's administrative autonomy is embodied by its property lease (which makes it a private domain) and its special legal status of *communauté rurale autonome*, in spite of its size. Another specificity of Touba is the banning of products and behaviors prohibited by Islam or held as

contrary to the sacredness of the city—drugs, alcohol, tobacco, wearing indecent clothes etc. Even some other activities which are regarded as quite normal in the secular or even Islamic world are proscribed in the holy city (despite existing resistances)—sports events, public entertainment (outside religious gatherings) etc. Such a specificity allowed the Caliph to ban all political gatherings within the city and to compel political parties to move their centers outside, because of the clashes between Murids belonging to opposing sides.

Other authors questioned instead the Islamic orthodoxy of founding holy cities outside the Mecca and Medina. Touba's outstanding development, on an African scale, ranks it today as the second most important town of the country, after Dakar (Senegalese capital), in terms of economic growth, urban planning, population and according to other indicators. Such a rapid growth is all the more striking since Touba is self-managed by the Murids themselves (with the help of the State) and since it was founded just one century ago, unlike the country's other big towns which are far older.

As for Murids, they hold Touba (which name originates, in Islamic tradition, from the Tree of Paradise and which appeared once in the Qur-ān xiii. 29) as a very special place endowed with *Baraka* (blessings), a Divine gift to *Serigne Touba* (the "Master of Touba", the popular name of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba), a holy city which is spiritually different from other places and where they hope to live and to bring about the Favors promised by the Lord—in short the Murid Promised Land. Such an ideal view of Touba, confronted with prosaic urban difficulties common to all great towns of the Third World (health issues, shortage of some urban facilities, delinquency and so on), has always produced a certain gap between this idyllic model and reality. Some local medias exploit often such a discrepancy in using any news in brief or scandal regarding Touba as their favorite headlines—even a horse cart accident in Touba is liable to be a scoop for gossip columns and breaking news! Which shocks deeply Murids and arouses sometimes fierce debates on the radio. For many Murids have an inclusive faith which can really not discriminate material necessities from spiritual objectives. Some of them even misconceive

Bamba's vision and have come to think that living in Touba is enough to benefit from its *Baraka* (blessings); which leads them at times to be heedless towards Islamic basic teachings and to betray, in so doing, the founding vision of the holy city. Which leads us to ask these serious questions—Is Touba a Muslim Utopia? What was really its founding project?

When Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba prayed the Lord in his famous poem entitled *Matlabul Fawzayni* (In Quest for Bliss in this World and in the Hereafter), devoted to the holy city of Touba, one may find out through his pleas how he conceived the model of perfect society to which he invites his disciples and all humankind. The objectives set by the Sheikh in *Matlabul Fawzayni* have always been the Charter and the *feuille de route* of the successive Murid caliphs and of the disciples, who made every efforts to bring about in Touba the pleas of its founder. This ideological dimension of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's writings did not escape some scholars as Babou, who wrote:

*"All these projects and ideas [about Touba] were enshrined in Matlabul Fawzayni, a short poem of supplications [Bamba] composed soon after discovering the land of Touba; the Murids see this work as a sort of constitution for the holy city. In the poem, Bamba prayed, "[God] make of Touba a place of knowledge, faith and mercy." He also wrote, "[Lord] make of my home ... a crucible for the flourishing of [Islamic] ideas and thinking", and he begged that God would pour wealth and blessings on the village and protect its inhabitants."*

Another scholar of the Muridiyya, Cheikh Guèye, wrote in this same instance, *"Touba's economic attractiveness has also ideological grounds drawn from Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's poem entitled Matlabul Fawzayni, in which he prayed for "wealth in times of hardships", for "God's help", and for "ease" in Touba."*

In fact, to understand fully the spiritual project designed by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba through the concept of Touba, we must refer to this qasida and to other writings. We could see in the preamble of

*Matlabul Fawzayni* how the Sheikh refers directly to the Qur-ān (notably Abraham's pleas for the Mecca and other similar verses) and to the general Islamic principles regarding holy places where religion should constitute the nucleus and where Muslims would find all spiritual and material conditions favorable to worship. This means that the scholars willing to unravel Touba's striking specificities through its ideological basis are invited to go back to the Qur-ān. Because Bamba's vision was basically inspired by the Holy Book, through Abraham's pleas for a city (the Mecca) devoted to worshipping God and which he wished to be a very easy-living place for his heirs and all believers:

*“Remember We made the House a place of assembly for men and a **place of safety**; and take ye the station of Abraham as a **place of prayer**; and We covenanted with Abraham and Isma'il, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it. And remember Abraham said: “My Lord, make this a **City of Peace**, and **feed its people** with fruits,-such of them as believe in God and the Last Day.” ...And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): “Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-knowing. Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (Will), and of **our progeny** a people Muslim, bowing to Thy (will); and show us our **place for the celebration** of (due) rites; and turn unto us (in Mercy); for Thou art the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful...And this was the **legacy** that Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob; “Oh my sons! God hath chosen the Faith for you; then die not except in the **Faith of Islam.**” (Qur-ān ii.125-132)*

Bamba's reference to Abraham's pleas is quite conform to his ideological immersion in the Holy Scriptures which leads him to frequently use words and concepts taken from the very terminology of the Qur-ān and the hadiths. His constant reading of the Qur-ān he held in an unusual regard, and his unique spiritual understanding of its verses, are valuable clues for scholars of the Muridiyya to get back to the holy Book so as to better penetrate his vision.

So, according to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's spiritual perspective, Touba project is not intended to replace or to duplicate literally, *in verbatim* and *in extenso*, the Muslim Holy Places, as assumed by some writers who doubted the orthodoxy of founding holy cities outside the Mecca and Medina. The concept of Touba is quite conform to God's promise to establish firmly to the land His servants who intend to worship him duly:

*"(They are) those who, if We establish them **in the land**, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with God rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs."* (Qur-ān xxii.41)

Thus, Touba is not supposed to be the heavenly place on earth and the idyllic city where all material difficulties are totally ignored, or a parallel Dreamland where all and everything would be perfect, as assumed erroneously by some Murid disciples. For the Sheikh, Touba is a concept and a place where the Lord has poured His *Baraka* (blessings), a parcel of land which must be devoted to worshipping. The reason why he said:

*"The reason why Touba and Darou Salam (another village near Touba he founded) are dearer to me than the other places I founded is the purity of the intention which led me unto founding them. Indeed I did not settle there in following some ancestor or in seeking for lands propitious to farming or pasturage. I founded these places with the sole aim to worship God, the One, and to gain His Satisfaction, by His Leave."*

The Sheikh founded Touba in a very hostile place. He settled in the wilderness and in an inhospitable land lacking in water where no one could live unless he was absolutely convinced in the absolute Power of God to bring him there all kinds of favors by His Will and by His Grace to pour down *Baraka* (blessings) wherever He pleases .

For Bamba, Touba is a vision of society, a spiritual life plan which should be progressively carried out by his spiritual heirs and

disciples to the best of their abilities and as far as their material conditions allow—prayer is a dynamic process, not necessarily a static outcome. Touba is not certainly the Utopia of Thomas More or Plato’s Republic, where God is not the founding element. And the Murid community are not certainly El Dorado, or *le meilleur des mondes possibles*, where all are supposed to be morally perfect and kind. Murids have also to recall that *Baraka* is not Paradise on earth, because even the Islamic holy places have often experienced material difficulties and serious setbacks of all kinds in their histories. In spite of Abraham’s pleas and Makka’s holiness for all Muslims, the Ka’ba has been yet the heart of idolatry and of giving partners to God (*shirk*) for centuries before the Coming of Muhammad (PBH). Although the Lord teaches us in the Qur-ān (xvii.1) that “He has blessed the precincts” of the *Masjidul Aqsa* (Mosque of Jerusalem), this place have been tragically burnt in 1969 and much Muslim blood has been shed in its “precincts” since many years. A blessed place, compared to other places, is just like a village enough fortunate to have a river flowing in its precincts, compared to other villages where people are daily compelled to walk for many hours to quench their thirst. Though it is easier to get water in such a favored village, its inhabitants might never take advantage of their privilege if they spend their time throwing waste in the river so as to pollute it and to make it unusable for a while. It is neither of use living there without going to the river and drawing water from there, as the Sheikh warned idle believers in *Masālik*:

*“Well! In what use may be a sickle to a hungry person who consents not to go to the fields and to weed therein? O Dear Friend! Is it useful to a thirsty man to have in his possession a rope and a buckle as long as he will be reluctant to go to the well and to draw water therefrom? Wilt thou be exempted from the Obligation of Pilgrimage just because of thy having sold some provisions to a pilgrim? Does it suffice - o my Brother! - to always perform ablutions without ever praying?”*  
(*Masālik*, v. 831-834)

Indeed, Islamic orthodoxy has sufficiently taught Muslims that claiming our theoretical linkage to a blessed person or place will be of

no use as long as we consent not to comply our deeds with the principles of such a relationship. As warned this answer of the Lord to another plea of Abraham about his offspring:

*“And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: “I will make thee an Imam to the Nations.” He pleaded: “And also (Imams) from my offspring!” He answered: “But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers.”*  
(Qur-ān ii.124)

*Baraka* can be defined as an unusual **positive potential** granted by the Lord to whatever and whomever He pleases, and which is ready to entail benefit in the easiest ways to all who purify their hearts and show genuine intention to take advantage of such a Divine Grace, through the rules and limits allowed by God. Its opposite is Divine curse and disapproval, which is a negative potential ready to harm all who show intention to misbehave.

Murids must also know that breaking news about horse carts accidents in Touba or about a Murid robber caught in *Okas* market is neither a tragic melodrama nor a sign of failure of Bamba’s initial project. They just recall that Touba has now become a big metropolis, with a melting pot from different horizons and social backgrounds. Too many banks in Touba is not a sign of secularism. As long as Murids will make far more efforts to build as many modern universities and mosques, or if they propose specific Islamic financial system likely to take into account the legal principle of *riba*. Murids must remember that, like other modern towns, Touba is open to all (good and bad) effects of globalization, and that the challenge must always remain to prevent this “invasion” to alter for good the initial project. Of course, there has been and there would always be difficulties and imperfections in building Touba, as it was and so is still the case of Islamic holy cities mentioned in the Qur-ān. There would still be misbehaviors and misconceptions among Murids. But what must stay permanent is the process of its *founding project* to build progressively, throughout the numerous obstacles and setbacks of

material world, brick by brick, mosque by mosque, school by school, a land for Islam in Africa.

### The Key of Murid *Himmah*

Another meaningful case which shows the relevance to refer to Murid internal **literary sources**, to better understand their ideology and behaviors, is what we call the “Mystery of the Murid labor philosophy”. Actually, many scholars have always been puzzled by the Murid conception of work and the prominence they accord to labor and producing wealth for their community. Much has been said and written about this question, indeed. Many scholars explained Murids’ zeal for work as a result of the so-called “sanctifying virtue of work” which “is considered as equivalent to prayers by the Murids”. According to this prevailing scholarly theory, such a work-equals-prayer doctrine has been built by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba himself and other Murid sheikhs to abuse their disciples’ credulity, in promising them paradise in return for their labor and wealth; in short, a new African version of man’s exploitation of his fellow man and a local form of “the Muridiyya as the opium of the people”.

Other students of the Muridiyya have tried to go a bit further than this hard-materialist perspective and have proposed approaches stressing more on doctrinal and psychological elements. Like the symbolic significance of work for Murid disciples to express their membership to the organization, or their faith in the would-be “redeeming power of work” Murid doctrine would share with protestant work ethic. Besides, most scholars of the Muridiyya showed blatant gaps in their knowledge of Bamba’s writings through the two well-known and widely quoted sayings mistakenly attributed to Bamba by almost all of them, although their being (controversial) traditions of the Prophet (PBH); “*Work is a mean of worshipping God*” and “*Work as if you will never leave this world and pray as if you know you will die tomorrow*”. Despite the significance of these maxims, such a long-lasting scholarly mistake, taken up by almost all who wrote about the Murid doctrine of work - and even by some Murid scholars - is assuredly an interesting evidence of the lack of direct examination

of Bamba's writings we are concerned about. Moreover, if really such sayings were fully and directly effective with the Murids, they should then refer openly to them frequently, which is not actually the case (except some modern lecturers who quote them without prior checking). Moreover, seeing that all Muslims are sharing these hadiths, we should logically notice the same work doctrine within many other Muslim communities.

The Murid labor mystery deepens when one realizes that, although Bamba happened to allude here and there to formal work in some of his writings, we cannot notice an unusual emphasis on its importance, in comparison to other themes. At least to such an extent that it may explain alone Murids' working dynamism. The Sheikh refers to work in his books often when inciting Muslims to seek for licit means of living, in accordance with Islamic orthodoxy and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH). Besides, the ascetic Sufi conception of life, tending to depreciate worldly activities in favor of formal worship and contemplation, may seem somewhat contradictory to Murids' economic commitment.

In analyzing all previous scholarly interpretations in such an interesting issue, Cheikh Anta Babou brought in appositely new essential doctrinal concepts referring to work and used by the Sheikh himself in his writings—like *khidma* (work for the benefit of others and for the sake of godly rewards), *amal* and *kasb* (labor or earning one's living, which are religiously significant, and become *khidma*, only when they serve ultimately godly purposes). This central principle of *Khidma* may be considered, in our view, as the worshipping bridge which links this present world and the Hereafter. Since, as the Lord's vicegerent (*khalifa*) on earth, man has been entrusted the mission to build properly this world in order to make it a place most propitious to worship and to prepare for Future Life. As implied by these verses:

*"And there are men who say: "Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and defend us from the torment of the Fire!"*  
(Qur-ān ii.201)

*“But seek, with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world.” (Qur-ān xxviii.77)*

In making such an interesting breach to all the previous scholarship on this question and in suggesting other ideological viewpoints, Babou showed how it can be far fruitful to bore the long-overlooked wells of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s own writings. Furthermore, Babou’s contention is largely backed by Murids’ frequent references to the central notion of *khidma*, they translate in Wolof by *ligéeyal Serigne Touba* (literally “working for Bamba”). *Khidma* has also the same lexicographical root than *khādimu Rasūli Lāh* (the Servant of God’s Prophet), the spiritual title claimed by Bamba and which is central in his work. We will not need further persuading to step cheerfully into this fresh breach and to introduce another important concept taken from Bamba’s writings as well and liable to clear up more the Murid labor “mystery”—*Himmah* or *Pastéef* in Wolof.

If we refer to another biography of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, called *Irwa-u Nadim* (Quenching the Thirst of the Spiritual Guests), written by Sheikh Muhammad Lamine Diop Dagana, a biographer and disciple of the Sheikh, we can read these interesting extracts relating to the circumstances of the founding of the Muridiyya:

*“One of our elder Murid sheikhs - a very reliable witness - reported to me that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba related him that the Prophet ordered him [mystically]: “Henceforth, educate (tarbiyya) your companions (ashaabaka) through **Himmah** (constant determination in worship) but do not educate them through theoretical teaching alone.” [This historic order marked the founding of the Muridiyya in the village of Mbacke Cayor, because when the Sheikh made clear this new educational direction in the school he inherited from his father, a large group of his students chose to leave him then and to seek for other teachers, while others accepted to stay and to follow him].... Then the Sheikh urged all his disciples to seek for God’s Satisfaction, in teaching them how to bear patiently*

*hunger, to perform numerous acts of **Khidma**, to invoke frequently the Lord (Dhikr),...and to always stay in perfect purity (Ikhlas). Murid disciples soon surpassed all their peers because they dedicated their entire lives and all their goods in quest for God's Satisfaction. [In accordance with this verse]: "God hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise)" (Qur-ān ix.111) "*

This new concept of **Himmah**, referred to by the Sheikh, on the eve of founding the Muridiyya, is assuredly worth of a certain examination, even though we never happened to come across it in the existing scholarship on this organization. *Himmah*, which may be translated as "clear-sighted and unwavering resolve in seeking God's Satisfaction, through any lawful thing in the universe", is the spiritual turning point Muridiyya brought along in the historical path of Islam in Senegal. Although this concept (which is also translated by "constant spiritual ambition") has always been implicitly at work in the message of Islam and even if it has been mentioned by few Sufi masters, this notion had not been previously brought to the fore in circumstances alike. It is exactly the same case, we can say, with other important spiritual concepts which were in the latent state through the message of Islam and Sufism. Such concepts have been *revived* and *updated* through different perspectives by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. Just to mention, as edifying cases, *Khidma* (Service to humankind), *daara-tarbiyya* (educational and working school), nonviolent *jihad* (which basic and wider meaning is "efforts" made in God's Path), Islamic holy city, *Hadiyya* (pious gifts) etc. This seems to be the core of the mission of spiritual Renewal (*tajdīd*) Bamba undertook; the semantic update of many spiritual key concepts, for social and religious change and progress. So, Bamba's ultimate purpose seems not to be really *creating* new principles and concepts, but rather *reviving* and *renewing* existing Muslim key principles he found depreciated to achieve social and spiritual evolution. Practice has shown that the full significances and social scopes Bamba gave to many Islamic traditional concepts were far richer than what many Muslim masters implied in the past. Although all were using the same terminology, their meanings and scopes were quite unlike—indeed,

spirituality and reasoning are often dependent on individual experience.

Thence, we argue that *Himmah* was the powerful lever which started up the Murid “quiet revolution” in Senegal. Because, once the Sheikh succeeded to instill keen sense of *Himmah* in his disciples, using as tools *Daara-tarbiya* (educating schools), *Khidma*, *Dhikr*, love and confidence in their spiritual masters, mystical certainty in Bamba’s Divine Favors and so on, Murid disciples learnt to show high resolve and willpower through whatever thing they undertake. They also learnt to see the possibility to obtain God’s Satisfaction through anything lawful and liable to benefit the Cause of Islam and their fellow creatures. Bamba’s notions of *Himmah* and *Khidma* enabled Murids to take worshipping God out of the **Mosques** alone, and out of formal practices and pure liturgy, and to expand the scope of religion in Senegal to the **City** itself and to all social and economic daily activities (work, urban projects, migration, language, strong cultural identity etc.) Murids, who usually translate *Himmah* by *Pastéef* in Wolof, have always held this principle as the top-ranked value which allowed them to undertake and to finish major community projects on their own (railroad building, Touba’s projects, farming, schools, migration), to face manifold social obstacles and to rise to the top of Senegalese social scale. So *Himmah*, *Khidma* and love for the Sheikh (*bëgg Serigne Touba*) may be regarded as the true keys of the “Murid Labor Mystery”. They enable us to better understand the ideological ground of the Murid conception of work, in spite of the hardly noticeable concern about “formal work” in Bamba’s writings.

It seems also noteworthy that it was essentially this same principle of *Himmah* (unfailing resolve in acquiring God’s Satisfaction) which have enabled the Prophet (PBH) and his **companions** (*ashaaba*) in their times to raise the Word of Islam over idolatry and ignorance. We may learn, through the history of the first Muslims, that they were also entirely committed to *khidma* for the Messenger (PBH) - they were holding as their master – through all their activities to establish firmly Islam—struggles, building mosques by their owns, solidarity and manifold sublime sacrifices in the Holy Path.

Furthermore, the term “*ashaabaka*” (your **companions** or your disciples) used by the Sheikh in referring to the order given to him by the Prophet (PBH) is significant inasmuch as it may explain why the Sheikh conceived his mission as a revival of the original Message of Islam given to Muhammad (PBH). Because the Companions themselves were not taught fighting on God’s Path through theoretical textbooks alone by the illiterate Messenger (PBH), they were also educated through the same tool of *Himmah*. This may explain why Bamba never ceased to point out the Prophet’s **companions** to his disciples, so that his disciples may take them as models. “*My wish is to renew the Pure Tradition (Sunnah) of the Elected Messenger*”, he was claiming.

In fact, the Messenger (PBH) taught his Servant and disciple (Bamba) the same educating method he was taught by God Himself and through which he trained his companions in the past. So, we cannot understand Bamba’s philosophy unless we study the philosophy and the biography of the Prophet Muhammad he took as his absolute model.

Another question which is hinted at by the materialistic interpretation of Murid work doctrine by the scholars is the well-known “exploitation of Murid disciples” through labor and the giving of *haddiyya* (pious gifts) to their leaders. Despite some black or lost sheep among Murid leadership (as it is the case in all communities) who do not abide by the theoretical conditions of use of Murids’ donations, and who spend them for individual interests, the principle of personal contributions to the community projects remains highly valid and constitutes an important pillar to the materialization of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s vision. Everything which has been built by Murid leaders (mosques, schools, farms, infrastructures in Touba, supporting the needy etc.) was funded by individual donations of the disciples and personal contributions of the leaders themselves. The true function of *haddiyya* is contributing to the progress of faith in financing religious activities and projects, and obtaining blessings from Godly persons who have committed themselves in such

activities. As implied by this religious maxim reminded by the Sheikh in *Masālik*:

*"Whosoever helps who that is seeking for knowledge, in his aim or in any of his worldly affairs, will share with him aught he might be imparted as a reward. Just the way any such that knowingly sells a sword to a brigand should be involved in the crimes perpetrated by this one."* (v. 179-180)

A cursory survey may show that most Murid leaders are supporting many people (needy or kins), who are partially or totally dependent on them. Despite effects of global growing individualism, Murids (as other Senegalese communities) have always cultivated a certain tradition of solidarity within their community. Indeed, the fact that some tax inspectors may embezzle and break the measures arranged to collect and to transfer the amounts received from taxpayers does not question the validity of paying taxes. Moreover, an interesting question one may wonder, in this instance, is—if Murid disciples are really economically exploited and deceived (in comparison with other Senegalese communities), how is it that they are today among the richer businessmen of the country, especially if one recalls that Murid disciples were ranked at the bottom level of the social and economic Senegalese scale in the past?

### **The Slave and the Servant**

The *Himmah - Khidma* paradigm theorized by the Sheikh implies an interesting philosophical perspective which warrants certain examination. The spiritual title Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba was mystically given and which he claimed continually through his qasidas is "*Abdu Lāhi wa Khādimu Rasūlihī*" (The **Subject** (literally "the slave") of God and the **Servant** of His Prophet). The vocable *Khādim* (servant), deriving from *Khidma* (service or work in God's Path), was a spiritual title hitherto unknown in the history of Sufism. And it seems to embody much significance in Bamba's ideology, as well as the word *Abd* (subject or slave of God) which is central in Islam, as unanimously shown by all Islamic references.

But, in addition to pure orthodox motivations, we may find few other symbolic meanings implied by such two concepts. When Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba was born, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Black African Muslims were subjected to two major domination systems threatening their lives and faiths—the **traditional** domination system and the **colonial** domination system<sup>5</sup>. The first one was based on the absolute power of royal classes (allied sometimes with other high classes) over the common people, which led Black kings to contribute significantly to the *slave* trade, in exchanging many of their *subjects* for alcohol, arms and other goods. Even after the official abolition of slavery in 1848 (Bamba was born just seven years after), kings went on imposing their rule and will to the masses, through sudden raids, never-ending battles, unfair requisitioning and other iniquitous measures. Many, even within the Muslim leadership and the clerics, were compelled to accept such an unfair hegemony, either in bearing humbly kings' excesses or in becoming their allies.

In denying any form of subjection, except God's supreme and exclusive domination (implied by *Abdu Lāh*—subject of God alone), Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba was denouncing somewhat this alienating system and he had the opportunity to show his open disapproval in several circumstances. So, when he was invited to take over his dead father's position as adviser of king Lat-Dior, Bamba publicly turned down the offer and wrote afterwards, in response to people who were blaming him, a famous poem called *Irkan* (Lean thou):

*"They told me; "Lean thou toward the doors of the kings so as to gain enough wealth that will suffice thee for aye."*

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<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to my dear friend Pr. Galaye Ndiaye, a Murid scholar teaching theology and philosophy in Brussels, for having attracted my attention to this original duality. My frequent exchanges with my other Murid colleagues were also very helpful to integrate all their various scholarly *waves* and *upstream* critics in this *Ocean*: S. Cheikhouna A. Wadud, S. Sam Bousso, S. Khadim Ndiaye, S. Khadim Lo, S. Mourtada Fall, S. Alioune Cissé, my little brother A. Khadre Ba, S. Abdoulaye Diop Sam, S. Issa Danfan etc.

“God suffices me”, *I retorted*, “I do content myself with HIM and naught satisfies me but **knowledge** and **worship**.”

*I fear nothing but my True KING and I put my hope in Him alone, for He is the Majestic LORD who is able to make me rich and to save me*

*How could I entrust my affairs to such people that are not even capable of managing their own, like the poorest creatures?*

*What! How the lust for wealth could drive me unto frequenting such people whose palaces are Satan’s gardens?”*

In claiming the degree of *Abdu Lāh* (Subject of God), Bamba showed his strong will to recognize alone in his heart the Lord as his true Master—which is the true feature of genuine *Ubudiyya* (serving only God). Besides, it is noteworthy that, even in this early age, the Sheikh had already his knowledge-and-worship ideology.

As for the second domination system Black Africans were undergoing - **colonial imperialism** which had replaced slavery in fact - its main objectives were exploiting the natural resources of the conquered countries and using the *work* force of their inhabitants. Colonies and Black natives were supposed then to be at the *service* of Western countries and of colonizers through the laws about forced civil work (*travail forcé*) and many other coercive and depreciating rules. Furthermore, French style of colonization, contrary to British form, was characterized by its aim to adapt natives *subjects* to Western culture and to *enslave* them intellectually, through their various *assimilation* policies and *evangelization* campaigns carried on by conniving Christian missionaries.

In advocating his status of *Khādimu Rasūl* (Servant of the Prophet alone), Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba somewhat rejected clearly these policies as well and set himself to strengthen Islam, the message of the Prophet (PBH) he acknowledged as his only spiritual and intellectual *master*. Thus, all his works were intended to revive and to

renew the mission and the principles taught by Muhammad in the hearts of his fellow natives and to shield their spirits and their hearts from inferiority complex and self-enslavement. Bamba criticized the intellectual enslavement of his fellow natives in such terms:

*"[Black natives] who are misguided and ignorant think that [Western rulers] are superior and endowed with natural supremacy. Such fools are actually holding them as the overlords of the Noble Saints...Such insane folk set themselves to imitate them, through dissoluteness, disloyalty and other immoral vices. Out of fear for their [masters], some of them have come to forget God and His Prophet... They are actually convinced that Supreme Power (hawla) and Strength (quwwata) are their sole privileges. Although Power and Strength belong to our Lord alone...There are among [natives Africans] who are literally ranking [the colonizers] among the Angels of the Most Gracious Lord!...O ye my people! Awaken ye from inebriation of sleep!" (Ilhāmu Salām, v. 15, )*

From this new philosophical perspective, *Khidma* can be considered as the key tool through which Bamba intended to revive Islam in the hearts of all the members of Muhammad's Community (*Ummah*) and to work in the material world so as to rebuild the true and spiritual Nation of Islam. Bamba summed up his attitude towards these two alienating systems in this striking verse;

*"I content myself with God, out of all other **masters**. And I content myself with the Prophet, out of all other **intermediaries**."*

We are allowed then to think that these following spiritual dialectics are quite equivalent for Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba (as they appear in his writings) and that they just differentiate in their operational and conceptual degrees:

-*Himmah-Khidma* (Determination to attain **God's** Satisfaction + Service of the **Prophet**)

-*Abdul-Khadim* (Subject of **God** + Servant of the **Prophet**)

-Compliance with *Haqiqa* (**Internal** realities and laws) + *Sharia* (**External** realities and laws)

-*Batin-Zahir* (**Inner** considerations + **outward** considerations)

-*Tawakul-Kasb* (Inward reliance to **God** + using rational means in accordance with the Sunnah of the **Prophet** )

-*God and His Prophet*. This last dialectics reminds why Muhammad (PBH) is so important in the Sufi conception, as the Symbol *par excellence* of the Divine Mercy (*Rahmatun lil Alamin*) and the Gate through which the Lord ordains to deal with His creation. Indeed, here is assuredly a solid ground to better understand the outstanding significance of the Prophet (PBH) in all Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's life and work, and his matchless love for him.

-*Ilm-Taqwā* (**knowledge** + fearing God or **worship**). We can also better appreciate here and have a new perspective of the double title *Abdul-Khadim* the Sheikh used in a previous verse in which he explained the true nature of his jihad:

*"I am waging my Jihad through Knowledge and Fearing the Lord, as a subject of God (Abdun) and the servant of His Prophet (Khadim); and the Lord who oversees everything may assuredly bear witness thereof."*

We may infer through this last dialectics that the purpose of his spiritual jihad was to make Islam progress in fighting the two alienating systems. Such a struggle was made by Bamba through the two weapons that are; (1) fostering true and useful **knowledge** in himself and in his people and (2) putting such a knowledge in genuine practice (**worship**) for the sole sake of God. This seems to imply, in Bamba's conception, that any who achieve not such degrees of *Abdul-Khadim* could never carry on the kind of successful nonviolent struggle he was waging. It ensues from this vision the fact

that Muslims “activists” should first become *Abdul-Khadim* (instead of planting bombs) and that they should have valuable spiritual degrees, granted by clear-sighted faith and worship, is a condition of global peace.



# Wave Tive

## The Sufi Horse

We may feel that, in Bamba's conception, Sufism was just the valuable *tool* ideal to renew the original principles of Islam he has found somewhat depreciated and debased through space and time. Thence, in our view, the Sheikh seemed far more concerned to achieve the ultimate spiritual goals—God's Satisfaction— rather than focusing too much on theological and metaphysical debates which have always divided Muslim scholars since the death of the Prophet (PBH) and which have severely weakened the Muslim community. The concept of "Sufism" is basically the result of the theorization of such spiritual values as asceticism, purification of the heart from worldly vanities, sincerity in worship implied by the third key pillar of Islam (*Ihsan* or spiritual perfection). So, it is considered as nonsense to say that, since this exact word has not been used by the Prophet (PBH) himself, Sufism is a blameworthy innovation (*bid'a*). Because all of its basic principles were in fact practiced by the Messenger and taught by the Qur-ān. Rejecting Sufism on the pretence it was not explicitly quoted at the birth of Islam amounts to disregarding sciences originating from philosophy, like quantum physics, molecular biology and other new sciences, just because they were not quoted explicitly in the books of the fathers of philosophy. This is more a problem of spiritual perspective than a real divergence, notwithstanding particular practices and excesses. Thus, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's approach of

Sufism seems not to be bound by some Sufi conceptions which have been criticized and which have often led to certain drifts he personally condemned:

*“Some who claim to be Sūfis (Mystics) declare that what they are practicing [as a worship] is worthier than the reading of the Qur-ān, [the reason for which they disregard it]. Know that such an allegation is groundless and erroneous; Satan has deluded such people - do bring thyself closer to GOD through the Holy Book instead.”* (Masālik, v. 532-533)

*“Some others claim to have attained GOD’s Neighborhood: the reason for which they gave up any act of worship - so do they perish! They have been deluded by their lack of understanding and by the veil of their sins which hide the Truth from them.”* (Masālik, v.1461-1462)

In dealing with the controversial issue of discord among Muslims aroused by their belonging to different Sufi brotherhoods (*tarīqa*), the Sheikh reminded that brotherhoods were, *in fine*, just spiritual forms of organizations, founded in accordance with the teachings of a specific proficient Sufi master. But they are not at all the end in itself; *tarīqa* are just means and particular types of spiritual and social organizations, among others, to attain God’s Satisfaction:

*“It matters little that a wīrd (set of pleas designed for a specific brotherhood) originated from Sheikh Abd-al-Qadīr Jīlānī or from Sheikh Aḥmad Tijānī or from any amongst the other eminent Masters; because all of them are in the Right Path. And all of them prompt their disciples unto worshipping the LORD OF THE THRONE and unto what is upright. Thence beware of ever belittling any of the accredited wīrd and never denigrate one of them.”* (Masālik, v.1273-275)

To better depict Bamba’s overall vision of Sufism, let us use the metaphor of the Sufi Horse. Sufism was the swift thoroughbred Horse of Islam the Lord sent to Bamba, accompanied by the Virtuous Sufi Ancients, who tied up the Horse in front of his door. Bamba gave himself enough time to remove meticulously some unessential

harnesses Sufi emissaries loaded down the Divine Horse with and undertook then his trip back to the Lord. On his way back to the Divine Satisfaction Home, whenever Bamba found luggage fallen from the horse of Islam during its outward journey over space and time, he stopped. Without any concern about the color of the dust covering such Islamic luggage, which depends on the particular sand they fell over (Sunnit or Shiite, Sufi or Ahl Sunna), he bent down, took them (*ihyā* or revival or Renaissance), dusted them carefully (*tajdīd* or renewal) and put them back on the horse of Islam some passer-by have named now "Muridiyya". He constantly followed the Right Path, where the Horse's footprint were still visible, and avoided all cracks on the way left by the numerous struggles and quarrels to seize the Horse. So, he went on his way.

Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's deep vision of Islam is overall and very pragmatic, because he understood very early that most divisions among the Muslim community are spiritually artificial and that all Muslim sides are holding somehow a part of the Truth. Many were just overstressing their parts of the Truth and did not accept others may hold as well other parts, which are yet essential to piece together the original and whole Koranic Truth broken up by centuries of political and ideological dissensions within the Muslim people.

*"Those who split up their Religion, and become (mere) Sects,- each party rejoicing in that which is with itself!" (Qur-ān xxx.32)*

This indictment, which was originally intended to the People of the Book, seemed unfortunately to apply now to the Muslim community. Bamba's approach was an attempt to appeal against such a grim judgment. Now, this explains better the critics of some French scholars who labeled Bamba as having "*une pensée syncrétique et hétérodoxe*" (a syncretic and heterodox thinking) because of their failure to put him for good in a definite category among the standards categories of Sufism or other ideological schools, out of the rest. In fact, this critic turns out to be one of the most valuable praise ever paid to him. We may find in Bamba's thought and writings many of the different parts of the original Islamic Message scattered among the

differing factions of the Muslim community. This is the reason why most of Muslims who carefully took the time to read him and to get acquainted with his very history and thinking could not help feeling consideration for him and to approve at least some parts of his view. Such is the case with some modern Salafis (who are ranking him now among the Senegalese *salafu sālihīn* (virtuous ancients)), some Shiites (who appreciated his love and his great regard for Alī), Sufis and people of other religious persuasions.

Bamba's innovative practice of *wird* (set of pleas designed for a specific Sufi brotherhood) is another example which shows his broadminded vision. Even Murid disciples, who have not yet grasped such a vision, are still engaging in vain sectarian quarrels with members of other brotherhoods. The Sheikh have practiced all the accredited *wirds* of his milieu for at least ten years during his youth, prior to adopting the Qur-ān as his only *wird* and acknowledging the Prophet (PBH) as his only spiritual and intellectual master. Despite most brotherhoods have laid down special conditions and prerequisites to their members (which were regarded as quite mandatory rules), Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba never consented however to abide by some of those rules. For instance, he did not accept the principle set by some *tarīqas* to not visit other masters belonging to different brotherhoods, neither did he with the rule to never practice concurrently many *wirds*. His basic conception of *wirds* is these are just extracts of the Qur-ān and valuable pleas and *Dhikr* liable to bring the believer closer to the Lord, in perfect accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (PSL), nothing else. Thence, even after he founded officially the Muridiyya, the Sheikh happened to still transmit the other *wirds* to some of his disciples and to advise some new Murid disciples coming from other brotherhoods (Tijāni, Qādiri and so on) to keep up their previous *wirds* (though there are other mystical motivations justifying this practice). And even after having received his own *wird*, Bamba went on maintaining that the Qur-ān itself (where all *wirds* are extracted) is his personal *wird*. Moreover, all his biographies and all external testimonies about him agree on the kind and fraternal way he always treated his Muslim brethren, in his everyday life, in spite of their particular spiritual claims or belonging

to other brotherhoods. Bamba practically never prayed in favor for his Murid disciples alone in his writings, he was always using the words *mūminūn* (believers) or *muslimūn* (Muslims) in his numerous pleas instead.

Bamba's spiritual experience within the different brotherhoods, during his youth, and his various readings, were really helpful in giving him a positive and tolerant conception allowing him to make a synthesis of their benefits. On the eve of founding his own doctrine, he behaved as the bee who sucks up the nectar of all the flowers in the garden to make thereof honey for people. Time past in exploring other teachings and other visions enabled him to set up his own university where one may find all previous faculties. As his biographer, Sheikh Muhammad Bachir, puts it; "*[The Sheikh behave in the past as he did] because he was destined by God to be the Confluence of the rivers [of knowledge] and the Guardian of [spiritual] goods.*"

So, we are quite convinced that if, instead of the Sufi Horse, the Lord had decided to send to the Sheikh a Shiite Camel (in case he was living in the desert) or a Sunni Boat (in case he was living near a river), Bamba would have proceeded exactly in the same way. That is to say, sorting out carefully luggage he found in the vehicle, selecting essentials and throwing down non-essentials or detrimental, collecting every useful element found on the way back and belonging to the original loading of Islam.

### **Who really founded the Muridiyya?**

Indeed, all of this raises somewhat the interesting question of knowing if the Muridiyya is actually a *tariqa* (Muslim brotherhood or order), in the full and traditional meaning of the word, or not. We are tempted to answer "yes", sociologically speaking, but "no", spiritually and doctrinally speaking. Our contention is derived from our previous analysis and from the examination of some other scholarly material disregarded theretofore. Even if we are convinced that only more thorough research based on all Bamba's available writings could alone answer fully this question. Let us ask first a quite

unexpected question (scholars have not yet wondered, somewhat oddly)— Can we find the word *Murīdiyya* itself in Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s writings?

We haven’t yet, to the best of our knowledge. And all Murid specialists of Bamba’s writings we asked did not either.

Well, is it not peculiar that Bamba, universally known as “the founder of the Muridiyya order” (*mu’asasatul tariqatul Murīdiyya*), he who has spent all his lifetime in writing thousands of books about numerous spiritual themes, has never mentioned the name of his order in just one verse? He did neither write anywhere that he had founded a new brotherhood—which is highly peculiar. Does this mean that we are all wrong in giving him a title he himself never claimed anywhere? And what about our solemn titles we are giving him in our books and conferences all around the worlds? Does the “Muridiyya” really exist in the mind of his so-called founder? Are we all rowing in the wind since almost a century, o fellow scholars!?

Well, things are starting to seem a bit confusing and disconcerting now, aren’t they? All right. Let us get our breath back, and – why not? - drink one or two nice cups of hot *café Touba*, and give enough time to our old brains to restart properly, prior to resuming our eventful exploration. Well, this heavy swell on the open sea has driven us seasick (...)

Are we back? All right. The previous unanswered question leads us to other questions that are not less serious— *Who* has actually coined the word “Murīdiyya” then? And where does it come from?

Even if we have not yet met this word hitherto in Bamba’s books, on the other hand we can find, mostly in his earlier writings, the words *Murīd* and *Irāda* which have the same lexicographical root than *Murīdiyya*. It is noteworthy that even the Arabic word *Murīd* was not coined by Bamba himself. In fact, this word has always existed in Sufi tradition and it describes the beginner who aspires to attain God’s Satisfaction (*Irāda*) and high spiritual degrees (*maqāmāt*) with the help

of a well-guided Sufi master (*shaykh* or *murshid*) in charge of teaching him, of purifying progressively his heart and of educating his soul, through various spiritual exercises. It is likely that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba adopted this word, which is in fact an Arabic synonymous of “disciple” or “pupil”, from his numerous readings (Al Ghazālī, Kuntiyu authors of Senegal and Mauritanian masters). Thence, in naming his disciples by this word in his speech and in his first writings, Bamba’s main purpose was just to use *the appropriate existing word used by all Sufi masters to refer to their pupils and disciples*. Nothing else. Indeed, if we get back to the writings of some previous Sufi masters, those who founded brotherhoods or not, the common word they all used to refer to their disciples is this same word *murid*. When the Sheikh refers to his disciples in his writings, he equally uses “my pupil” (*tilmīzī*) or “my *murid*” (my disciple)—and it is unlikely that a Tijāni or Qādiri master calls his disciples “my tijāni” or “my qadiri”.

Furthermore, we were very interested to read afterwards the definition of the word *murid* in Wikipedia (January 2009), which backs up the universal meaning we emphasize above:

*“Murid is a Sufi term meaning ‘committed one’. It refers to a person who is committed to a teacher in the spiritual path of Sufism.*

*It also means “willpower” or “self-esteem,”. Also known as a Salik, a murid is an initiate into the mystic philosophy of Sufism. The initiation process is known as 'ahd or Bai'ath (pledge of allegiance [our note: called jebbalu in Wolof language]). Before initiation a Murid is guided and taught by a Murshid (Shaykh) or Pir who must first accept the initiate as his or her disciple. Throughout the instruction period, the murid typically experiences visions and dreams during personal spiritual exercises. These visions are interpreted by the murshid. The murid is invested in the cloak of the order upon initiation, having progressed through a series of increasingly difficult and significant tasks on the path of mystical development. Murids often receive books of instruction from*

murshids and often accompany itinerant murshids on their wanderings.

*Religious meanings:*

- Pir [**Persian** word for Sufi master].
- As a proper noun, the word Murid may refer to an adherent to the Muridiyya Sufi order based in **Senegal**.
- Murids are also members of a caste of the Yazidi-Religion (of **Iraq**).
- A Mureed is also the term for a follower of **Universal Sufism** (an universalist and spiritual movement founded in the beginning of the twentieth century).
- Also, the official word for a follower of the Nizari Ismailism, following the Aga Khan [a **Shiite** organization].”

It follows that the Senegalese Murids are not the only Muslims who are known as *murid* and this is a clue which shows, in our view, the *universality* of this term in the Islamic world and in the history of Sufism. Most of the Sufi tariqas agree to use the **generic term** of “murid” to refer to their members at the stage of disciples. As implied, for instance, by some book titles as “*Junnatul Murid*” (The Shield of the Disciple), written by Sīdi Mukhtār Kuntiyu, an old Qādiri master in West Africa, referred to by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba in *Masālik*. This means that there are as well Tijāni Murids, Qādirī Murids, Shiite Murids, Senegalese Murids, Persian Murids, Iraqī Murids and so on. All of them share the same fundamental basis—Islam.

There are other clues which may reinforce our contention about Bamba’s universal vision of his doctrine. Most of the brotherhoods who are known in Black Africa and in the world bear a name coined (mainly by their followers) from the name of their founders— the **Qādiriyya** originates from Sheikh Abd-al-**Qadīr** Jīlānī, the **Tijāniyya** originates from Sheikh Aḥmad **Tijānī**, the **Shādhaliyya** originates from Sheikh Abū Hasan al-**Shādhili**. If Bamba intended to found his own brotherhood, why hadn’t he called it the *Bambiyya*, or the *Mbakkīyya* or even the *Khādimīyya*, as it was the rule? And why his followers did not either?

And something else which is more striking is we have not yet read a book where Bamba asserted clearly he has founded a new brotherhood called the *Muridiyya*! Indeed, there is no need to tell; “I have founded such a thing” to be considered as its founder. Facts convey often more than words, but the *fact* is, when referring to what he brought in, Bamba never used the word “Muridiyya”. He used instead “revival” or “renewal” of Islam, of the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH), and so on. This leads us to this disconcerting remark—it seems that Bamba never intended to found a specific brotherhood called the *Muridiyya* and which is supposed to be different from previous brotherhoods! Such an perspective, if proven, calls fundamentally into question all the previous official scholarship on the “Muridiyya”.

So, what can explain then that such an appellation is reserved to Bamba’s disciples and the doctrine he brought in? And why disciples who affiliate themselves to Bamba’s doctrine name themselves “Murid” and refer to their organization as the “Muridiyya”? In our opinion, unless later new material prove the opposite, the term *Muridiyya* (*yoonu murit* in Wolof) has been created by former disciples Murid and/or by external observers who need to find a name to label the new community of disciples gathered round Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, following the appellation this latter was using to refer to his disciples and these adopted for themselves. This term meets of the common need to name an organization which differentiated itself from previous movements in many aspects, but which functioning is alike many brotherhoods in numerous aspects. History and sociology do not like gaps and a suitable noun had to be inevitably coined to label the new community. So, “Muridiyya” is the sociological term chosen to name the disciples and afterwards the doctrine of Ahmadou Bamba. It is likely that the term has been invented by Murid or Moorish writers who needed a suitable word based on the Arabic root *irāda* and which is shaped in the similar lexicographical form than standards names of all the known brotherhoods.

Even the French corresponding term “Mouridisme” is coined by Paul Marty, the influential colonial administrator and specialist of

Islam, who was initially using this word to label all Black Muslim movements he regarded as liable to threaten the colonial order or those he held as heterodox. He used, for instance the meaningful phrase “[Il existe une] efflorescence de Mouridismes en germe qui n’attendent qu’une occasion favorable pour se développer à l’égal de celui d’Amadou Bamba.” (There are many “Mouridismes” [in Senegal] which may develop as the Mouridisme of Amadou Bamba). Besides, Marty referred as well to the “Mouridisme” of Bou Kunta and of other Sufi masters in Senegal. He also unsuccessfully tried to name “Bambisme” Bamba’s doctrine. This reflects the general tendency to add “ism” suffix after new ideologies, the way previous French authors were naming Islam, with a certain pejorative connotation however—“Islamisme”, “Mahoméтанisme” and so.

In old Wolof Murid language, the spiritual path revived by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is referred to by the terms *ag taalibe* (the status of disciple), or *ag Murit* (being a Murid), or *yoonu Serigne Touba* (the path of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba), or later by *yoonu Murid* (the Murid path or brotherhood). Although the Wolof term *yoon* translates the double meanings of the Arabic word *tariqa* - which is a “path” etymologically and a “brotherhood” in Sufi lexicon - old Murid disciples were not used to say *tariqa Bamba* or *tariqa Serigne Touba* (Bamba’s brotherhood), unlike their Black Muslim brothers who often refer to their orders by *tariqa Shaykh* (Sheikh Ahmad Tijānī’s brotherhood) or *tariqatul Qādiriya* (Qādirī brotherhood). [This difference may well be explained also by Murids’ greater attachment to their native language].

However, one may recall, quite appositely, that some of the founders of old Sufi brotherhoods did not either name themselves the brotherhoods they have founded and that many were rather claiming the universality of their mission of revival as Bamba did it. This is true, but one of the main problems with Bamba’s doctrine is the traditional significance of *wird* practice in almost all Sufi brotherhoods (known in Senegal) which is not found in the Muridiyya. In fact *wirds* have always been, in all the popular brotherhoods in Black Africa, the

most distinctive and essential feature which confirms officially one's belonging to those organizations.

Bamba "founded" the Muridiyya in 1883 (1301 h.) without any specific *wird*. This moment is considered as corresponding to the foundation of the Muridiyya because of its marking the turning point when Bamba made clear his new method of education (*tarbiyya*) through *himmah* and *khidma*. The community of his disciples grew considerably in such conditions until 1904 (1322 h.) when he publicly asserted having received, during his second exile in Mauritania, his own *wird* (called *Mākhūz*) from the Prophet (PBH). That is to say, more than twenty years after the official foundation of the Muridiyya. And even after he received his own *wird*, he never stressed on the particular significance of Murid *wird*, as other brotherhoods have done in the past. As valuable and important as he might hold this *wird*, he never ranked it to the same spiritual level he claimed for his own *qasidas* (poems), the reason why very few Murid disciples are really using it. Bamba seemed to consider this *wird* just as a mystical *privilege* and *favor* the Lord has granted him, because he was promised by God and by His Prophet (PBH) to obtain everything the previous Saints were given and even far more.

It is also noteworthy and symbolical, in our view, that Bamba's Moorish biographer, who reported the story and who was present at Sarsara (Mauritania), had said that the Sheikh has received his *wird* during the special night of *Laylatul Qadr* (the Night of Power, which is highly regarded in Islam), during the month of Ramadan (the month of fasting), during the year 1322 h, during his second exile to Mauritania. The Night of Power is said in the Qur-ān (surat xcvi) to be the best night of the year and that it corresponds to 1,000 months of worship. The month of Ramadan is also unanimously held as the best month of the year. The year 1322 h. has been granted special favors by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba in his writings. He called him in fact *hāma shahidnā bil karam, hāma baksashin* (the year in which we testify having been honored [by God] 1322 h.) and he asserted that the *qasidas* he wrote after this date are spiritually superior to those he had written before, because of the special gifts the Lord granted Him in that year.

As for his second exile to Mauritania, the Sheikh wrote that this exile is very different from the first one to Gabon and that we must never confuse their purposes. Because the first one's purpose was a trial the Lord made him undergo in order he might combat his soul and purify it entirely through its numerous hardships. As for the second one, it was in fact a *reward* God had aimed to grant him, as he affirmed. All these symbolical coincidences are very meaningful for Sufi believers and are, in our view, a valid ground to say that Bamba held the *wird* imparted to him in such circumstances as a reward and a spiritual award for his work in Islam rather than a classical *wird* granted to a specific brotherhood.

### The Three Founders

There is another important clue which may show that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's deep vision of his doctrine goes beyond all kinds of sectarianism and takes its root in the basic principles of Islam. This document is an interesting correspondence (found in the *Majmūha* collected by the third Murid Caliph) in which the French General Governor asked 18 questions about the organization Bamba has founded. We may feel through his questions that the French Governor was regarding the Muridiyya like the other brotherhoods practiced in Black Africa and which originated first from old Arab Sufis and which were just spread locally by Black masters representing them in Senegal. Through the answers given by the Sheikh, we can better understand his own vision of the Muridiyya (which is, in his view, a synthesis and a revival of Islam) and his etymologic conception of this *tariqa* (which is just the kingly spiritual *path* of Islam leading towards God):

*"These following questions are asked by the General Governor of Saint-Louis (Senegal) to the great Sheikh [Ahmadou Bamba]:*

*Question 1: Who is the initial founder of the Muridiyya order?*

*Question 2: When was born this first founder of the tariqa?*

*Question 3: Where was he born exactly?*

*Question 4: Who were his first disciples?*

- Question 5: *What are the main motivations which led him to found this tariqa?*
- Question 6: *What are the cities he was travelling through?*
- Question 7: *Where did he die?*
- Question 8: *Which communities are still faithful to the initial tariqa?*
- Question 9: *Who is the first master who introduced this tariqa in Western Africa?*
- Question 10: *From which area exactly this tariqa penetrated Africa?*
- Question 11: *What is the present epicenter of this order where most of its followers are gathered?*
- Question 12: *Which people were first converted by the founder of this tariqa ?*
- Question 13: *What is the history of this brotherhood?*
- Question 14: *Who are the current leaders of this tariqa?*
- Question 15: *Where did their present leader [you are] originate from?*
- Question 16: *When did he convert to this tariqa?*
- Question 17: *Who has converted him?*
- Question 18: *What can he say about his own case?*

**[Answers of the Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba]**

*In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

*“Say: He is God, the One and Only.*

*God, the Eternal, Absolute*

*He begetteth not, nor is He begotten*

*And there is none like unto Him” (Qur-ān cxiv)*

Question 1: *Who is the initial founder of the Muridiyya order?*

**Answer:** *This Path has been initiated by these [three founders]:*

- **Faith in God** (Iman) *through absolute conviction in God’s Unity (Tawhīd)*
- **Submission to God** (Islām) *through worshipping practices in accordance with the rules of Islamic Law (Fiqh)*
- **Spiritual Perfection** (Ihsān) *through sincere worship allowed by [the rules of] Sufism*

Questions 2 and 3: *When was born this first founder of the tariqa and where was he born exactly?*

**Answer:** Whenever and wherever a Muslim was born, this Path was born again in such a place.

Question 4: Who were his first disciples?

**Answer:** All who aspire to get [religious] knowledge and who are seeking for it.

Question 5: What are the main motivations which led him to found this tariqa?

**Answer:** The main principle of this Path is the exclusive Face of God, the Honorable.

Question 6: What are the cities he was travelling through?

**Answer:** Every country where Muslims are living is among these cities.

Question 7: Where did he die?

**Answer:** Every place where a pillar of the different spiritual paths dies.

Question 8: Which community are still faithful to the initial tariqa?

**Answer:** All who conform to the rules of

- Faith in God (Mūminūn),
- Worshipping God (Muslimūn),
- And Spiritual Perfection (Muhsinūn).

Question 9: Who is the first master who introduced this tariqa in Western Africa?

**Answer:** That are [the three founders of the main tariqas]; Sheikh Abdul Qadīr Jīlāni, Sheikh Abul Hasan Shādhali, and Sheikh Ahmad Tījān (may God be Satisfied with them all).

Question 10: From which area exactly this tariqa has penetrated in Africa?

**Answer:** This Path was introduced [in Africa] by the Great Masters who have attained God – Blessed and Exalted – and who made people attain Him, wherever they may be.

*Question 11: What is the present epicenter of this order where most of its followers are gathered?*

*Answer: We have to acknowledge that nowadays there is no longer a place where genuine followers of this original Path are gathered.*

*Question 12: Which people were first converted by the founder of this tariqa ?*

*Answer: These people are all who are seeking sincerely the Countenance of God, from the time of the Prophet (PBH) to the Virtuous Ancients until today.*

*Question 13: What is the history of this tariqa?*

*Answer: It began from the Hegira of the Prophet (PBH) until [this present moment] 1345 h. (1926).*

*Question 14: Who are the current leaders of this tariqa?*

*Answer: There is no longer a true leader of this Path.*

*Question 15: Where did their present leader [you are] originate from?*

*Answer: The forebears of who that is answering these questions [myself] were believers (mūminūn), worshippers (muslimūn) and sincere in their worship (muhsinūn).*

*Questions 16, 17 and 18: When did he convert to this tariqa? Who has converted him? What can he say about his own case?*

*Answer: Such a Path was transmitted to me by masters I thought first authentic, which proved to be false. God – Blessed and Exalted – decided to exile me to the sea [Gabon] and to grant me, during this exile, the three main wirts (Qādiriyyah, Shadhaliyyah and Tijāniyyah) through the Prophet (PBH) himself, without any other mediator, due to the numerous actions of Khidma I was performing in his Service. Afterwards, God Himself – Blessed and Exalted – entrusted to me the Qur-ān and Islam. And assuredly “God is a witness to what we say.” (Qur-ān xxviii.28)”*

From all of this, we may contend that, ideologically speaking, Bamba's deep view of Islam goes beyond founding a formal and distinctive brotherhood, and that the "Muridiyya" is not a brotherhood, in the traditional meaning, if we refer to the intentions and to the basic spiritual project of the Servant of the Prophet. It is rather a doctrine intended to revive and to renew the pristine message of Islam and to adapt it to space and time.

However, if we consider strictly certain perceptible sociological aspects, we will notice that this doctrine has taken on the features of a formal Sufi brotherhood, in many extents. The reason why it is not a mistake, in our view, to treat it *sociologically* as a Sufi order (*tariqa*), as all scholars are compelled to do, provided one bears in mind its doctrinal basis which excludes any kind of deliberate limitation or exclusion within the Muslim community. In fact, such ambivalence originates from Bamba's synthetic approach of Islam we discussed earlier. Because, although the deep spiritual project of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is to renew Islam, he was also convinced that the Sufi Horse is fully endowed with all the features which can enable him to realize his project. Brotherhoods have always been the sociological forms which have played a key part in spreading Islam in West Africa and which were more likely to adapt to their cultural milieu, despite certain problems. This is one of the reasons why Bamba and his disciples adopted naturally this organizational form which corresponds better to their objectives and which is more conform to their conception of Sufism and Islam. In this regard, what we called "Muridiyya" is just the group of Muslims who have openly acknowledged the spiritual value of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and who commit themselves to carry out his vision and projects through *khidma* (or *ligéeyal Serigne Touba* in Wolof).

In fact, Murids have replicated all the features of the standard brotherhoods they regard as useful for attaining their particular objectives. Sometimes they have adapted some of these features according to specific considerations or visions. This is the case, for instance, with the pyramidal structure of the order, characterized by the hierarchical stratification of clerics related, through bloody ties or

allegiance, to Bamba or to one of his renowned disciples. In addition to the widely discussed theme of Baraka-laden sheikhs common to many tariqas, the principle of appointing a sheikh (*seexal* in Wolof) in the Muridiyya seems rather to be originally and essentially driven by two main concerns—(1) competences transfer and (2) tasks sharing out. This particularity is somewhat due to the central place of *khidma* in the Muridiyya. Unlike other traditional wurd-centered tariqas where the nomination of a new sheikh involves often a certain ceremonial (wearing a symbolic turban or cloak, receiving a stick, or a written *ijāza* which is an official authorization to transmit the wurd), the *seexal* process is less implicit in the Muridiyya. Besides hereditary dimensions common to all Sufi orders, the status of sheikh is primarily indicated by the level of responsibility and the signs of confidence shown by Bamba (or by another sheikh) to one of his disciples—the order to found a new village, to teach schools, leading important works and so on. This explains why Bamba never consecrated officially and formally any Murid sheikh. Disciples who are formerly treated and held as sheikhs in the Muridiyya are those who have been given high responsibilities or a certain autonomy (*wàcce*) or publicly praised (*ngërëm*) for their merits by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. So, this position was initially endowed with two dimensions that are linked; **mystical** (relating to *Baraka*) and merely **organizational**. These two dimensions are interlinked in the Muridiyya, because abilities and full commitment to *khidma* are regarded as a kingly source of *baraka*. Such an informal mode of nomination, in stressing on the value of measurable merit, has given to the Muridiyya much social flexibility and mobility within the traditional hierarchy of social classes, in spite of drawbacks aroused sometimes by some who can proclaim themselves sheikhs out of any control. But, combined with Bamba's principles of "affirmative action" (we will discuss further), this system allowed some disciples from humble backgrounds to raise, thanks to their work, to very prominent positions within the order.

This sociological dimension of Bamba's doctrine of revival, called "the Muridiyya order", can be likened to a *company* (a building firm for instance) in charge of carrying out the projects of its founder.

The main projects entrusted to this company by the founder is to build mosques, schools and other urban facilities likely to renew his native city (Islam). The founder is very conscious that, without a well-organized and structured company, made up of really motivated staff (Murid disciples), his noble and great objectives would remain dead letter—the reason why he set up different departments within the company (work sharing in the Muridiyya) and appointed managers (sheikhs) at their heads. A *General* manager (Caliph) is in charge of supervising all activities, in collaboration with the board of directors (local caliphs), chiefs departments (sheikhs and *jëwriɲ*), and staff (Murid disciples). Chiefs departments can be concurrently involved in other departments activities. Among the company departments initially set up by the founder himself there are :

-**Training** Department, in charge of educating and forming future staff, in training centres (*daaras*) led by proficient teachers like Serigne Ndam Abdou Rahmane Lo, Serigne Mbacke Bousso and other sheikhs.

-**Administrative** Department, in charge of coordinating all activities and of representing the founder before third party, led by Mame Thierno Ibra Faty (Bamba's right-hand man) and other sheikhs.

-**Accounts and Financial** Department, in charge of collecting and managing funds—acquisition of holdings (*haddiya*), salaries, investments and profit sharing. This department was led by Mame Sheikh Anta, Massourang and other sheikhs.

-**Operations** Department, in charge of supervising all technical activities and manual work on the site, led by Mame Cheikh Ibrahima Fall, Serigne Mandoumbe and other sheikhs. In addition to these key departments, other have been added in accordance with the company growth.

In order to grow and to attain its basic objective (which is building the Islamic City, even if funds can be partially used to pay salaries and to remunerate investments), standard conditions of good management must be met. Thus the company must be run by qualified and genuine managers (good sheikhs), chiefs managers and staff must all abide by company rules and charter (Bamba's

teachings), staff have to be constantly motivated (*himmah*) and fully committed in their jobs (*khidma*), they should be also convinced in their real prospects of (social and spiritual) promotion according to their level of *khidma*. Managers must always remember that staff (disciples) under their supervision and control are hired by the company itself, and their work and means (as other current assets) are to be devoted to the company's objectives, but not to personal interests. Potential elements which can slow down the company growth are unqualified or disloyal managers (deceitful sheikhs), mismanagement of some unskilled heirs who inherited free shares from the founder or positions from their relatives, demotivated staff (without *himmah* and *khidma*), disregard for company rules, embezzlings and use of the company means (*haddiya*) for external purposes etc. The Muridiyya Company was so successful that it has set up international branches (*dahiras*) where its activities are currently performed as well.

Such an image, which captures many aspects of the running and structuring of the Murid order, implies the difference to be made between Bamba's **doctrine** (embodied by the company objectives, and what is commonly called *ag murit* or *Irada*) relating to renew original Islamic principles and the **organization**, in the form of a brotherhood (embodied by the company and its management - what is commonly called *yoonu murit* or *Muridiyya*), in charge of carrying out this doctrine. Though this organization may be considered as just a tool, a particular method, to achieve such main objectives, it would remain really significant and even vital as long as it performs the mission assigned to it. However, like any method, this *company* can experience all problems, misconducts and conflicts inherent to *human* communities and which explain why a *human resources* department is always necessary within a big company. Though many organizational and managerial methods have evolved since the founder had passed away, they must be constantly upgraded according to new circumstances and realities of global large-scale firms.

### Muslim Fraternity

Bamba's conception of Islam and of Muslim Community is an overall perspective, excluding all political, ideological, racial or semantic divisions created by historical differing approaches. For Bamba, although all Muslims are not alike and well-guided, to every extent, most categorizations are artificial. Some Muslims claimed for themselves to be the true *Ahl Sunnah* (People attached to the Authentic Sunnah) out of the others, though any lucid Muslim would never consent to be excluded from this circle. Sufism, Sunnism, Salafism and the like are just cross-meaning notions, since any well-balanced Sufi would never accept to be out the Sunnah of Muhammad (PBH), likewise any clear-sighted Sunni would never decline to have his heart perfectly purified as theorized by Sufis, and all of them are claiming their respect and fidelity to the Virtuous Ancients (*Salaf*). All true Muslims have fundamentally the same goals, and they only differ in their methods, their accredited sources and the outcomes of their perspectives (in spite of misguided tendencies and excesses sometimes). Notwithstanding this ultimate unity, each side would not in the least hesitate to treat as their deadly enemies other Muslims who do not share their perspectives and to label them as unbelievers (*kāfirūn*), or giving partners to God (*mushrikūn*), or hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*). Today Muslims are ready to kill other Muslims and to throw bombs in mosques full of other believers, during Friday prayer, just because other Muslims are not sharing their ideological views. Bamba's vision of Muslim fraternity, in spite of all their real doctrinal differences and cultural diversities, can be summed up in these two verses;

*"Never consider as an enemy anyone you hear proclaiming that there is no other god but Allah."*

*"Do love every Muslim for his faith in God."*

When praying for good and mercy for his Muslim brothers, the Sheikh never made distinction between Sufis, Shiite, Sunni and any other Muslim persuasions, as shown by his pleas in *Matlabu Shifai* (Seeking for Remedy):

*“[O Lord!] Provide Thy remedy to all Muslims, in this world and in the Hereafter, and protect them from fear and sorrow on the Beyond.*

*Grant them salvation and forgiveness, treat them with benevolence and never show resentment against them for their numerous wrongdoings.*

*O Thou the Only One! Even if they disobey Thy orders out of heedlessness, know that [in their inmost hearts] they assign no partners to Thee.*

*And it is obvious that their weak bodies cannot in the least bear Thy ordeals.*

*[In spite of their numerous transgressions] their hearts will never turn towards someone else but Thee.*

*However, the inclination of their members for worldly pleasures has led them to the basest acts.*

*Do not punish them for their [own errors] which could in the least depreciate Thy Grandeur, and grant them Thy [favors] which are of no use to Thee.*

*O Lord! Thou who can reverse the hearts, turn our hearts away from vices.*

*Inspire us love for all Muslims and protect us from evil aroused by wrongdoers.*

*Make of all Muslims our beloved brethren—so will we be safeguarded from harm.*

*Guide to the Right Way all Muslims, men and women, and forgive all their sins in the Last Day.”*

This kind of tolerance and love transcends all social and racial considerations, and focus on the spiritual and moral value of the individual, in acknowledging humbly that only God may ultimately judge His servants and in reminding that we are not even sure of our moral superiority and of our salvation once before the Lord.





# Wave Six

## In the Name of PROGRESS

### **Bamba's Affirmative Action**

This open-minded philosophy of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is likewise extended to other social divisions. Bamba's writings as well as his very life have shown that the only criterion by which man must be judged is his moral value. Accordingly, he never agreed to conform to the rules of social stratification of the Wolof ethnic group, which reserves some particular works to certain classes and castes out of the others. Thus, the Sheikh did not hesitate to entrust to disciples of noble descent tasks which were traditionally considered as devoted alone to lower classes (like handicrafts), or to raise deserving Murids from humble background to high functions in the community (like teaching, or being a sheikh at the head of disciples from all classes and all ethnic groups).

Such a policy of "equal opportunities" and "affirmative action", despite still enduring social resistances today, extended to woman status in Wolof society. All Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's daughters received a good education and were all taught the Holy Qur-ān and religious sciences. What is amply proven by the numerous and fine poems some of them wrote, as well as in Arabic and Wolof (Sokhna Maïmounatoul Kabir, Sokhna Amy Sheikh, Sokhna Maïmounatoul Sakhir etc.) There is no need to say that this

was very unusual in the class of *doomi sokhna* (Wolof religious aristocracy). Bamba's daughters had also the rare privilege to have their own disciples (men and women), just like other male sheikhs—which is a big first in Senegalese recent male-dominated history. Some of them (like Sokhna Mouslimatou) set up very ambitious self-managed food production units. An evidence of the spiritual advancement the Muridiyya promoted for women in Senegal is the high regard Murids are holding Bamba's daughters and mother. Indeed, Sokhna Diaara is one of the rare women in Western Africa to whom a commemoration (*Mâggal*) is dedicated, at Porokhane (South Senegal), where thousands of devotees gathered every year to pay her tribute. So, even if Islamic conception of household and of gender-based sharing out remains essentially different from Western individualistic and libertarian vision, we may find through Bamba's teachings, inspired by the Prophet's life (PBH), valuable clues and enough ground to give more significance to woman gender today, within the limits set by the Lord and by nature however.

### **Everlasting Ends and Changing Means**

In fact such an interesting potential of social progress, in Bamba's thinking, is an outcome of his dynamic approach of religion. In claiming his adherence to Sufism, the Sheikh began, as usual in his time, by subscribing to most of the teachings taken from the accredited Sufi masters of his youth. But he progressively freed himself of their spiritual and intellectual tutorship. This is why he undertook to redefine many social and spiritual traditional concepts he was taught before and imposed boldly new definitions and new perspectives his milieu was not really accustomed to. This explains also why the quality and the import of his writings have made significant progress the further he discovered new prospects and inspirations.

Though referring often to the Virtuous Ancients (*Salafu Sālihīn*), particularly in his first writings, Bamba cannot be however labeled as a Salafi, in every sense. Insofar as he claimed that, as valuable as the teachings of the Pious Forefathers may be, he felt

completely free to change whatever method they provided him with, whenever he realized that such methods are no longer suitable to his own space and time. Bamba's intellectual and spiritual approach differentiates well between mere *methods* (often subject to progress and change according to space and time) and spiritual *aims* (which are fundamental and often static, as the immutable importance of knowledge and worship). So, all methods are doomed to be updated and to upgrade one day, as long as all conditions regarded as compulsory are gathered—telling religious essentials from non-essentials, differentiating what is really relating to faith from mere traditions, proving that suggested updates are spiritually and materially better than existing methods, appointing proficient and righteous masters entitled alone to deliver authoritative advice, enforcing changes with great skills and in accordance with the specific realities of the milieu.

On second thoughts, this conception seems to be more conform to the Islamic principle of *progress* shown by the adaptation and the update of many verses of the Qur-ān, according to different sociological and geopolitical situations. This dynamics-and-statics dialectics is, to some extent, what other African authors, like Senghor, called later *enracinement et ouverture* (rooting and opening up). Indeed, such a principle of *Tajdid* (Renewal) is vital to grasp the vitality of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's philosophy and its high potential for progress and adaptability. On one hand, we may say that Bamba is a conservative (*muhāfiz*) as far as moral and spiritual principles are concerned, but he is in the same time a renovator (*mujadid*) regarding methods and their necessary flexibility. This is one of the ideological clues, in our view, which are likely to answer to the old disturbing question of many scholars, "What can explain the unusual ability of the Muridiyya to maintain cohesion and continuity across space and time, and to adapt to changing factors?"

### **Innovation and Progress in Islam**

Here are a few examples which may illustrate the social and intellectual progressivism of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thought. In

traditional Senegalese Muslim society, everything from the past and from the ancestors was almost regarded as naturally sacred. Imitating the Ancients and respecting their opinions at the point of making them sacred, is assuredly a common denominator of all societies in decline. That was the case at the time of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. Therefore, any opinion which came from the Virtuous Ancients was often held as correct and undeniable. As for the contemporaries, their sole roles were to explain such opinions and to defend them. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba invited his contemporaries to go beyond such a follow-my-ancestor attitude and he wrote in this instance:

*“Do not think that the Divine grace is just reserved to the Ancients. For, a man living in present times may well know secrets which were ignored by men living in old times.*

*And may not my low renown in this generation divert thee from giving credit to this [book].” (Masālik, v. 51-52,46)*

There is no need to say that such an attitude was not at all usual in that time. Another example of the modernity of Bamba’s thinking is the new teachings aids and methods he dared to bring in West African traditional educational system, mainly based on textbooks and theoretical instruction. Conscious that many were condemned to stay out of the realm of true knowledge by their inability to be given textbook instruction, and that such a method was just one *method* among others, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba innovated in updating Senegalese *daara* (school) model. He created, along with the traditional theoretical schools, the *daara tarbiya* (center for practical education and training through work and spiritual exercises) run by educated instructors. To such disciples who were under his direct authority, and who were not receptive to textbook teaching (or not), he gave practical education and oral teaching in Wolof language, using various illustration methods to convey his messages—lines, marked points on the sand, examples, parables, comparisons, and so on. (It is noteworthy that such a method has been used by the Prophet (PBH) himself with his companions.) Many who failed to grasp this innovation in the domain of teaching (which does not exclude

theoretical teaching in the least) assumed that Bamba showed little regard for textbook teaching, in spite of his numerous books and the founding of many Murid theoretical schools (*daara al Quran* and *daara Majalis*). Moreover, the recent introduction, in many modern educational systems around the world, of practice-oriented schools for pupils considered as unfit for theoretical teaching is evidence of the relevance of Bamba's early innovation.

Besides, such an interesting dichotomy between **theoretical** knowledge (*Ilm*) and genuine **practice** of one's knowledge (*amal*) is conform to the differentiation Bamba always made (following other masters) between pure speculation and worship based on reliable knowledge. This is the true relationship between religious theory and practice, for the Sheikh:

*"Do know, o my Brother!, that knowledge prevails over action, being its principle and root - bliss to whom that is endowed with! Nevertheless, knowledge could not bear fruit and bring profit without its subsequent putting into practice—so try to combine both of them. Few actions based on accurate knowledge will, of a surety, entail more Reward than a host of actions performed with ignorance. Useful knowledge [in the Hereafter] is that which has been learnt and taught for the Sole Countenance of the MAJESTIC LORD, the ONE. But not that which has been learnt for superficial debates, making parade and searching for glamour - know thou this!"* (Masālik, v. 103-107)

For the Sheikh, philosophy and other intellectual exercises are praiseworthy as long as they enable man to combine his material and spiritual progress, in this world and in the Hereafter. As long as they do not hinder him to get nearer to his Lord and do not lead him astray from the right path and to overstep the limits imposed by the Lord. For him, knowledge is not noble by *nature*, but it becomes dignified only through its suitable *expression*. Because knowledge acquires its true value only through genuine and clear-sighted *practice*. As Bamba wrote it:

*“Indeed, any who fears not the LORD of the Worlds is far from being learned; had he mastered all the branches of knowledge!” (Masālik, v. 183)*

So, contemplation, meditation and philosophy (etymologically “love for wisdom”) are only valuable if they can render man really *wise*, that is to say when his *actions* correspond strictly to his accurate *knowledge* and can lead him to happiness and peace in this world and in the Hereafter. High spiritual degrees and purity of heart granted by such a uprightness are the ground where are sowed the seeds of true knowledge provided by the Lord to His righteous servants. This is the reason why the Sheikh has always stressed on the great import to favor practicing one’s knowledge over doctrinal unproductive controversies (as the shown, during his exile in Mauritania, by the fierce argument between Moorish scholars about the *māhiya* (how God can be *with* a creature?) to which the Sheikh answered with a severe warning to both sides.)

Another interesting example of Bamba’s concern to adapt tools to people but not the opposite, is his efforts to make old religious books easier for modern students. In fact, Black Muslims used to teach with ancient books, written in different spaces and times, in forms and sizes no longer suitable - which impacted sometimes on the effectiveness of teaching. Bamba noticed that most of such books, though valuable, were not adapted to the local realities.

*“The works of the [old masters] are presently neglected by most of the people of this generation, due in part to their voluminous sizes...And I have revived in this book the lights of knowledge people have rendered dead letter in their errant ignorance” (Masālik, v. 24, 32)*

Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba dared, during his very youth, when he was still his father’s assistant in the *daara*, to meddle with such sacrosanct books, in putting them into verses and in giving freely his opinions and his own analysis of the great masters’ writings, whenever needs be. For instance:

*“As for the Advantages ensuing from regular reading of the Qur-ān, they are held in great regard by the Stainless Master [Al-Yadālī] who said; “Whoever wishes to draw nearer to his LORD, let him read the Qur-ān ceaselessly”. I do add for myself: “Whoever wishes to earn GOD’s Satisfaction, let him read constantly the Qur-ān and meditate on its verses.” (Masālik, v. 527-529)*

*“[After having expounded the differing opinions of the masters regarding the case of a worshipper who is ignoring the legal rules of worship—his act of worship is accepted or not?]. For my part, I do put this : “Our LORD forbids to any person recognized as accountable for his actions to perform any practice of worship, prior to knowing the particular legal conditions which rule it.” Such a point of view is verily reliable. Indeed any such who ignores his religious obligations and who persists in not asking information thereon is bringing ruin upon himself and is wronging himself.” (Tazawudu Cighār, v.161, 163)*

Bamba’s thought is that men are not at all compelled to stay stuck in an intellectual timewarp, and Muslims should not be a hidebound community obsessed by their glorious past. Such a rigid misconception and lack of adaptability of Muslims is assuredly one of the main causes which have dramatically precipitated Islamic civilization decline in the past. Contrary to this vision, Bamba’s attitude has proven that he believes deeply that progress in Islam is possible and has to come. Unlike many Salafis who hang on the famous principle of absolute superiority of the first generations of Muslims (based on some hadiths about the illustrious pioneers and following *tābihūn*, and on some verses understood as the “End of Muslim History”), Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba thinks that, even if Muslim precursors are eternally granted exceptional favors, God’s Grace will never end and is closed to nobody, as he asserted it in *Masālik*:

*“As goes the saying: “Drizzle may well precede pouring rain, however pouring rain is far better to the crops than drizzle” O thou that art scorning my work! Do call to thy remembrance this*

*Prophetic maxim (hadith): “My community is like a rain, [no one knoweth which part thereof is the best—the first part or the last part]”* (Masālik, v. 53-54)

Such a conviction about possible spiritual and material progress of the modern generations of Muslims, which eludes nowadays many Muslims excessively haunted by *bid’a* (blameworthy spiritual **innovation**) and *akhīru zamān* (End of time), runs counter to the idea of unavoidable moral and spiritual decadence widely advocated by most of Muslim preachers. The Sheikh is far from being fatalistic. For him, there can be among modern and coming generations some who are as valuable or even more valuable than most of the Muslims of past generations. Humanity can improve if men strive to comply with true spirituality and if they use their powerful modern means to achieve God’s Satisfaction instead of letting them lead humankind to animality, as it is often the case today. Thus, in founding a new city (Touba) he planned to be a place most propitious to worship for coming generations, in educating generations of Muslims, in rekindling the dignity of his people, in reviving and adapting many essential concepts to his space and time, Bamba made a gamble on the future and demonstrated that all is not lost. Unless we really want it.

### **Murid Grounds for Yes-we-can Attitude**

A last example showing that Bamba’s thought was a length ahead the spiritual conceptions of most of his fellow Black Muslims, is his self-confidence which led him to found a Sufi doctrine (or brotherhood), in a relatively young age. Indeed, most of Senegalese Muslims were convinced to be Muslims only if they become members of one of the two most prominent existing brotherhoods, founded by Arab Sufi Masters—the Qādiriyya and the Tijāniyya. Besides, their highest spiritual ambitions within these brotherhoods were to be conferred one day the title of *Shaykh* in the Qādiriyya or that of a *Muqaddam* in the Tijāniyya. Although Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba has always advocated the importance of Sufi orders and the merit of their respective founders, he was also convinced that brotherhoods are not

the ultimate end and that their founders, like Sheikh Abdul Qadīr Al-Jilāni and Sheikh Ahmad At-Tijāni, reached their eminent ranks by the Grace of God and by their sincerity in devotion. The Sheikh began by practicing the *wirds* of such brotherhoods and of others, with the ambition to reach the spiritual ranks of their founders and - why not? - to surpass them one day. With this daring and Yes-we-can conviction, which constitutes the greatest level of *Himmah* (infinite spiritual ambition), the Sheikh undertook to reach the highest spiritual and intellectual degrees. He made so many efforts that he eventually attained a level which allowed him to no longer recognize as his spiritual master anyone but the Prophet himself (PBH). Hence, he founded his own brotherhood (or specific spiritual doctrine)—a big first in all African history. It is known that after his mystical allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad (PBH), Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba ceased to make frequent references to his previous masters (Al-Ghazali, and others Sufi writers). While still holding them in high regard, he stopped introducing himself as he was used to in his earlier books; “As a disciple of my father [who taught me], I say”. “Seniority” and race were no longer valid criteria of superiority for him. He wrote:

*“And never be dissuaded from holding this book in due regard by my belonging to the black race. Because [as quoted from the Book] the most honorable human being before GOD is who that fears HIM the most, without any possible doubt. So black skin does not imply insanity or ill understanding” (Masālik, v.47-49)*

In a second little-known version of *Masālik* he wrote later (and which has been lost, except some verses), he went even further and revised this last verse; “So black skin does not imply denial of the Divine Grace or of attaining high spiritual degrees.” Bamba’s assertion of his own personality and identity is very unusual in those times and foreshadowed a radical mental revolution in the relationship between Black Muslims and Moorish masters. This attitude also called into question the would-be natural intellectual superiority of White men over Blacks which was one the key argument of the upholders of “civilizing behind-the-times Black peoples” through colonization (“*le fardeau de l’homme blanc*” or “*la mission civilisatrice*” as they called it).

In saying “yes, we, Blacks, can write books, we can think, we can reach the highest spiritual and moral degrees”, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba was also maintaining that the era when Blacks must quite necessarily consider Moorish as their natural leaders is in the past and that the time has come when Blacks can be the spiritual as well intellectual masters of Moorish and White men as well. The only valid criterion must be fearing of the Lord ensuing from reliable and deep knowledge, moral qualities and worship of God, in accordance with the basic principles of Islam Although this absolute racial equality in Islam, constantly advocated and reminded by the Prophet (PBH) to his people, had always to face most Arabs’ psychological and cultural representations of their Black co-religionists as former slaves. This strong affirmation of self-confidence of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba enabled him later to be ranked among the most prominent Sufi masters of all times by many Mauritanian poets and Moorish Sufis who regarded themselves as his humble disciples. Such attitude contributed much in reviving Black Muslims’ self-assurance and into developing a strong Murid identity.

However, such a claiming against negative conceptions about Black race is not intended at all to uphold any spiritual difference on a racial basis, as some seem to assume it. Indeed, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s teaching, in itself, does not convey any idea liable to substantiate seriously the assumption of having “negriified” Islam (as President Senghor put it once) or of forging a form of Islam more suitable to Black Africans. His sole pretence and purpose was the renewal of the original principles of Islam, out of any racial or social coordinates.

In fact, though refusing the so-called intellectual and spiritual hegemony of the Moors, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba built up very solid relationship with many of them. Mostly during his second exile in Mauritania (he was calling *Ard Sālihīn*, the Land of the Virtuous), when a few Moor tribes swore allegiance to him, he a Black master—a first, to our knowledge. Mauritanian masters, among which some were known yet for their natural condescension towards their black

peers, and for their far-reaching knowledge, were so impressed by Bamba's spiritual and intellectual levels that they dedicated him hundreds of impassioned praise-poems - another first in Senegalese history - which have been gathered in a major collection in Touba Public Library.

### **The Witnesses of the Written Miracles**

There are definitely too much to say about these questions, but let us content ourselves in agreeing that one cannot understand perfectly the ideological basis of the Muridiyya unless he becomes familiar with all these notions conveyed in Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's writings and other internal literary materials we call "Murid parallel writings", like biographies, hagiographies, *Wolofal* (poems written in Wolof language by Murid authors) etc.

Among important parallel writings, which deserve analysis and which may be of great interest through meaningful cross-checking, we must count Bamba's official biographies, and reliable accounts made by close disciples who lived with him and which are gathered in written *majmūha* or in audiocassettes. Such as the important reports of Serigne Mabandji Ndiaye, Serigne Cheikh Fatou Tacko Diop, Serigne Demba Kébé, Serigne Habibou Mbacke, Serigne Mor Seck Ridial and others. These disciples, who were unanimously recognized as reliable and God-fearing, gave highly valuable clues, through stories and anecdotes they personally witnessed, about the thinking and the stance of their Sheikh regarding numerous matters—among which some may be very unexpected, as household, the importance of teaching girls, his outstanding exegesis of some Koranic verses and hadiths, his opinions about many daily situations, his attitude in private life etc. Their testimonies, after due cross-checking through classical academic tools, could constitute an important complementary element crucial to analyze some writings and attitudes of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. Because spiritual experience is not easy to communicate and we can grasp it perfectly only through the Sufi 's everyday life, as Anawati wrote it:

*“Mystical experience is essentially personal and cannot be fully interpreted outside the analysis of the Sufi’s life itself, beyond his mere verbal expression. We need to know in detail the accurate behavior, during his life, of the author we intend to study, as well as his conduct towards his close relations, and his attitude towards death. All of this must be reported by critical biographers - and not only through pure legends - so as to ascertain if what the author related us from his experiences was just pure literary fiction or the accurate description of a phenomenon he personally experienced. Indeed, nothing is easier than repeating wonderful maxims or reciting marvelous prayers. Which is quite different from producing them spontaneously prompted by a choice [Divine] Grace.”*

Reliable accounts on Bamba’s actions and doings could play the same role as the hadiths did, in helping to document the Prophet’s teachings in many questions the Qur-ān gave no explicit details. Scholars who attempted to study the Muridiyya, without examining carefully these vital internal sources, chose instead to rely often on misguided Murid disciples who never received training or instruction by the Sheikh himself or never lived intimately with him. They chose also to content themselves with the tendentious official reports of the jealous native colonial representatives, or the doubtful “scientific” studies of Paul Marty and the like.

Indeed, all these examples above have shown us how Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s writings are crucial to appreciate fully his philosophy and the doctrinal foundations of the Muridiyya, and how the scholarly dearth noticed in this purpose may be critical. Most of the mistakes and misunderstandings conveyed by previous works on the Muridiyya originate often in their attempts to construe this organization basically from interpretations of Murids’ opponents or of some Murids (even though these happen to be ignorant or to have misconceptions of Bamba’s true writings and teachings), disregarding so its fundamental ideological basis. This is typically the same mistake made by some scholars who identified Islam with the misconducts or the misconstructions of some little-balanced Muslims—this is what we call the “down-top” perspective.

# Wave Seven

## Standing up “Crawling” Studies

Even past occasional attempts to study Bamba’s writings focused essentially on the interpretation of such writings *by the Murids themselves* and how it affects their social behaviors. But they never endeavored to construe the true meaning of these writings, according to *Bamba himself*. Most of the time, scholars content themselves with quoting occasionally some verses met with in the few existing French translations of the qasidas or taken from interviews with some Murid disciples (who can distort many primary meanings). Furthermore, such verses and reports are often taken out of their initial contexts and without the essential preliminary ground-level investigations and methodical studies on their original sources. Another problem raised sometimes by the full reliance to Murid disciples’ isolated interpretations, without due cross-checking with the doctrinal basis of the Muridiyya, is the fact that the perceptions of the Murids who are living in different spaces and times may be quite different, while their theoretical reference basis is supposed to be the same—Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s teachings.

Through this new prism, we are tempted to say that most of the scholarship on the Muridiyya to date is rather *crawling* around the epiphenomena of social facts. Because it has been too often *dazzled* by some striking distinctive features of this organization and has been

frequently *confused* by biases and intellectual short cuts. So, what we need now is to help this scholarship back to its *two feet*—meaning, (1) analyzing carefully and thoroughly its founder’s **writings** and **everyday life** and (2) confronting these with **historical facts** and their **interpretations** through Murids’ practices and beliefs.

What can explain such a lack of research on Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s writings, despite the substantial scholarship on the Muridiyya? We found some main reasons, among others, which can give us a few keys to the riddle.

### **The Collateral Damages of Marx and Marty**

First, many of the scholars who studied the Muridiyya, up to now, are social scientists who were far more interested in the visible distinctive features of the Murids—economic vitality and psychological motivations, social behaviors, political commitment, conservative tendencies along with adaptability to modernity, immigration etc. Moreover, until now, many scholars are, somehow or other, influenced by the prevailing and enduring paradigms laid down by French colonial literature on the Muridiyya led by Paul Marty, the influential colonial administrator. This is somewhat what Babou reproached to this trend in saying:

*“Scholarly interpretations of the Muridiyya reflect a general trend that, until recently, has marked the literature on religion in general and on religion in the former European colonies in South Asia and Africa in particular. One defining characteristic of this trend is the importance ascribed to economic and political aspirations spurred by colonization as the major causative and explanatory factors of religious social movements...Terence Ranger observed that “all religious movements...have been treated as new and as explicable in terms of special pressures and transformations of colonialism.”*

Indeed, this is just one of the several “collateral damages” of the lasting and deep influence of the Marxist methodology in social

sciences. We are convinced that such a lack of concern about the real ideological and spiritual basis of the Muridiyya are at the root of numerous misunderstandings and clichés about the Murids, largely portrayed as ignorant, fanatic, credulous and heedless of Islamic orthodoxy. These clichés, based on the study of particular samples, were further legitimated by the racist concept of “Islam noir” (so-called form of Islam practiced specifically by Black Africans) theorized by Paul Marty and other orientalist, who considered it as less pure than “Arab Islam” and as more akin to paganism. This explains certainly why the reputed very serious gazetteer “Le Grand Dictionnaire du Monde” describes the Murids in such incredible words:

*“Murids have adapted Islam to African specificity—so, when they perform their prayers, they turn **towards the tomb** of their great marabout, Amadou Bamba, but not towards the Mecca.”*

We may also read in Wikipedia (January 2009), and in many other internet resources about the Muridiyya, very amazing descriptions:

*“Every year, millions of Murids all over the world make a pilgrimage to Touba (Magal), worshipping at the mosque and honoring the memory of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. On one occasion during the pilgrimage, Murid believers pray **facing the Atlantic Ocean**, to commemorate Bamba’s legendary prayer on the water.”*

This last report (widely taken up by a few global media) is all the more eccentric if one realize that Touba is situated in the heart of Baol and Cayor lands (central Senegal), where nobody could hardly locate where the sea breeze is blowing!

Indeed, the lack of reliable information on the true doctrinal basis of the Muriddiya led often many scholars to content themselves and to make do with the (false) conceptions of the first Murid who comes along, without due and minimum checking. Because, the fact is there are many Murids who claimed strongly their affiliation to

Bamba's doctrine without having ever studied seriously his authentic thinking and practice, and who rely seldom on unverified stories and popular misconceptions. There are as well, as it is often the case in all communities, some Murids who act deliberately out of compliance with Bamba's teachings because of their individual worldly interests, though perfectly conscious of their inconsistency. René Luc Moreau criticized this ill-oriented methodology used to study the doctrine of the Muridiyya, in writing:

*“Regarding the Murids, [scholars] have essentially made their enquiries about Murid doctrine from the great number, in other words from the peasants who were the least prepared to answer the inappropriate questions of the interviewers. [Scholars] were also asking information from the opponents of this organization, who found their interests to misrepresent and to denigrate [the Murids] to the local authorities.”*

Such a subjective methodology may be likened to a Martian reporter who relies essentially, once he got off his flying saucer, to his interview with the first US citizen he met with - *who is unfortunately member of the Ku Klux Klan* – and who writes, on this single basis, his article on the racial conception of all American people! This is as if we rely on the wild imaginings of some British drunk hooligans or on the rambling of a neo-Nazi activist to portray the common behavior and frame of mind of all the United Kingdom's inhabitants. Indeed, like all human communities in history and around the world, all Murids are not equally clear-sighted and well-guided—for sure, they have got their *hooligans* as well. But, in the same way clear-sighted Muslims do not accept their religion being improperly identified with violence and intolerance, just owing to a handful of “terrorists”, so clear-sighted and genuine Murids do not accept their doctrine being misjudged because of a few thoughtless individuals. Making sweeping generalizations has always been, and is still, Achilles' heel of most of the scholarship on the Muridiyya based alone on unchecked ground material or ill-targeted surveys. Goodness ! Is it not time, o Dear Scholar, to get to the core of Bamba's true ideology, *now?*



## The Wolof Boatman

Another subtle premise which impacted implicitly on the underrating of the full significance of Bamba's writings is, in our view, the weight of oral tradition for many scholars in construing "illiterate" African societies' philosophy. This led many scholars to give relatively few importance to Black native writers. Although, we have to acknowledge that the case of a prolific writer as assiduous as Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is quite atypical in many African societies.

Furthermore, some scholars assumed that, since most Wolof natives were illiterate, they could not get to the writings of the Sheikh. Hence, there is no need to waste time with, since Murid disciples rather refer to mythical and fabulous stories to make up their own code of belief. This approach seems a little too hasty, insofar as it disregards the high significance of Wolof literature (called *Wolofal*), which played a key part in translating, poetically and in a fashion more familiar to the masses of that time, the essentials of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's writings. *Wolofal* ranked among the best "bridges", among others, which enabled Wolof illiterate people to attain the "ocean" of Murid doctrine and principles. Murid poets, like Sheikh Moussa Ka, who regarded themselves as "boatmen in charge of making Wolof cross the language barrier", were convinced to be inspired by Sheikh Ahmadou himself. As Sheikh Moussa Ka put it, in some of his admirable poems:

*"Bismil Ilaahi, Njamee ngi deeti joow pake ca bël ba  
Njamee di mool biy xuus ci geeju Bamba,  
Di xotti mbeex ma, tay jalle gaaya pom ba"*

In the Name of God, I am launching again my boat  
As the ferryman in the heart of Bamba's Ocean

Through the waves, I shall cleave  
And make my people cross the Bridge.

*"Tay jii ma wax ba ne tareet,*

*Ngir yaa ma def àntalpareet  
Ngir yaa fabi xam-xam ne yareet  
Ci sama xel ci Xarnu bi''*

Today, I shall shout [O Bamba!]  
For you make of me thy interpret,  
Inspiring a knowledge very fine  
To the mind of mine, today

Another Murid poet, Sheikh Samba Diaara Mbaye, depicted his empathy with Bamba in these most outstanding verses:

*"Bu leen ma yéem, yéem leen ko moom,  
Du man di wax, mooy ka di wax,  
Waxande laa wum tëji wax,  
Bu ma tijee may làmmiñam"*

Marvel not at my artistry, wonder ye at him instead  
These words of him are not the words of mine  
I am just the box where his words nestled  
Whenever he opens me, I shall be his words

If Bamba chose to write in Arabic, it was mainly because Arabic was the scholar and scientific language of his milieu and time, and that the Qur-ān and all textbook material African Muslims were using are written in Arabic, which portrays Islam official and sacred language. Murid Wolof writers were deeply conscious of their mission to translate this message. Bamba himself gave clear clues to their forerunners, who were his disciples (like Serigne Mbaye Diakhaté, Serigne Mor Kayré and Sheikh Moussa Ka), and encourage them to write in their native language. Wolof poets were considering seriously their role to educate illiterate people and to make them attain the most of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's teachings, though it was through the colorful prism of Wolof culture and touch. Their numerous allegorical references to "Bamba-Ocean" (*Bambaa di gééj*) in their poems devoted to hagiography, ethics, spiritual education, admonitions, pleas, praising, and so on, show that authors like Sheikh Moussa Ka, Serigne

Mbaye Diakhaté, Serigne Mor Kayré, Sheikh Samba Diaara Mbaye, and others, were fully aware of their educational role. Thus, many of their works may be construed as a kind of "wolofization" of the qasidas.

Besides, much has been said about the popular epic and the "propensity to legendary stories" reproached to Wolofal literature. Some scholars, with Wahhabi leanings, have also reproached Wolof hagiography to fuel the cult of the saints. Others were prone to erect a wall between Wolof literature, somewhat held as "populist" and designed for the "peasantry", and Bamba's writings, regarded as more significant, intellectually speaking.

There is no doubt that Wolof poets, like many poets elsewhere, are often inclined to lay more stress on the fantastic element and on supernatural events rational spirits are tempted to hold as pure fancies. However, such standpoints disregard the fact that, in addition to epics and hagiographies, Wolof poets have written in many other valuable fields. A writer like Serigne Mbaye Diakhaté is particularly well-known for his numerous and vivid educational poems designed to teach Murid disciples the fundamentals of Sufism, and his harsh criticisms against the misbehaviors of a part of the Murid leadership and disciples.

Other reasons which contributed to shape the form taken by many Wolofal are the intellectual level and cultural tendencies of their time and milieu, favored by the West-African griot-style of storytelling, the allegorical and lyric style imposed by poetry, and the Sufi tradition of hagiographic literature (*manaqqib*). Moussa Ka's works played in Wolof society the same role as "The Odyssey" of Homer did in Ancient Greece, or "One Thousand and One Nights" in Arab imaginary, making due allowances.

Following Babou's relevant remarks, we must also observe that the "immoderation" reproached to Wolof poets have played a key part in counterbalancing efficiently, in the popular Murid imagery, the

major subversive effects of the politically oriented colonial literature on the Muridiyya. Moussa Ka was a kind of anti-Marty writer.

As for the reproach to fuel the cult of the saints, it is a very old controversy between differing ideological tendencies in Islam. However, Bamba is not certainly held by the orthodox Murids as their god, neither as their prophet, but he is the gate through which they reached the Divine light and the gateway to the Treasures of the Prophet (PBH) and human dignity. This is the reason why they are revering him over all other human beings but they do not worship him, because all his recommendations corresponds to what God and His Prophet (PBH) have ordered them. And whatever Spiritual Favors he claimed, as outstanding as they may be, are just considered as an evidence of the Lord's infinite Grace and Mercy. No one can find, in all Bamba's writings, any favor he claimed having been granted outside his Lord's Mercy or which runs counter to the Absolute Kingship of God. Were it not their deep conviction that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is infinitely favored by the Lord and His Prophet (PBH), Murids would have never followed him and love him so much. Loving someone the Lord himself and His Prophet love amounts to loving God and His Messenger (PBH), in their perspective.

As regarding the criticisms about too much tendency for miraculous stories, it is a general reproach common to many traditional hagiographies. However, Muslim rationalists have to recall that religion is not made of rational (in the modern sense) and Cartesian elements alone. Miracles have always been an integral part of Islamic teaching, throughout numerous stories related in the Qur-ān, as shown by the miracles (*mu'jizāt*) worked by the Prophets. Let us just remind the prodigious powers granted to the Prophets David and Solomon, as told in the Book:

*"We gave (in the past) knowledge to David and Solomon: And they both said: "Praise be to God, Who has favoured us above many of his servants who believe!" And Solomon was David's heir. He said: "O ye people! We have been taught the speech of birds, and on us has been*

*bestowed (a little) of all things: this is indeed Grace manifest (from God.)" And before Solomon were marshalled his hosts,- of Jinns and men and birds, and they were all kept in order and ranks. At length, when they came to a (lowly) valley of ants, one of the ants said: "O ye ants, get into your habitations, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you (under foot) without knowing it." So he smiled, amused at her speech; and he said: "O my Lord! so order me that **I may be grateful** for Thy favours, which thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may work the righteousness that will please Thee." (Qur-ān xxvii.15-19)*

Although modern rationalist exegetes have tried hard to give more Cartesian and more allegorical constructions to such passages they hold rationally "disturbing", quite implicitly, they are also bound to acknowledge that telling miracles or having faith in the supernatural powers of the saints (*wāli*) are not at all in contradiction with the spirit of authentic Islam and to return to pristine prophetic tradition. In our view, what they should rather emphasize is educating the audience such stories are intended for, through proper teaching tools, so they may learn how to understand their symbolisms and the limits they should never overstep. As outstanding as Divine miracles and favors may be, they must be just considered as evidences of His infinite mercy and must prompt men to show gratefulness to their Creator. But they can never be valid grounds for transgressing or assigning partners to God. So, criticizing the miracles of the Saints and Wolofal hagiographies, on that point, amounts to suggesting to remove all "disturbing" supernatural references of the Qur-ān and of the Hadiths, so as to suit hard-liner rationalists. Indeed, discussing in great detail all questions relating to the countless controversies between rationalist Muslims and Sufis would lead us beyond the scope of this study.

*"When it is said to them: "Believe as the others believe:" They say: "Shall we believe as the fools believe?" Nay, of a surety they are the fools, but they do not know." (Qur-ān ii.13)*

Moreover, some scholars seem to be assuming that Wolof writers were not well-versed in genuine religious knowledge and that the popular literature they founded do not reflect accurately Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's teachings. According to such scholars, this contributes greatly to distort the perception many Murid have of Bamba's teachings. Indeed, one cannot deny the cultural impact of Wolof imagery, traditions and collective memory on the popular perception of Murid doctrinal corpus. Because religion has always to cope with cultural dimensions wherever it settled down. Then the struggle has always been to never let corrupting traditions detrimental to worship supplant religious and moral principles—such dynamics and unsteady equilibrium is the basis of religious life in any society. However, assuming that Murid poets were not well-learned does not square with reality. In fact, Sheikh Moussa Ka as well as Serigne Mbaye Diakhaté, and other Murid writers, were trained by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba himself, and a thorough examination of their great poetic legacy may show their high commands of all the religious sciences—exegesis of the Qur-ān, Hadith, Tawhīd, Sufism, history of Islam, poetry, and so on. Which is largely demonstrated by the high quality of their very works. Furthermore, through many elegiacs, they have just translated in Wolof cultural form the outstanding spiritual favors the Sheikh himself declared he was granted by the Lord in his own writings, in accordance with Sufi old tradition of spiritual disclosure.

The beneficial and didactic effects of Wolofal on Murid disciples are also proven. While contributing greatly to foster Murids' African identity, poems in native language played an essential role to popularize many subtle Islamic concepts, to the common Wolof people as to the upper learned classes who could be not very familiar with Sufi notions before. I can give my personal example to show how Wolof poems can impact on Murids' attitudes and beliefs. Whenever I am listening to moving Wolofal elegiacs of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba or one of his valiant companions, I can't help being touched by their virtues and their works, though being quite aware of the simplifying power of poetry. This is assuredly a major psychological motivation which may prompt to imitate them, to keep one's dignity and to

cherish ambitious spiritual purposes. As Serigne Moussa Ka puts it in, in some quite notable verses:

*“Bepp làkk rafet na  
Buy gindi ci nit xel ma,  
Di yee ci jaam ngor nga”*

All languages will keep up their beauties,  
As long as they light the way for men,  
And rekindle their sense of dignity

On the point of doing something, I happen sometimes to recall a particular Wolof verse relating to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s practice and teaching which dissuaded me or encouraged me to do it. For instance, whenever I feel sick or exhausted so as to be tempted to cut short some daily acts of devotion I am accustomed to, this verse of Sheikh Moussa Ka comes often to my mind; *“Du wopp ba tax mu wàññi jaamu Yàllaam”* (“Bamba was never prevented from performing his devotional duties due to ill health or tiredness”). Even though this indulgence is perfectly permitted by Islamic law (*Shari’a*), such a determination to worship the Lord, in any circumstances, to one’s extreme limits (*Himmah* or *Pastéef*) has deeply shaped Murid doctrine.

### **The King and the Cleric**

The political commitment of the Murids and their relationship with the State have also aroused much questioning and many analyses of the scholars, which fueled an enduring picture of political clientelism of the Murids. Most of those scholars were deeply influenced by the paradigm imposed by French colonial authors, which considers the Muridiyya as “an instrument used by the Wolof ethnic group to adapt to French colonial rule”. These same scholars assume that, in the postcolonial era, “the Murid order continued to perform its political function by helping foster a “social contract” which mitigated the new rulers’ lack of legitimacy in the eyes of rural masses and provided stability to the state”. Under this contract of quid pro quo, “the Murid leaders, among other Muslim brokers, assured the loyalty of the

citizens and in return received recognition and material support from the State.”

Besides individual attitudes and political stances of some Murid leaders and disciples who actually use their membership of the Muridiyya as a political and politicking device, we contend that many writers have failed to grasp fully the complexity of this question and all its implications. As usual, passion and prejudice supplanted careful and scientific study. As a colonial officer, Marty's obvious worries about potential native forces liable to threaten the official authority's full control over the masses are still perceptible through many approaches, until today. Such a vision has been worsened by the *religious* form taken by the political commitment of the Murids. For, in analyzing this problem, we noticed a meaningful difference of approach regarding this question between, schematically speaking, the scholars originating or influenced by the theories in vogue in former **colonial** countries (mostly France) and scholars from **nonimperialist** countries (like American researchers). Though it would be highly simplistic to reduce this problem to just a problem of nationalities, it is known that, in these two areas, the perception of religion and the limits of its sphere of influence are historically different, on the whole. And it is also known that their research methodologies and approaches are often different, particularly in social sciences, in spite of many common academic tools and standards.

The French Revolution has set down enduring political principles regarding secularity (*Principe de laïcité*), the strict separation of the Church and the State, and the containment of religious life within private space. Such a vision may be easily explained by the feeling of intellectual revolt against the complicity of the clergy with the monarchy and their unfair domination over the people for centuries. As for American scholars, the religious historical background of their nation, their past of former colonized people and of anticolonialism, and their culture of communitarianism favored by the outcomes of slavery and immigration, help them generally to treat with less prejudice the question of political commitment of a Black

religious community. Religious communities' political lobbying, which is widely acknowledged in American context (and in other areas, despite however real problems sometimes), is officially regarded as in opposition to French republican principles. Although lobbies of the freemasons, of various economic forces, of homosexuals, and of other visible minorities are an undeniable fact in this system. Today, in many countries in the modern world, homosexual lobbying is widely more accepted than religious lobbying, due in part to the continuing revenge of the Enlightenment (*les Lumières*) on the Church (and on other religious beliefs). Even Senegalese scholars and intellectuals who have been trained through this system did not escape such a conception of the Republic they are defending with real conviction, unlike Anglo-Saxon scholars who show often more detachment in analyzing this question (schematically speaking). This analysis of Allen Roberts (one American scholar among others), which is representative of this tendency, is about the role of Senegalese religious forces in the stability of the country (in spite of serious problems):

*“Mouridism is one of the most distinctive aspects of contemporary Senegalese social life. Indeed, it would be impossible to understand how the republic's ‘brisk and vigorous democracy’ makes it ‘a beacon of hope...in a troubled region’ without fully appreciating its most economically and politically influential Islamic movement. Mouridism links all secular and sacred activities. Senegal also has a long tradition of amicable and tolerant coexistence between the Muslim majority and the Christian ... and other religious minorities ... the country's striking stability can be directly attributed to the unusual balance of power between the Senegalese government and the Mourides and other religious orders.”*

This new scholarly trend, which contrasts with all what have been written on this question for decades, denotes clearly that the theme of Murid political commitment can be analyzed through a different more complex prism. In fact there are a few important parameters which should be taken into account in studying the nature and the significance of the very long-discussed Murid political

commitment. These factors have been very often ignored by many authors who have attempted to study this question in the past. Let us recall here some essential elements which will show the shallowness of most articles on this subject and the reason why those articles are often something of heatedly opinions rather than objective critics.

First of all, Islamic overall conception of life does not make fundamentally a tangible separation between religious and secular social activities. *"Say: "Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for God, the Cherisher of the Worlds" (Qur'ān vi.162).* In Islam, politics is understood, in the broadest sense, as every activity and effort aiming to promote social, economic, and spiritual development of the Muslim community. Thence, politics is an integrated part of its original message, as implied by this statement of the Prophet (PBH); *"Whoever does not care about his fellow Muslims' welfare is not a member of my community."* From the very beginning, Islam claimed the political commitment of its leadership, symbolized by the State of Medina, designed and led by the Prophet himself (PBH). After the death of the Prophet (PBH), this initial model of politics suffered serious alterations produced by endless internal dissensions and by the excesses of ruling dynasties which turned to mere politicking. This deviation contributed much to break up the homogeneous initial politico-religious conception in Islam, which split in two distinct powers compelled to interact through unsteady relationship—temporal power and religious power.

This led some Muslim masters to advocate return to the sober and ascetic lifestyle of the Prophet (PBH) and to theorize, through a method called Sufism, the purification of the heart of all worldly purpose, so as to get nearer the Lord. Power and politics became then suspicious, and religious leaders who were maintaining close relationship with the rulers were systematically blamed and accused of loving this world and of dishonest compromise. A more balanced Sufi approach (supported by Imam Ghazali, among others) acknowledged the possible collaboration with (unjust) rulers under special and restricted circumstances. Such conditions were about the moral perfection of the religious leaders, the scope of this diplomatic

cooperation (*maslaha*) which must not step over the legal limits imposed by the respect of Divine principles. Religious leaders must then keep away from the rulers' corrupting milieu and are allowed to cooperate with them only in case of necessity. This Sufi tendency invites also Muslim subjects to abide by the laws set down by the rulers as long as they help them in their material needs and do not compel them to give up their faith. Such principles influenced deeply many brotherhoods, among which the Qādiriyya, one of the most prominent *tariqas* to which belong many Senegalese clerical families, like Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's family, the Mbacke. Although the possibility of violent opposition to unjust rulers and of religious conquest of the political power have always been regularly claimed by some Senegalese clerics, according to particular circumstances, the main trend of such a Sufi approach may well be summed up by this popular maxim "Peace and tranquility are better than anything else" (*As-Salāmun wal āfiya khayrun min ghayrihima*).

Historically, in Senegal, kings have always solicited clerics to manage their kingdoms or, otherwise, have tried to contain their influence. Such a tradition became the rule in Wolof society since the sixteenth century, notably after the collapse of the Jolof empire which had dominated the political landscape of Senegal for over two centuries. The Jolof empire gave birth to new Wolof states (Jolof, Walo, Cayor and Baol) which rulers asked often Muslim clerics assistance about statecraft, mystical protection and political support. In return, influential clerics were granted land, administrative and cultural autonomy, as Babou described it widely in his book:

*"This policy of exchanging services became an enduring trait of the relationships between rulers and clerics in the Wolof states, which the French colonial administration would try to replicate centuries later. The association of Muslim clerics with the business of government helped enhance **the prestige of Islam** and its **expansion** among the commoners...Because of its increasing influence on the wider population, Islam gradually became an important **political force**... From the seventeenth century on, it gradually became a refuge for the powerless, who were the primary victims of the violence and insecurity*

*spurred by the slave trade, dynastic wars, and French encroachment. Some Muslim clerics responded to the deleterious economic and political situations in the Wolof states by waging jihads and seeking political autonomy. Some remained involved with the rulers in various capacities. And many others pursued their laborious work as **educators** at the grassroot levels and away from the centers of power, contributing to a gradual but steady implantation of the Islamic religious culture among the Wolof."*

Thus, we are allowed to contend that, despite numerous historical ups and downs, the complex and very old relationship between Islam and politics in Senegal was decisive to realize what James Searing termed "the quiet Revolution" of Islam in Senegal. That is to say, Islam has progressed and has gained its power in Senegal due to complex social interactions. Among which the presence of Islam in the **highest levels of power**, allied with the laborious **education** of the masses at the grassroot levels, have played a crucial role. In other words, the fact that all ruling systems, which dominated successively the country, had passed away, while **Islam remains the sole growing force** which has made steady progress over several centuries in the society, is evidence that the religion is the winning party of this deal. Were it not the (active or passive) presence of Islam in the realm of politics and education, we are allowed to think that this religion would not gain such a force of penetration in Senegalese society and that rulers would have enforced over the people detrimental ideas and beliefs (*ceddo* values, animism, Western conceptions and excesses etc.), without any counterbalancing spiritual power, since Islamist State is not on the agenda.

Besides, it seems to us relevant, in order to grasp better this situation, to realize how the form taken by the modern State is *artificial* and theoretical in the deepest psychological representations of Senegalese (and African) people. Indeed, we are conscious that the thorough analysis of such a peculiar gap goes beyond the scope of this study. However, if we examine the complex psychological relationship the broad mass of Senegalese people (or even Black African people) have always maintained somewhat with the modern

State and their particular conception of public wealth and assistance, we would see that the case of the Murids must be considered, to many extents, with regard to the most general case of the progressive acclimatization of the Western model of State to the traditional African model of kingdom. We could also argue that the Republican form (which is still translated in Wolof by *nguur gi*—kingship or enjoyment deriving from power) has not taken yet its full meaning in our society, as it would be the case with other peoples whose histories have led them “naturally” to this system. Africa was regularly forced by history to change brutally its way of thinking and to adopt overnight systems generated elsewhere. Thus, Senegalese (or African) people seem often to feel some modern forms of organizations as Western systems imposed from outside and with which they are just compelled to cope and to adapt to their most basic psychological leanings. Although new tendencies are progressively developed by globalization and media, this poses somewhat the more general and crucial problem of the psychological appropriation or the adjustment of “external” systems to African peoples to achieve development.

### **Touba is the World**

Bamba’s political approach and practice, further perpetuated by his successive caliphs (or by other Senegalese clerics), are strongly influenced by the association of ideological Sufi principles, taught by Al Ghazali and other masters, with old Senegalese traditional model of relationship between religion and politics. Nonetheless, there are a few interesting particularities in the Murid approach which explain, in our view, the scholarly attention it has drawn hitherto. The special historical circumstances of the birth of the Murid order are characterized by tense relationship and distrust of French colonizers who later laid down a strategy of “accommodation” with the Muslim power in general, so as to contain it. Such a strategy of cooperation paved the way to the modern “Senegalese social contract” which is a distinctive feature of the current post-independence State.

Other special attributes of the Muridiyya are its extensive expansion (compared to past Senegalese religious organizations) and

its centrifugal power, symbolized by its pyramidal organization headed up by the Murid General Caliph. Well-organized one-headed communities obeying to a central authority have always fascinated politicians.

There is another essential doctrinal element, relating to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thinking and which is disregarded or ignored by most of the scholars. Such an element is yet crucial and central to better understand the nature of Murid political commitment. This element consists in Murids' ambition to bring about in **Touba** Bamba's project to build a holy city which will be granted all the facilities liable to help Muslims to freely live out their faith in the most favorable conditions. In Bamba's vision, Touba must be endowed with all religious infrastructures (mosques, schools, public places and so on) as well as all material and social facilities (water, healthcare, roads, flourishing economic activities etc.). Murids consider this project as the greatest form of *khidma* (or *ligéeyal Serigne Touba*) they can perform and from which they are hoping the Retribution of the Lord, through the satisfaction (*ngërëm*) of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. However, as a social movement primarily based in the humble peasantry, the Murids did not have in their disposal all the necessary means (technical, administrative and others) to carry out exclusively by their own this major project. The reason why they request public assistance. Touba has always been at the core of the relationship between the Murid leadership and public authorities. Because the different Caliphs conceive their fundamental mission as looking after the general interest of the community they are (mystically) entrusted by Bamba himself, and to carry out his projects relating to Touba. So, all public authorities who have consented in the past to help them, in whatever form, in this sacred mission were consequentially granted the political support of their community. And politicians have very often taken advantage of this frame of mind in bringing their support to Murids' projects so as to benefit, in return, from the *ndigël* (voting guidance) or from tacit support of the caliphs, who often focus essentially on Touba and on their particular mission out of other external considerations. The Murid caliphs traditionally regard first themselves as the representatives of their community's interests before external actors,

as just other Senegalese communities' leaders. It seems also to us really meaningful that, despite the great means entrusted to them by the disciples and the help of the State, Murids Caliphs have always lived quite humbly and have invested almost all their properties in the general interest.

Although this exchange between religious and political leaders may remind, to some extent, Anglo-Saxon political lobby system, Murids' conception differentiate itself from many models by their reliance on their own financial means and autonomy to carry out their projects. Because Murids rarely appeal to public help whenever they think they can manage all by themselves, like founding schools, cultivating their fields, investing new economic sectors, emigrating etc. In this instance, it is interesting to know that the first Murid Caliph called for public help only regarding administrative leave and technical assistance when he undertook to extend personally the national railroad from Diourbel to Touba – an unique private initiative in Senegal's history. Sheikh Muhammad Mustapha decided to fund himself all technical work provided by French engineers and the equipment as well. Murid sheikhs and disciples volunteered for carrying out manual work and for contributing fully in building the 50 kilometers of railroad (many of them died on the sites during the two years of work). Touba mosque was also built thanks to Murid internal means and workforce essentially, and this is still the case in many current community projects. Such a tradition of self-financing, despite occasional external contributions and help of the State, has always been an important feature of the Murids. Contrary to what seems to be assumed by many writers, Murids have always cultivated a philosophy of autonomy and of self-financing – which is assuredly a relevant feature for African underdeveloped communities to replicate. The State is mainly regarded by Murids as a tool (sometimes at the hand of people with differing beliefs) to achieve Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's vision in Touba and everywhere else. Besides, the type of help provided by the State, mostly limited to technical and administrative assistance, is all the more justified since Murids are among the most important Senegalese taxpayers and since Touba is the second largest town of the country. The model of self-management

proposed by Touba, where most services are provided by the community and where we count the least number of humanitarian aid organizations of the country, deserves great interest for underdeveloped countries, despite the numerous challenges and problems it is still facing.

Moreover, it may be of a certain interest to know that the public help is interpreted by the Murids as a result of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's pleas:

*"O Lord! Turn over the hearts of the colonizers and inspire them to help me instead [in my Service]. Subjugate in my favor every haughty tyrant. By virtue of Thy Absolute Unity and Thy Power of Subjugation, prompt my enemies to work for my Bliss."*

However, we have to acknowledge that there have always been some Murid leaders and disciples who take advantage of this model of relationship to consolidate their personal interests (administrative facilities and other advantages devoid of any public interest) in cultivating compromising relationship with politicians. Such a reprehensible misuse of the original model (by elements we label as "Muridopaghaus" or *dundee yoonu murit* in Murid jargon) has attracted far more interest of many intellectuals and local medias who are still identifying entirely the Muridiyya to this warped model far more suitable to their conception of religion as "the opium of the people".

Although Murid traditional model of political commitment has produced palpable results in the progress of Islam in Senegal, we think that this model must now evolve according to new realities and better adapt to modernity. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's vision about progress and adaptability of methods according to particular space and time implies that Murids are not compelled to duplicate literally the same approach applied by their predecessors, as valorous as they may be. So, we think that, though Touba must remain the hub and the heart of the "Murid dream", Murids must progressively extend this concept to all the nation, and - why not? - to all the continent and to the rest of the world. Touba is more a project of society and a vision of

life than a formal and delimited city, because everywhere a Murid is living, every place a Muslim is living, is somewhat a part of Touba. Let us just remember Bamba's answers to the French Governor previously mentioned:

*"Questions 2 and 3: When was born [the initial founder of the Muridiyya] and where was he born exactly?"*

*Answer: Whenever and wherever a Muslim was born, this Path was born in such a place.*

*Question 6: What are the cities this first founder of the tariqa was travelling through?"*

*Answer: Every country where Muslims are living is among these cities."*

In fact, Murid disciples are already used to naming *Touba* everywhere they settle in the world—*Touba Thiès, Touba Abidjan, Touba Johannesburg, Touba New York, Touba London, Touba Paris, Touba Montreal, Touba Roma*. The strategy of geographical expansion initiated by the Murid pioneers, in founding, throughout the country, many new villages they were considering as parts of Touba, is another evidence of the wider meaning of Touba concept. Modern Murid leadership and disciples, while securing first their personal community projects, must extend their vision of Touba and *globalize* it. They should realize that everywhere a Murid, everywhere a Muslim, everywhere a human being is living can be a part of Touba.

So, in our view, Murid political commitment must no longer be exclusively based upon public facilities and public aid provided by the State in Touba or during community events. But it has to be broadened to other wider considerations, such as right conduct of national public affairs by politicians, management abilities, moral practice etc. Politicians who contented themselves in contributing to Murid projects, just for political gain, must no longer be automatically granted electoral backing as long as they are not recognized as able to manage the country for the general interest. The Muridiyya is not assuredly the same today as it was fifty years ago and some considerations which were legitimate and understandable for their

forefathers could no longer be the same for present and upcoming generations. Most Murids are no longer humble *Bawol-Bawol* peasants ranked at the bottom of the social scale. They have got now engineers, academics, large business managers, doctors, and experts in all domains. This expertise is just waiting for a suitable framework to materialize the vision of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and to better contribute to the development of the country. The Murid community must no longer be considered as a mere electoral tank for politicians. Murids must now be regarded as valuable partners for developing their country and giving a better picture of Africa and Islam.

### **Fernand Dumont's Great Surprise**

Another obstacle which prevents most of the western-trained scholars from having full and easy access to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's writings is classical Arabic language the qasidas are written in. Indeed very few of these scholars can read and understand perfectly Arabic. And even if it was the case, the allusive forms inherent to Sufi writers' style and the Sheikh's frequent use of esoteric terms relating to his personal spiritual experience would still make it demanding often to construe accurately his verses.

Arabic-speaking scholars (of the Arab-Islamic world) who could be expected to show more proficiency on this field proved to be the least committed in studying Bamba's works, due to many reasons. Currently, the qasidas are written in the North African form of Arabic, which is not easily readable in the largest part of the Arabic-speaking world. However other decisive explanations are to be found in the relative lack of knowledge of Arab-Islamic scholars about Black Muslims' history and works. Though Murids can be held as partly accountable for this lack of global popularization of Bamba's works, we content that enduring Arab psychological and cultural representations of Black Muslims (as former slaves) have also played a key role in this situation. Another likely reason is the impact of ideological dissensions among Islamic differing visions (notably between Sufi and Muslim rationalists), knowing that Senegalese

approach of Islam, based on the brotherhoods, is largely criticized in leading Muslim nations like Saudi Arabia.

In addition to mastering perfectly *classical* Arabic (which can even be quite incomprehensible to many *modern* Arabic-speaking people), there are other prerequisites most recommended before undertaking the hermeneutics of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's qasidas few of the social scientists who studied the Muridiyya really meet. These criteria are—knowing perfectly the ideological and spiritual concepts and basis of Islam, the different notions at work in the Qur-ān and in the Hadiths and their subtle existing interpretations by the different ideological schools, Islamic knowledge as conveyed by religious books of reference, the model of ascending *maqamāt* (spiritual degrees) of the Sufis and their various *hāl* (spiritual states), Bamba's allusions to his own biographical unknown events, the Sufi terminology used by the Sheikh - though sometimes revised and reinterpreted in his writings - etc.

Therethrough, the most advanced and extensive works devoted to the doctrinal basis of the Muridiyya and to Bamba's philosophy were somewhat impeded by these limits. So was the case with Fernand Dumont's commendable efforts, synthesized in his book "La Pensée Religieuse d'Amadou Bamba", in which he tried to study some of Bamba's writings. In spite of Dumont's real merit to explore this so far neglected field and a certain proficiency in Islamic and Sufi history and concepts, one must however confess that he often encountered several difficulties to construe exactly Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's allusive and metaphorical style. Dumont was not really familiar with. This led him often to construe quite literally many verses and to distort, though involuntarily, their true meanings. In spite of Dumont's broad knowledge of Sufism, we also happen to notice here and there some confusions and his inability to unearth numerous allusions taken from the Qur-ān, Hadith and other references. The French scholar was also a little impeded by his absolute need to categorize Bamba's thinking according to some classical well-known Sufi tendencies and authors he saw the Sheikh referred to in some of his earlier poems. Furthermore, Dumont was

more interested to prove the perfect orthodoxy of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thought, contrary to the criticism of heterodoxy made by the upholders of "Black Islam", rather than studying Bamba's thought *in itself* and exploring all its intellectual potential. In a way, Dumont was on the defensive, just like many Murid scholars, when arguing against anti-Murid attacks.

Another serious limit of Dumont's research is the few number of writings he managed to collect in comparison with Bamba's numerous qasidas. As he himself admitted, he gathered 41 brochures of qasidas, containing about 30,000 verses and 4,000 prose lines. Then he was quite convinced of having in his possession the main part of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's bibliography and he undertook his research on this basis. Later, he was compelled to reconsider seriously his claim in visiting some Murid traditional museums (called *bayti*), where numerous trunks of qasidas were jealously kept, as shown by this anecdote related by Pr. Amar Samb, who travelled with him then (*cf.* Samb's book "Essai sur la contribution du Sénégal à la littérature d'expression arabe"):

*"Mr. F. Dumont, who thought he had in his possession the whole collection of Ahmadou Bamba's writings, with about 30,000 verses, couldn't hide his great surprise when we took him at some Murid disciples' houses where these latter took out of some trunks numerous versified books of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Dumont never saw before. In September 1969, we paid another visit to Moustapha M'Backé, a great-son of the founder of the Muridiyya, who told us; "This collection of qasidas is the famous Fulk ul-mashun (The Full Ship). Serigne Hamzatou Diakhaté hand-copied a part of it while another part is written by my grand-father himself [Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba]. Know that all the poems which are in this [second] collection are composed in acrostic with verses of the Qur-ān. And I hold at home seven and a half other similar trunks full of my grand-father's manuscripts."*

Though held by other scholars, like Vincent Monteil, as the “greatest reference regarding scholarship on Bamba’s writings”, Dumont had then to confess the serious deficiencies of his incomplete inventory, which should be yet the first step enabling him to have an overall vision of Bamba’s thought. F. Dumont entrusted then to the coming generations of Murid disciples the mission to carry on this challenging task which seemed not to him insurmountable:

*“It is necessary to undertake special studies [of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s writings], external and internal studies quite similar to those carried out with the Qur-ān, making due allowances.”, Dumont prophesied.*



# Wave Eight

## The Last of the Written Miracles

Indeed this task may seem so much enormous that it could dissuade some scholars, as acknowledged it the late Pr. Amar Samb who was in charge of showing Senegalese authors' contribution to Arabic-language literature by the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN, Dakar). During a public lecture in 1977, he emphasized that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is *"the most prestigious Muslim poet, and the most prolific author of all Arab-Islamic literature"*. Then, he admitted plainly his feeling of distress at the point of undertaking such a challenging work;

*"I cannot hide my unrest at the face of such a challenging task, even if I am feeling greatly honored to be chosen for this purpose. My apprehension is all the more well-founded that it seems to me that the founder of the Muridiyya has spent his whole lifetime in writing. We would certainly need an entire lifetime to estimate accurately the writings of the founder of the Muridiyya."*

### **Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's Treasure-Houses**

However, non-Murid scholars were not the only ones to face obstacles in analyzing Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thinking through his writings. Although Murid disciples hold in high regard the qasidas, most of

them are rather used to focus more on their “mystical” dimensions and on strictly worshipping concerns, in reciting them regularly, than exploring their full ideological and intellectual potentials (though such a reciting is greatly praiseworthy and spiritually useful). There are however some Murid scholars who have tried to work in this field in the past, but many attempts were impeded by a certain lack of methodology and too much concern about transcendental considerations, which prevented them sometimes from taking real interest in the intellectual significance of the qasidas. West African societies’ tendency to favor more laudatory aspects, through selective oral tradition and hagiography, instead of methodical analysis contributed also to this situation.

However one of the key factors, which hindered as well external scholars as Murids scholars, is the absence up to date of a **major scientific initiative** planning to collect and to study thoroughly Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s writings. Presently most of the qasidas are published through private and unorganized initiatives, and are very simply presented on newsprint paper printed in the big Senegalese cities or abroad. Unformal conditions of publishing have also favored clerical errors and the publication of different versions of a same qasida or even apocryphal poems. Important efforts have been made in the past, mainly by the third Murid caliph, Sheikh Abdoul Ahad, to make an inventory of the qasidas and to assemble them in collections called *dīwān* or *majmūha*, kept at Touba public library and other traditional Murid museum, called *bayti*.

However these collections have not yet been subject to the substantial academic works which could facilitate their studies to most scholars. There is neither a well-organized and far-sighted strategy within the Murid community to spread Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s teachings and writings throughout the world, as it is often the case with many modern religious communities, except isolated initiatives of few Murid leaders or *dahiras* (Murid associations). Hence, apart from the worthy French translations of Bamba’s main books devoted to religious knowledge, by the late Serigne Sam Mbaye, we can say that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s writings are not yet

translated to international languages. Furthermore, Murid disciples are not used to set up, until now, cultural centers and institutes liable to promote international academic studies on the intellectual, ideological and spiritual legacies of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. It is true that Murids have founded numerous *daaras* (religious schools) in Senegal, where many were educated and taught. This traditional educational system, in spite of the real efforts made to modernize it, is still experiencing problems to integrate fully the new advances in sciences and technologies liable to develop conditions of extensive research.

Unfortunately, seeking and spreading knowledge, as constantly and strongly recommended by the Sheikh, is often the *parent pauvre* of our initiatives, in favor for lesser important social activities in which too many financial and human resources are daily spent. Such a situation is assuredly worsened by the underdeveloped conditions of most African countries which prompt often people to seek for *means* rather than *meanings*. Other likely reasons are the unfavorable and difficult conditions for local research in Senegal, characterized by lack of means and support, and the “hyperpoliticization” of Senegalese public democratic life which presently prioritize political issues and judicial scandals on the media over scholarly issues. The lack of full commitment of a large part of the Murid leadership in this important field and their lack of keen awareness of its true importance are another major reason which explains this situation, in our view. In spite of unfailing *Himmah* and commitment to *Khidma*, the Murid community, which are yet endowed with many potentials, often meet real difficulties to adapt their methods of organization to modernity and to rationalize their means for the most important and most useful priorities.

And yet, Murids would be the first to benefit directly from studies clarifying more the true thinking of their spiritual leader. Because practice often shows that many Murid disciples cannot really tell apart what, in the Muridiyya, belongs truly to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s teachings and what originates from Wolof tradition and folklore, or from ideological internal deviations. This difficulty, which

is often increased by the lack of serious studies on Bamba's writings and on his real history, entails many misconceptions and drifts by some Murid disciples and leaders (too much folklore, confusions, and misbehaviors). Deviations which have nothing to do with Bamba's authentic teachings and which have always fueled clichés on the Muridiyya. Thus, studying methodically Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's literary legacy would help Murids lay down clearly his accurate opinion on many issues, and to put forward a lesser "empirical" approach to the doctrine of the Muridiyya, which opens up the way to any eccentric misconception, as is often the case today.

Moreover, since most eye-witnesses of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's life have passed away, it is all the more important for Murids to agree on a more steady reference system, based on his writings and on other accredited sources. This is, relatively speaking, the same case with the collecting of the Qur-ān into a final text initiated by the third well-guided Muslim Caliph, or with the inventory of the hadiths and later necessary tasks carried out thereon by the meritorious imams Bukhari and Muslim. Murid scholars, and other students of the Muridiyya from all around the world, have the heavy burden to explore the "treasures" bequeathed by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba to humankind. Such treasures he described in this verse:

*"My treasures are the Qur-ān, the Hadiths and the Rules of Ethics; but not at all hoarding money and gold."*

### **Qasaid Project**

This crucial mission was primarily entrusted to Murid disciples by F. Dumont, when he realized the difficulty to study Bamba's writings in spite of his personal efforts:

*"It seems to me desirable that clear-sighted Murids undertake to carry out methodically a task which is not truly impossible—the **inventory** of all the writings of their venerated Sheikh ... Afterward, they should try to make a **chronological classification** [of those writings] which is the first step to **analytical classification**. They should as well*

consider **publishing** a new standardized and exhaustive edition of these writings. This would not prevent, of course, other separated editions to be published, as it is presently the case, so as to permit to the masses to draw therefrom their fundamentals of religious education. After this first step, they could collect all **stories** reported by people who were living with the Sheikh, in order to write his true history. Later, **specialized studies** could be carried out and devoted to Bamba's phenomenon; because the social significance of his **thought** leads to the social importance of the **Muridiyya**."

A major initiative, called QASAIID Project [*Qasaid* is the plural of *qasida*], is currently carried out on this purpose by Majalis Research Project ([www.majalis.org](http://www.majalis.org)), which aims to pave the way for future more extensive research. This important initiative, presently performed at the Institut **KH**adimou **RA**ssoul (IKHRA) in Dakar (Senegal), is divided into 3 main phases, and each phase is divided into several stages. The 3 phases deal with :

- Phase 1, devoted to collecting and to research on Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's **personal books** (qasidas),

- Phase 2, devoted to Bamba's **correspondence**, to the worldwide **works** about the Muridiyya and to the authentication of historical **reports** relating to Bamba and to the Muridiyya,

- Phase 3, devoted to collecting and to research on the works of other **Murid authors** (Wolofal and the like) and of the other **Senegalese Muslim authors** (Qādirī, Tijānī and others).

The first phase is structured around 7 main stages:

1. Gathering of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's personal books (qasidas) from accredited *dīwāns*,
2. Digitalization (scanning and typewriting),
3. Correction of clerical errors,
4. Analysis and Classification in databases and softwares,
5. Translation in international languages,
6. Research works by a multidisciplinary team of researchers,
7. Publishing in different modern formats.

The first step enabled already Majalis Project to gather 1,236 poems (cf. [www.majalis.org/choixq.php](http://www.majalis.org/choixq.php)) from the first class of the 7 accredited *dīwān* collected by the late Serigne Modou Diagne of Touba Public Library (which are complementary to the six other official *dīwān* collected by Sheikh Abdoul Ahad, the third Caliph). Compare these 1,236 qasidas with the 41 brochures collected by Fernand Dumont! The process of typewriting is currently in progress in IKHRA (January 2009) and the complete methodology of the Qasaid Project is described in Majalis website.

### Dealing with Methodology

The research works stage should involve a multidisciplinary team of researchers in charge of elaborating methodologies and approaches liable to better explore Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thought about many interesting and topical issues. Many modern problematics could then be reanalyzed in the light of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's philosophy and understanding of Islam—features of perfect human society, human freedom, democracy, human relationship, gender issues, jihad, nonviolence, peaceful coexistence between human civilizations and communities, ethics, useful knowledge, worship, work, wealth, importance of his work doctrine for poor African countries, etc.

Lateral hermeneutics of terms and concepts used by the Sheikh, through thousands of verses gathered in databases and accessible instantly via software and websites, would be of great interest. New research methods on this field and a more exhaustive approach could certainly help in avoiding the common mistake made by a few scholars in quoting some of Bamba's verses alone to back up their ideas. Indeed, if we recall that Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thought was progressing continuously, we would realize that he happened sometimes to change notably his mind about a particular question. His beliefs in the fundamental principles and Pillars of Islam have never changed, but his degree of certainty and the quality of his spiritual insight varied through time. Thence, only a **chronological classification** of his writings could, in such instances, gives us an

accurate idea of his definitive thinking - though the cases in which he changes radically his view are relatively few. This is typically the same mistake made by many modern exegetes of the Qur-ān who often content themselves in quoting some particular verses (out of their spatiotemporal contexts) to uphold their ideological views without taking into account other verses which tone down their primary meanings or which specify their special circumstances and limits. All scholars who undertake to study the Holy Book or other spiritual writings must bear in mind this dynamic dialectics.

The interesting case of the *dīwān* collected by the late Serigne Modou Diagne of Touba Public Library is a good example showing the importance of making Bamba's writings chronological classification. In fact Serigne Modou Diagne undertook to collect only the *qasidas* written after 1322 h. (1902), which is an important turning point in Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's spiritual rise, as he attested himself. The reason why Serigne Modou Diagne chose particularly this moment is based on a text where the Sheikh asserted that his writings from that year are endowed with great benefits. As for what he had written prior to that date, they are not approved by the Lord (or is not intended to be read), the reason why Serigne Modou disregarded them. However other Murid scholars emphasized the limits of such reasoning, because when the Sheikh made such a statement, he was in a certain level of his mystical journey. So, when the Lord revealed him that He has approved eventually all his writings, during all his service for the Prophet (which started in 1301 h.), he wrote:

*"[O Lord!] Thou have approved all I have written, from 1301 to [this present year] 1332. But Thou **informed me** thereof only in 1330 [in revealing me that Thou wilt approve henceforth all my services]."*

*"Thou have dispelled all my hardships, o Thou that have approved **all my services!**"*

It is noteworthy that Bamba undertook to rewrite or to revise many of his earlier books, due to his higher spiritual degree and

insight which conferred on them more mystical value, according to him. He was even considering some of those old writings as sins for which he asked humbly God's forgiveness. Though their quite compliance with perfect orthodoxy of the common worshippers, the Sheikh was regarding himself in the wrong in considering some of his earlier writings, compared with his current degree of knowledge and certainty. As goes the famous saying; "The Good Deeds of the Virtuous are considered as sins by the Neighbouring Elite" (*Hasanatul Abrār Sayyiātul Muqarrabīn*).

Another example showing the importance to date accurately Bamba's writings (whenever possible) is his book entitled "Tazawudu Cighār" (A Viaticum for the Children), devoted to the fundamentals of religious rituals. This book is commonly ranked by most of the scholars (even by Cheikh Babou) among the first books written by the Sheikh during his youth (in Mbacke Cayor), due to its title and its theme which seem to imply it. However, a close examination of its content may show that this book, although devoted primarily to the youth, was written after the exile to Gabon. First, the Sheikh took the habit to introduce himself in almost all his earlier writings in such terms as "As a disciple of my father, I say" (*Khāla ibn shayhihi*). This is not the case in this book which begins with:

*"The one named Ahmad who pays infinite tribute to his ABSOLUTE MASTER and who regards himself as a subject of GOD and the Servant of the Prophet, says:"*

Secondly, all the specialists of the qasidas know that the nature of Bamba's writing prior to his exile and after his return from Gabon is quite different. Because, one may feel in his after-exile writings (called *ginaaw geej gi*, literally "after-ocean") more self-assurance in his spiritual certainty and in the Favors the Lord granted him through the long years of ordeals. Which is not noticed in his first writings. The fact is we can find many spiritual favors he claimed, here and there, in *A Viaticum for the Children*, though its being an initiation book. This is, moreover, a valuable clue showing the fact that attaining high spiritual degrees in mystical knowledge (*haqīqa* or *m'arifa*) did never

prevent the Sheikh from emphasizing the high significance to comply with the legal rules of worship (*Shari'a*). Sufi history is rich of masters whose high mystical degrees led to depreciate formal rules of worship they held as less important than Gnostic knowledge and designed for the common run of believers.

Multidisciplinary teams of researchers would include as well Murid scholars as non-Murid scholars, Muslim scholars as well as non-Muslim scholars, who must all be skilled in a particular relevant field—Islamic Theology, Sufism, history of Islam, philosophy, economy, sociology, anthropology, political science, developing strategies etc. This may be really interesting, seeing that Murids' natural immersion in the cultural, spiritual, social and literary milieu of the Muriddiya could be of great use to avoid many previous common mistakes. Though this is commonly doubted by authoritative academic standards, the spiritual experience of believing scholars may be of great help inasmuch as spiritual and mystical intuition are sometimes crucial to fathom the individual mystical experience and perspective of a Sufi master. Because only a believer who has really practiced the same spiritual exercises the Sufi was practicing (*Dhikr*, reciting and meditating on the Qur-ān, prayers, spending nights in worshipping, fasting, *khidma* and other religious practices), those who have really “tasted the flavor” of Divine Favors, can bear witness to their reality. How an unbelieving scholar could *really* penetrate mystical secrets of the Qur-ān claimed by the Sufis (out of pure theoretical conjecture), if he even doubt inwardly about the *reality* of the Revelation and the *truthfulness* of Muhammad? Academic norms of scientific objectivity, though necessary and useful, can sometimes impact seriously research on spirituality which is, by nature, “subjective”, in the sense of a phenomenon personally experienced and which can be communicated only to such a one who is sharing the same beliefs. Actually this norm compels all scholars aiming to get their PhDs or to be well received in the scientific milieu to act ideological comedy and to write “as if”. Presently, believing researchers are often obliged, while dealing with spiritual issues, to think and to write *as if* they do not believe, if they really care about “academic objectivity”. As for unbelieving scholars, they are also

forced to admit theoretically believing premises and dogma, were it just to better grasp their topics, while doubting inwardly of all spiritual material they are given. Doubt can assuredly be of great use to avoid biases, but faith does not imply subjectivity and unreliability. The glaring differing perspectives and interpretations between Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and the colonizers about the true nature of their relationship and the deepest meanings of historical events have caused enduring misunderstandings, until today. As for the non-Murid and non-Muslim scholars, less prone to admit some apparent evidences, they will help the team in keeping the necessary distance and objectivity to academic research, if needed.

This methodology will contribute much in setting out Bamba's teachings in a more modern and more neutral form to many all around the world who could be really interested in the new and fertile perspectives they are offering to the world today. In fact, this will solve also, to some extent, the paradox of the Wolof form in which migrant Murid disciples are trying currently to spread Bamba's teachings in their host societies. Because many of them often confuse Murid doctrine and Wolof social values (as we put it often, "we must not confuse Muridiyya with *Wolofity*, as some have confused Islam and *Arabity*"). This approach would also contribute to get many Murid scholars out of "the defensive trap" they are presently confined by the numerous groundless and shallow critics, during the past decades of short-sighted scholarship, and by harsh ideological antagonisms of Muslim rationalists. They could, in so doing, perceive fully the richness and the modern agenda of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba's thinking which has no cause to be jealous of other thinkers in history, belonging to other civilizations. Well, we have had enough of Marty and other outdated issues! It is now high time to explore forthrightly and without any complex what Bamba offers to humankind for the coming centuries, isn't it?

Another important element which must be taken into account by Murids, while studying the writings of their Sheikh, is to update his teaching to modern circumstances he was not living in, whenever need be. Such a principle may assuredly seem "blasphemous" to some

undiscerning Murids. But any who really grasps the true meaning of Bamba's mission of renewal (*tajdīd*) should be convinced that, despite the exceptional spiritual degrees of Bamba and of many of his successors, we must always differentiate immutable *principles* from specific *methods* suitable to particular spaces and times. Because methods must not be held as sacred as far as it is proven than others may be far more beneficial, as well in this world than in the Hereafter. Bamba himself seemed to be very conscious of this necessity to constantly update our methods and tools, when, for instance, he prayed the Lord to give him a (spiritual) offspring in charge of perpetuating his mission of *tajdīd*:

*"[O Lord!] Grant me virtuous and persevering descendants who will renew the Path of the Elected Messenger."*

Thus, it is our contention that Murids should reexamine in the future many aspects of their traditional organization (without falling into the trap of modern secularity, however), the nature and the form of their political commitment, the activities deserving first and foremost their financing. They should as well emphasize scientific and secular teaching in their educational system, while fastening on to their spiritual values. They should modernize their methods of working without any complex, if they really want to comply with the ideology advocated by their Sheikh and keep up his spiritual and intellectual legacies. Murids must also professionalize many projects and tasks. While maintaining the principle of voluntary *khidma*, they should also learn to remunerate important internal and external expertise liable to carry out Bamba's vision in better conditions.

Although this long journey into "Bamba-Ocean" may reveal sometimes unforeseen new landscapes to many, present and coming Murid generations must get ready to make the trip. However they should, in so doing, beware overstepping the limits of "useful knowledge" advised by their Sheikh. They must avoid falling into the traps of heightened intellectual dissensions aroused, in some societies, in the past, by too much tendency to ethereal and subjective speculation. Murid scholars should as well learn to be gradually

familiar with the true history of their community and the true basis of their doctrine. Although a long tradition of wise “Pax Senegalensis” taught their people to handle with great care raw historical material and scientific data, to learn self-censorship (*maslaa* or *sutura* in Wolof) and to “let bygones be bygones” so as to ensure the social stability of their nation and society. Violent clashes and old visceral hatred between Shiite and Sunni Muslims in the Arab world, fostered by long historical and political differing views and conceptions, confirm assuredly how the principle of “useful knowledge” claimed by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba may be of certain interest.

*“Useful knowledge is not that which fills the heart with envy, resentment, arrogance and going astray. Or that which incites unto animosity, controversies and endless verbal sparring. Or that which prompts unto presumptuousness, self-praising and aggressiveness. Or that which leads unto quarrelling, quick-temperance, deceitfulness and struggling.*

*Useful knowledge is that which fills its bearer with Fear (Taqwā) of GOD, the CREATOR of the servants. That which inspires humility, asceticism, Ethics (Adab), self-effacement and the awareness of one’s weakness [before GOD]. That which purifies the heart, helps in mastering the soul and prevents man from transgressing the Orders of the MAKER.” (Masālik, v. 165-168, 114-116)*

In a word, we are deeply convinced that if we manage to gather the main part of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s writings and spiritual legacy, to carry out due studies thereon, to translate them in all widespread languages, to promote their teachings throughout the world, we could contribute significantly to alter existing biases against Islam, to appease tense relationship in the world today and to remind to all humankind the true significance of their stay on earth.



*Bambaa di geej*  
*Gu tàbbi geej*

*Fekk fa geej*  
*Gu ne ko ngiij*

*Mu duy ca leer ya ba ne ngiij*  
*Ñibbisi tooyal Xarnubi*

Bamba is an Ocean of Lights  
Who melted into the Ocean of the Prophet

And found therein the Ocean of God  
Who blended with Him

Both loaded him with shining Lights  
Which poured down over humankind

*In the poem Xarnubi by Sheikh Moussa Ka*

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