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Understanding Murīdiyya from ‘Ajami Sources: Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ñaṅ’s “Jaar-jaari-Boroom Tuubaa” (Itineraries of Boroom Tuubaa)

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Abstract

Why not write Niang?

Although Murīdiyya is one of the most studied Sufi religious brotherhoods of Africa, its endogenous ‘ajami literature - referred to as Wolofal - remains largely understudied. The external scholarship on Murīdiyya generally focuses on its history, its non-violent resistance against French colonization, and its work ethic or its so-called “Africanization” of Islam. As a result, the Murīds’ own beliefs are often simplified. The dearth of scholarship on Murīd ‘ajami sources may be partially explained by the paucity of scholars trained in Western schools with the appropriate skills to unlock their ‘ajami documents. Nevertheless, these documents capture the Murīds’ own accounts of the life and mission of Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba (the founder of the ṭariqa) and their own beliefs. By translating Ñaṅ’s Wolofal book entitled *Jaar-jaari-Boroom Tuubaa (Itineraries of Boroom Tuubaa)* and using insights from an interview with the author, this presentation departs from the traditional theory-driven approach to a data-driven method to reveal Murīds’ “unfiltered” voices.

Introduction

This is an annotated translation of the Wolofal book written by Sērīñ Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ñaṅ¹ in 1997 entitled *Jaar-jaari Boroom Tuubaa (Itineraries of Boroom Tuubaa)*². While the book is one of the most widely read and available endogenous accounts of the birth of Murīdiyya, the life and teachings of its founder (Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba), and his clash with the French colonial administration, among other events, it has never been translated into English or any other European language.

¹ Sērīñ Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ñaṅ (or Serigne Mouhammadou Mahmoudou Niang) is one of the leading and oldest living Murīd scholars. He performed “tarbiyya” with his father (i.e, received the basic soul training involving physical work, discipline), later studied religious sciences in Diourbel with Sērīñ Muḥammad Dem (or Serigne Mouhammadou Dème), a disciple of Aḥmadu Bamba, and finally served as special secretary of Arab affairs for Sērīñ ‘Abdul Aḥad Mbàkke (1914-1989), who served as the third Khalīfa General of Murīdiyya from 1968 to 1989. As secretary of Arab affairs, he traveled extensively in the Arab-Muslim world.

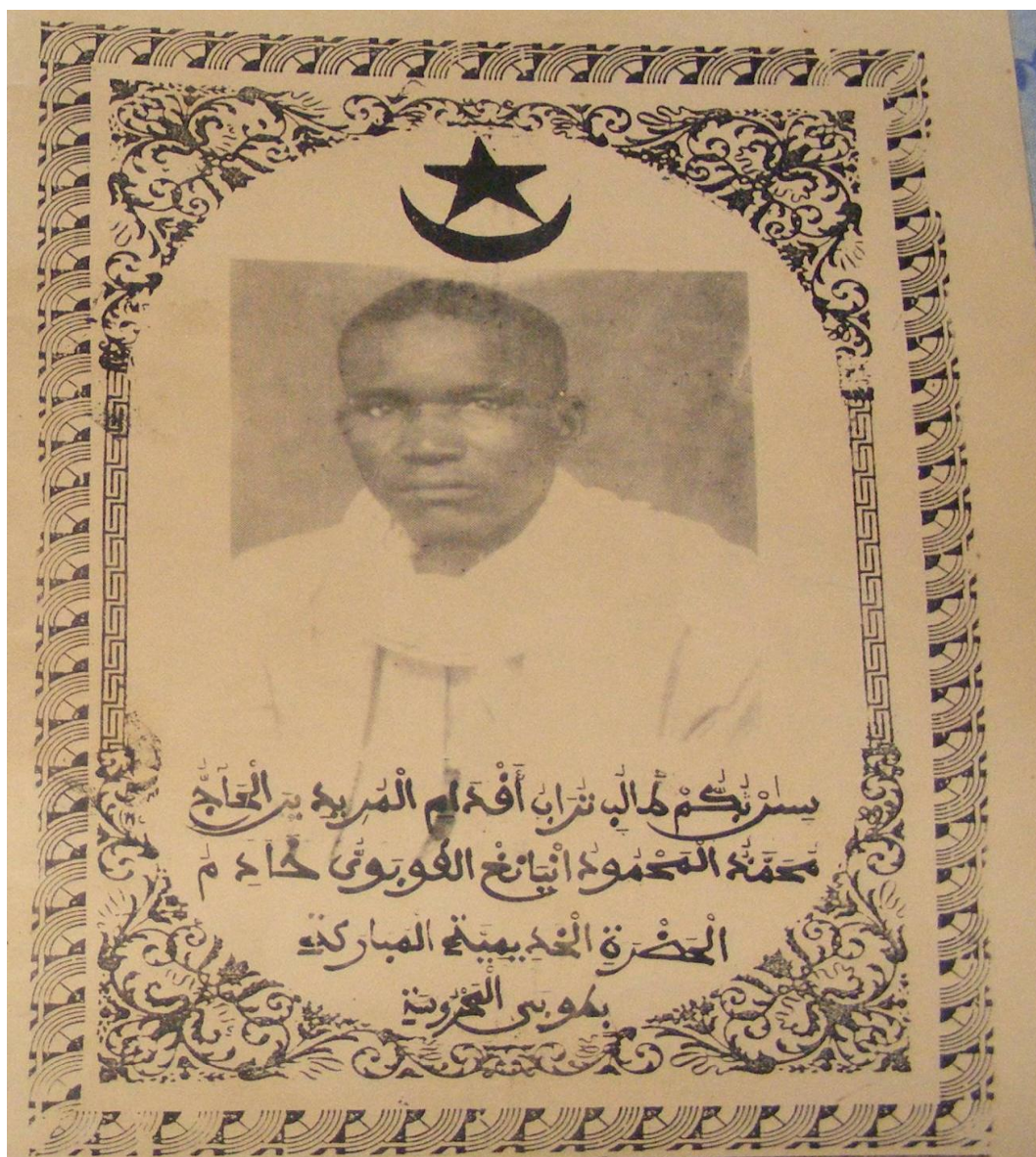
² Boroom Tuubaa (Wolof: The Owner of Touba) is one of the many endearing names of Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba (or Cheikh Amadou Bamba). He is also referred to as Bamba, Serigne Touba (or Sērīñ Tuubaa= The Religious Teacher/Leader of Tuubaa in Wolof), Khadimou Rassoul from Arabic Khādīmu’r-Rasūl (The Servant of The Prophet), or simply Sērīñ Bi (The Leader/Teacher). These names are interchangeably used throughout the book.

The author is part of Murīd Wolof ‘ajami “social scientists” - referred to as “gëstukat yi” in Wolof - who serve as professional historians, genealogists and biographers, and whose work is primarily based on fieldwork. The work of these authors is immense, but largely unstudied. In the preface of the book, the author notes that it is written to address what he perceived to be inaccuracies in the exogenous literature on Murīdiyya. While the book is written in Wolof ‘ajami, the author draws insights from numerous fieldwork trips (in places where Bamba stayed or passed through in Senegal, The Republic of Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Benin, The Democratic Republic of Congo and Mauritania during his confrontations with the French colonial authorities) and from Bamba’s own classical Arabic poetry (in which he chronicles his ordeals with the French colonial administration and reveals his divine gifts).

The book is 36 pages long and is divided into 27 small sections addressing various issues, ranging from Bamba’s personal characteristics, the precepts of Murīdiyya, Murīd education, Bamba’s conflict with the French colonial administration, his deportation to Gabon, to Mauritania and his house arrests in Jolof and Diourbel, to the internationalization of the movement. It was written on a Friday, the day of Tabaski³ in 1417 of the Muslim calendar, corresponding to April 18, 1997 in Touba⁴.

³ “Tabaski” is the Wolof name for the ‘īd al-kabir celebration in which lambs are sacrificed to commemorate the day Abraham was to sacrifice one of his sons out of faith, and God sent a lamb to replace him.

⁴The author uses both the Islamic lunar calendar and the Gregorian calendar. The use of the former results from the influence of the religion, and the latter from its being more widely utilized. He also uses the Wolof calendar based upon the Islamic calendar. Using these three different calendars ensures larger dissemination of critical dates of the Murīdiyya.



Cover page of the book published in 1997 with the following note: “Your fellow disciple, The Footstep of Murīdiyya, Al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ṣāḥ, from Touba, The servant of the Servant’s community.”⁵

⁵ He adopted the title of “Turābu aqdāmi’l murīdīna, Khādīmu’l hadrati’l Khādīmiyyati a’t-tūbāwiyyu” (The Footstep of Murīdiyya, The servant of the Servant’s community from Touba). It is customary among Murīd scholars to attribute themselves titles that underscore their humility, their position in the spiritual hierarchy and status as a devoted disciple at the service of their leader. Among Murīds, this tradition may have begun with Bamba’s own choice of the title of “Khādīmu’r-Rasūl” (The Servant of The Prophet) in his writings to humbly underscore his position and devotion to The Prophet. The spiritual Sufi hierarchical relationship in Murīdiyya starts from God, Prophet Muḥammad, Bamba, Murīd Shaykhs, to disciples. It is through this chain that the baraka and divine privileges are believed to be transmitted.



Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ṣāṇ (now over 80 years old) reading through his 1997 Wolofal book to answer questions during an interview conducted by Fallou Ngom on June 27, 2008.

The author emphasizes that the book was written in response to people like Philip Fondasee, Paul Marty⁶, some journalists and others who wrote inaccurate accounts on The Leader (Bamba) and Murīdiyya. He notes that his decision to write the book sprang from his belief in the Wolof saying that: “Anything made by a hand can equally be removed by a hand,”⁷ if it is untrue. Thus, he took his pen for eight years, from 1960 to 1968, to write in Senegalese newspapers such as Al-‘ahdul Jadīdu, Al-Ammatul

⁶ The name Philip Fondasee is not found in the existing archives and scholarly literature. It is possible that the last name is a Wolofized form of a French last name. The person is said to be a French agent who wrote on Murīdiyya issues disputed by the author. The author indicates in the interview that Philip Fondasee was a French spy (from a Moroccan mother) who infiltrated the family of Sērīñ Shaykh Mbàkke Gaynde Fatma (1913-1978), a grandson of Bamba, under cover posing as an Arab-Muslim interested in becoming a Murīd disciple. Paul Marty was an official in the French colonial empire. He is regarded as one of the most prominent French colonial expert on Murīdiyya.

⁷ “Lu loxo def, loxo mën na koo dindi” is popularly used in Wolof society to underscore the fact that man-made events or actions are by nature changeable or correctable. The proverb echoes the individual’s responsibility to take action when faced with wrongdoings. The idea contrasts with the fatalistic belief in “ndogalu Yàlla,” (Wolof: God’s decision/will), which refers to events that happen to humans and in the face of which they are powerless, and are required to “muñ” (Wolof: to accept and courageously endure painful challenges).

Senegāliyatū⁸ and others, and to speak on radio stations in order to educate people about Khādimu’r-Rasūl and Murīdiyya.

The author underscores that the book is written in Arabic and Wolof (the lingua franca of Senegal), after his realization that his prior efforts could not undo allegations made by French colonial authorities about The Leader and his religious order. He notes that the book is specifically written to “disseminate the truth more widely, to bring more mercy, and to benefit everybody.” The author concluded his introductory remarks in the book by asking God, with the baraka of Boroom Tuubaa⁹, to reward his own personal endeavors to write the book and to give to anyone who has it “sutura in this world and the afterlife.”¹⁰

In this paper, the author’s internal divisions in the Wolofal book are maintained and the translation endeavors to faithfully reflect his own perspectives, style and worldview. To maintain the authenticity of the author’s views, his own repetitions in the text are also maintained throughout the translation. When appropriate, his views which are colored by his Wolof cultural and linguistic background are explained in notes. Illustrations drawn from contemporary Senegalese popular culture that exemplify events

⁸ Al-‘ahdul Jadīdu (The New Pact), Al-Ammatul Senegāliyatū (The Senegalese Nation) were Islamic journals published in Arabic for the limited audience of Arabic literates in Senegal, consisting of some religious leaders and intellectuals trained in the Arab world or in local Arabic or Franco-Arabic schools. There is no evidence that these journals exist today. The Wolofal version of the book is more widely disseminated and read among Murīd disciples due to the limited number of people with the appropriate Arabic literacy competence.

⁹ The intercession of the baraka of Bamba is frequently used in prayers and is believed to facilitate God’s fulfillment of one’s wishes and prayers. This practice is grounded in the Sufi hierarchy, in which a disciple needs a Sērīñ (Teacher/Guide) to be taught, trained in mysticism and be lifted toward God. This feature is shared by all major Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal.

¹⁰ “Sutura àdduna ak alaaxira” is a common phrase used in Murīd prayers. The word “sutura” has no exact French or English equivalent. It roughly refers to the idea of a fulfilled and enjoyable life, with self-sufficient means, respect and discretion. “Àdduna” and “alaaxira” come from the Arabic words “al-dunya” (the earthly world) and “al-āxira” (the judgment day). The author’s prayer that God gives to anyone who has a copy of the book “sutura in this world and the afterlife” echoes the Murīd writers’ spiritual generosity and desire to widely disseminate their works. The prayer also points to the Murīds’ goal of achieving a fulfilled life in what they term “dārayni” in Arabic or “ñaari kër yi” in Wolof (the two abodes), i.e., the earthly world and the afterlife. These scholars regard themselves as disciples fulfilling their share in the spiritual and educational mission that Bamba began.

and beliefs discussed in the book are provided, whenever possible. For reasons of objectivity, important insights in the Wolofal manuscript are confronted with the most popular external accounts from colonial sources and other available scholarly works. Following is the translation of Ñañ's *Jaar-jaari Boroom Tuubaa (Itineraries of Boroom Tuubaa)*.

Who is Khādimu'r-Rasūl?

He is Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba of Sëriñ Momar Anta Sali, who rests in Dekheule, and Maam Jaara Buso, who rests in Porokhane¹¹. He appeared in 1270 of the Islamic calendar, corresponding to 1852 or 1853, after the death of the Prophet Jesus Christ in Mbàkke Bawol¹². When he appeared, he was immediately different from people in every way. He mastered the Qur'ān early, became “a sea of religious knowledge”¹³, was very humble, and loved Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) very much. He wrote books, recommended righteous actions, forbade bad deeds, helped all beings, had compassion for them, trained the soul of disciples, and made them know God. He knew God very well, feared Him a lot, worshipped Him a lot, entrusted Him with all his matters, turned his back against the earthly world¹⁴, and disapproved of the French¹⁵, attached little

¹¹ Dekheule (or Dekhle) is a village in the former empire of Kajoor. It is now part of the administrative region of Thies. It is where Lat Joor Ngone Latiir Jóob (1842 –1886), the former king of Kajoor was killed. Bamba's father worked as a Muslim judge in his royal court. Bamba's family moved with Lat Joor to Maba Jaxu Ba in Nioro du Rip in the region of Kaolack. Porokhane is located in the area. It is the place where Bamba's mother, Maam Jaara Buso (or Mame-Diarra Bousso), died and was buried. For further information on this, see Babou (2007).

¹² The Wolof verb “feññ” (to appear) used by the author is a deferential synonym for “to be born.” Its use echoes the perceived predestination of Bamba. Mbàkke Bawol is located in the heart of Wolof country in the present day region of Diourbel.

¹³ The “sea” is commonly used in the Murīd literature to refer to Bamba's exceptional mystical and supernatural powers that cannot be exhaustively comprehended by a mortal. In the eyes of Murīd disciples, it is those favors that single him out as a distinct exceptional saint with powers to act and protect his disciples in this world and in the afterlife.

¹⁴ To turn one's back against the earthly world (referred to in Wolof as “dëddu àdduna”) with its ephemeral pleasures and to devote one's life to God and meditation for the benefits in the afterlife is a recurrent theme in Murīdiyya Sufi literature. Bamba is believed to have exchanged ephemeral pleasures of this earthly life for the benefits of the afterlife.

importance to wealth, and loved the Qurʾān very much. He could endure great pain¹⁶, was very courageous, very honest and slept very little. He never even had a bed. No matter how comfortable a bed was, he would pile up Qurʾānic books onto it, and spray the perfume called Sikki or Libin¹⁷ on them and say: “Yā kitābal karīmi anta ḥabībī, wa xalīlī, wa qablu kunta ṭabībī” (Oh Holy Book of God, you are my friend, you are my confidant and my physician)¹⁸. He practiced all paths that lead to God. He used the Qādiriyya, Shadhaliyyu, and Tijāniyya wirds¹⁹, and anything he thought could lead him to God until God drew him close to Him. He wrote the following: “Dallaniyaʾl-Lāhu ʿalā Muḥammadi, wa qāda nī Muḥammadun liʾṣ-ṣamadi” (God led me to Muḥammad, and Muḥammad brought me to God.)²⁰ He received his own wird called “Al-maʾkhūḍhu min-

Ibra Faal (the father of the Baay-Faal offspring of Murīdiyya) is also considered to be the ideal disciple who exclusively exchanged all material possessions and work for spiritual elevation, benefits and privileges in the afterlife.

¹⁵ The word “tubaab” used by the author generally refers to white people. However, it is used throughout the book and in the Murīd literature to specifically refer to the French colonial authorities. Because the French were the first white people to come in contact with Murīds, all white people were traditionally thought to be French in rural Wolof country. However, the diversity within the white race is acknowledged in Murīd communities today as a result of the internationalization of the movement.

¹⁶ The Wolof word “muñ” refers to the ability to bear and face boldly difficult hardships without complains. It is believed that good events or important successes may be preceded by challenging events. The ability to endure courageously one’s ordeals is often what determines the greatness of historical figures in Wolof society. It is an admirable value in both men and women in Wolof society.

¹⁷ These are two brands of perfume favored by Sufi leaders and disciples. These perfumes and some types of incense are used to create favorable environments for optimal mystical experience. They are also used in special spiritual retreats known as “khalwa” in which supernatural beings called “Rawhān” in Arabic (Wolof: Raawaan) may appear to fulfill one’s wishes and requests. These supernatural beings are said to like the good smell of these perfumes and incense.

¹⁸ This verse is from one of Bamba’s poems called “Yā kitābal karīmi” (Oh Holy Book of God). The titles of Bamba’s poems are generally taken from the first verse of the poems.

¹⁹ “Wirds” are combinations of holy phrases and verses specific to each Sufi order that disciples are asked to recite on a regular basis. While recitations involving wirds may vary from one Sufi order to the other, they are all based upon Islamic tenets and their primary goal is, through the guidance of a leader, to lift disciples to God, and to provide them physical and spiritual qualities for a righteous life.

²⁰ Sērīñ ʿAbdul Aḥad Mbàkke (1914-1989), the third Khalīfā General of Murīdiyya, cited this verse in his speech delivered on Thursday June 20, 1985 in Touba. The original source of this citation cannot be found. It is possible that it is in one of the less known writings of Bamba.

al Lāhi bi wāsitati Rasūlihī, ‘alayhi ṣalātu wa’s-salāmu” (The one that comes from God transmitted by his Prophet, Peace be upon Him).

He subsequently gave up all the other wirts to use the new one and recommended those who rely on him to use it for their lifetime. He received the Murīd wirt in the month of Ramadan in the year 1321 of the Islamic calendar ²¹ in Mauritania in a place called Sarsāra²². It was physically given to him by The Prophet, not in dreams.²³

Conditions of the Murīd Wirt

Bamba instructed all those he gave the wirt 1) to read the Qur’ān daily, 2) to pray with crowds²⁴, 3) to learn about their obligations as servants of God (such as their relationship with their Owner, means of purification²⁵, to perform required prayers, to fast, to give charitably, to perform the pilgrimage, and others), 4) to repent relentlessly, 5) to give up sins, 6) to befriend righteous people and to abandon bad ones, 7) to trust and rely only on God, and 8) to use the wirt night and day.

²¹ The month of Ramadan is believed to be a holy month in which God bestows His mercy and privileges to His righteous creatures. The year 1321 of the Muslim calendar corresponds to 1903 in the Gregorian calendar. Colonial archives confirm that in February 1903 agitations of Murīd disciples raised the concerns of French authorities. In May 1903 Bamba defiantly refused to go to Saint-Louis to answer the French administration. In June 1903, 150 tirailleurs (colonial infantry of indigenous soldiers) and 50 spahis (a cavalry regiment of the colonial French army) were mobilized to arrest him and to send him to Shaykh Sidiyya in Mauritania (Ba, nd: 13).

²² Sarsāra (Sarsaara or Sarsara) is located in the region of Trarza in western Mauritania. It is a dry and sandy area with limited water resources. It is one of the places where he was sent by the French colonial administration in an effort to distance him from his followers.

²³ The author used the Arabic phrase “‘bal yaqaḍatan, lā manāman” (in an awakened state, not in dreams) to underscore that The Prophet physically came to Bamba. It is also argued that Sīdī Aḥmad Tijāni (1737-1815), the founder of Tijāniyya, also physically received the Tijāniyya wirt from The Prophet in a place called Abi Sam’un in Algeria while in spiritual retreat. Tāriqa founders generally claim to have received their wirts from The Prophet either physically or through dreams. Receiving a wirt from The Prophet is the highest spiritual rank in Sufi mysticism.

²⁴ Islam recommends reading the Qur’ān and praying in groups. Muslims believe that reading the Qur’ān regularly enlightens the heart, strengthens the faith, and brings divine blessings. Praying with groups is equally important because it strengthens solidarity among fellow Muslims, and is worth twenty seven times more than praying alone.

²⁵ The author used the Wolof word “laab” which refers to spiritual cleaning. It is typically performed with clean and untainted water. Ablutions and the ritualistic shower that one takes after sexual intercourse are examples of such purification.

Personal Traits of Boroom Toubaa

Physically, he was an average person. He was neither tall nor short, neither light-skinned nor black²⁶. He was neither big nor small. He mostly wore white kaftans, a white head wrap, “karbat” shoes in the rainy season and “neppe shoes” in the dry season²⁷. He did not look back when he walked and repeated everything he said twice or three times. He instructed people who submitted to him²⁸ to worship God, and he would show them the way to God by leading them along the path of knowledge through books. If the person’s mental abilities were limited or if the individual was beyond the schooling age, he would explain to him/her in Wolof using signs such as dots and drawing lines until the person truly understood²⁹.

He did not waste any of his time. He was always busy doing something, day and night. He was a man of strong character, but there was no protocol to have access to him. He impressed anyone who ever saw him. Whoever knew him loved him. He interested anyone who was acquainted with him, changed anyone who interacted with him, and no one could change him. No one could draw him into any wrongdoing, and no one could mislead him in anything. He was knowledgeable and vigilant.

What is the Murīd Path?

Similar to the commitment between God and Muslims in verse 111 and 112 in Sūrat Al-Ṭawba (The Repentance), Murīdiyya is based on “Īmān,” “Islām,” and

²⁶ Wolof people differentiate three types of colors within the black race: “xees” (light skinned), “ñuul” (black) and “xeereer” (brown). Bamba’s skin color would be called “xeereer” (brown) in Wolof.

²⁷ “Karbat shoes” are leather shoes with wooden heels. “Neppe shoes” are sandals entirely made of leather.

²⁸ The idea of submitting to a spiritual guide (the oath of allegiance) is called “Jébbalu” in Murīdiyya. It is a pivotal Murīd precept in which the disciple submits himself/herself to a Leader for the duration of his/her life and in the afterlife. The process typically involves bowing down before a Leader and telling him “aslamtu nafsi” (Arabic: I submit to you my soul) or “jox naa la sama bopp àdduna ak alaaxira” in Wolof (I personally submit to you in this life and in the afterlife). It is how one formally becomes Murīd.

²⁹ Rather than focusing on rote memorization, Bamba’s pedagogy emphasized comprehension and action. He used local linguistic and cultural tools such as metaphors, proverbs and wise popular sayings used in Wolof society to ensure that disciples, who came from different walks of life, understood his teachings.

“Ihsān”³⁰. It came to remove darkness, poverty and idleness, and to bring knowledge combined with courtesy, self-sufficiency combined with work, vigor coupled with caution, and to unite the hearts and intentions of the people who chose this path. It is meant to teach people willpower, and the meaning of being a Murīd disciple³¹. A Murīd disciple is an energetic and generous Muslim, who combines worship of God with work, gives to people from the fruit of his labor benevolently, follows whatever is expected of him/her, and immediately gives up whatever is forbidden. The disciple does not quarrel, or dispute, does not fight, and does not lead anyone ahead of him/her³². The disciple must not be the last³³, must have compassion toward anyone below him/her, must treat with respect and reverence anyone above him/her, and must treat anyone at his/her level the way s/he would wish to be treated. These are a few of the characteristics of The Leader that he cultivated in his disciples.

He wrote: “I have surrendered my life to God who owns everything. For this reason, my life is fulfilled. God has blessed me with the baraka that attracts people toward me, and He has also protected me so that mischievous traps and maraboutism³⁴ cannot come to me.”³⁵

³⁰ In Murīdiyya, the commitment is construed as the devotion to God and to “Jihādu Nafs” (an internal personal struggle against one’s negative instincts that breeds hatred, anger, greed, jealousy, etc). For further insights on this, see Babou (2007). The three concepts (Īmān, Islām, and Ihsān) are key principles of Sufism. Each concept corresponds to a level of spiritual elevation with its own requirements. Islām is the first level, Īmān is the second, and Ihsān is the highest level. If one reaches the third level, s/he is believed to be out of the reach of Satan, and to receive divine privileges. Reaching the level of Ihsān can be done with the guidance of a Shaykh “who has already traveled the way.” For further information, see: Mbacké, Khadim. *Les Bienfaits de l’Éternel ou la biography de Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké par Serigne Bachir Mbacké*. Bulletin de L’IFAN, 1981, Tome 43, Série B, Numéro 1-2, p.554-631.

³¹ “Murīd” is construed in the book in the generic sense. It refers to anyone who is yearning or aspiring to go to God.

³² This underscores the importance of humility in Murīdiyya, and the crucial importance of respecting the established hierarchy.

³³ The issue addressed here is that the disciple “must not be a loser.” It explains Murīd disciples’ determination to succeed in whatever they do.

³⁴ The word “njabar” or “njeber” refers to the practices of people commonly called “marabouts”. They are believed to possess magico-mystical powers to do both good and bad things.

³⁵ This verse comes from Bamba’s poems called “Faydu’l Bāqī’l Khāliq” (The gift of the Everlasting Creator).

Tarbiyya School³⁶

The Leader used to look for quiet places, far from major towns, and build schools there. If a learned person came to submit to him, he would send him/her to the knowledge schools³⁷, where the person would teach. If the person possessed some qur'ānic knowledge, he would send him/her to a qur'ānic school where s/he would learn and teach. If the person was of school age, he would send him/her to a school of general knowledge or a qur'ānic school where s/he would study at his/her level.

He wrote: “Wa şaytukum yā jumlata ʔullābi bi ʔalabi'l ‘ilmi ma‘a ādābi. Kullu murīdi bī yalūdhu fal yudim, tilā watan li khayri dhikrin qadrusim” (I recommend that all disciples should cultivate knowledge and discipline. I order every disciple who relies on me to keep studying al-Qur’ān, the best of the books.)³⁸ If the person’s brain could not hold these two things, he would send him/her to the school of work where s/he would be educated and taught every type of work. If the person was beyond the working age or could not perform it, he would find something appropriate that brings divine reward and ask the person to work on it. But no one ever stays with Boroom Tuubaa without doing something. He wrote in “Masāliku’l Jinān” that: “What those who passed away desire the most is to have the opportunity to come back to this world for any short duration to carry out additional work that would benefit them when they return to the afterlife.”

³⁶ Bamba’s Tarbiyya system emphasized study with work and discipline, and provided learners with practical skills they need to survive and succeed in the outside world.

³⁷ “Knowledge schools” are schools in which Islamic religious sciences are studied and taught, in addition to the Qur’ān.

³⁸ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Taysīru’l ‘asīri” (Easing Difficulty).

Furthermore, The Leader trained disciples to be united, to have compassion for each other, to trust and assist each other benevolently, to ensure that everybody wishes for others what they wish for themselves and to refuse for others what they would refuse for themselves, to help each other, to treat each other with respect, and to unite their hearts. This is the reason why, despite the important number of Murīd disciples spread throughout the world, in Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Gabon, Côte-d'Ivoire, Niger, and other places in Africa, Europe and America, all Murīds can quickly be united by one phrase: Boroom Tuubaa. Wherever it is uttered, it touches the thread that binds all Murīds. Bamba wrote: “Yā Rabbī ij‘alī’l murīdīna ma‘ā, fī ḥisnīka’l ḥaṣīri wa’l shamla ajma‘a” (Oh God, protect Murīd disciples and unite them wherever they may be).³⁹

The Causes of Bamba’s Conflicts with the French Administration

The personal traits of The Leader discussed above attracted everybody. Those who were merely seeking earthly benefits, crowds, wealth or fame came to him because these things could be abundantly found there. Those who were only seeking God, Īmān, Islām, and Ihsān also came to him because these were his only preoccupations. By 1889, a larger crowd followed him and the movements of the Murīds filled Kajoor, Bawol and Njambuur⁴⁰. The Leader founded his village of Touba in the year 1888, and several other villages surrounding it. Some villages such as Dāru’s-Salām were founded earlier, and

³⁹ This verse comes from Bamba’s poem called “Wa mā kāna’l Lāhu liyudī‘a īmānakum” (God will not overlook your faith).

⁴⁰ Kajoor, Bawol and Njambuur constitute the part of Wolof country where Murīdiyya was born. These regions correspond roughly to the present day regions of Thies, Diourbel and Louga, respectively.

others such as Dāru'l 'Alīmi Khabīri, Dāru'l Mannani, Dāru'l Quddūsi, Dāru'l Minani, and other villages with names starting with the word Dāru were founded later.⁴¹

As a result, French colonial authorities began to be suspicious of Murīd disciples and accused The Leader of wanting to create an Islamic theocratic state in the country. The reality was quite different as The Leader had no such intentions at that time, and did not even want to have a large crowd always gathering around him for he did not have the time. His devotion to the worship of God, his work for The Prophet⁴², and his dedication to lead people to the Islamic faith⁴³ took all his time.

It was in the month of March in 1895 that Boroom Tuubaa went to Jolof to create the village of Mbàkke Baari as he wanted to be away from the throng of disciples to devote his life exclusively to the worship of God, to provide spiritual training to disciples and to teach them about God. The place did not turn out to be what he planned for since the throng continued to come to him and it grew night and day. Thus, false allegations against him, accusations, and troubles began. On September 5, 1895 the French managed to take away The Leader. They brought him to the sea. He writes about his travel to the sea: “Sayyāranī illā bilādi'n-nā'iyā, wa qāda lī mukhjīla sam'ī's-sāriya” (I traveled to far away countries, and I received divine privileges that no one ever heard about).⁴⁴

⁴¹ Bamba named the first Murīd villages using attributes of God: Dāru's-Salām (Home of Peace), Dāru'l 'Alīmi Khabīri (Home of The Omniscient and The All Aware) or Dāru'l Mannani (Home of the Eternal Giver), Dāru'l Quddūsi (Home of Sanctity) or Dāru'l Minani (Home of Privileges), etc.

⁴² Bamba saw himself as a “Liggeykatu Yonent bi” (Wolof: a worker at the service of Prophet Muḥammad). He indicates that he obtained his baraka and divine privileges through the praises he wrote and the work he performed for The Prophet.

⁴³ Murīd sources argue that Bamba's mission was to lead people to the essence of Islam. They use the Wolof word “yeesal” (renewal) to underscore their belief that he came to rid the faith from cultural and traditional practices that blurred the pragmatic and spiritual essence of the faith.

⁴⁴ This verse is from Bamba's poem called “Hisnu'l Jalīlu” (Protection of The Majestic), but it can also be found in the poem called “Khāla'l Khadīmu” (The Servant says) contained in the collection known as *Al-Mawahibu ʾl Illāhiyya Wa ʾl*

He said that God gave him in his soul and body what no one will ever have. He also said that God gave him, thanks to the prominence of The Prophet, a secret that shields him from the actions of nonbelievers and hypocrites. He left Mbàkke Baari on the morning of the 18th in the Wolof month of Diggu Gàmmu⁴⁵ in the year 1313 in the Muslim calendar or in the year “Jaysashin”⁴⁶, corresponding to August 10, 1895. He travelled through Jeewal, Kokki (Coki), Louga to go to Ndar (Saint-Louis)⁴⁷ where he met Senegal’s Governor Merlin and the commandant of Louga Leclerc⁴⁸. It was through these people’s hands and their ill-wishes that God’s will was to be fulfilled. Bamba writes about Jeewal that: “God subdued Iblīs for me when I called for Him in Jeewal, and enabled me to survive the persecution by the French there and elsewhere without resorting to any weapon.”⁴⁹

Mazāya ʾl Muḥammadiyya (Divine Gifts and privileges from Prophet Muḥammad). The “trip to the sea” refers to Bamba’s seven years of deportation to Gabon. It is one of the most important historical events of Murīdiyya popularized by Bamba’s own poems and in Murīd Wolofal literature. Murīds believe that his deportation and the challenges that he faced were not accidental, but predestined. They are considered to be the price that Bamba agreed to pay for his exceptional divine privileges. French colonial authorities, despite their unjust actions toward Bamba and the Murīd community, are believed to be part of God’s plan for the fulfillment of Bamba’s destiny.

⁴⁵ “Diggu Gàmmu” is the Wolof month corresponding to Šafar in Islamic lunar calendar. The twelve months of the Wolof calendar are: 1) Tamxarit, 2) Diggu Gàmmu, 3) Gàmmu, 4) Rakki Gàmmu, 5) Rakkaati Gàmmu, 6) Maami Koor, 7) Ndeyu Koor, 8) Baraxlu, 9) Koor, 10) Kori, 11) Diggi, 12) Tabaski. For Arabic equivalents of Wolof months, see Dieng and Faye (2006:246).

⁴⁶ “Jaysashin” corresponds to the year 1313 of the Muslim calendar, the year that Bamba was deported to Gabon. In Arabic mystic numerology (particularly the one used in North and West Africa), the addition of the numerical values of the consonants of the word “Jaysashin” corresponds to the number 1313. The ‘j’ (3) + ‘y’ (10) + ‘s’ (300) + ‘sh’ (1000) = 1313. Important Murīd dates are usually expressed in this system.

⁴⁷ Saint-Louis, Senegal served as the colonial capital of French West Africa until 1902 when the capital was moved to Dakar.

⁴⁸ Merlin (Martial-Henri) served as Director of Political Affairs in 1895. Leclerc was the Administrator of the colonial district of Saint-Louis which included Louga. Merlin and Leclerc were the masterminds behind the arrest and deportation of Bamba to Gabon (Babou, 2007:125). Colonial sources do not confirm the presence of Merlin during Bamba’s arrest in Jeewal (located in the current region of Louga), but they confirm the date of Bamba’s arrest on August 10, 1895 at 2 p.m., and the presence of Leclerc who led the force that arrested him.

⁴⁹ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan). This quotation echoes the underlying spiritual reason for Bamba’s non-violent method in Murīd internal sources. According to Murīd sources, his method of resistance was spiritual and was based upon his faith and trust in God. He is portrayed as the only one who succeeded in abiding by his dual commitment to: 1) never offend God, and 2) never offend a fellow human in his life (Wolof: Mësula tooñ Boroomam, te mësula tooñ moroomam). Murīds believe that it is one of the exceptional behaviors that set him apart from other religious leaders and that accounts for his unequal divine privileges, protection and rewards.

Ndar (Saint-Louis), Senegal

He wrote: “It is in Ndar where God chased away from me all that harms, with the baraka of the people of Badr. It is there too where I prayed and received protection from God from my adversaries in the same way He shielded me from harmful hurdles. My devotion to the path of God protected me from hardships there.”⁵⁰ One of the ugly things that he first endured in Ndar was to be put in a place alone with an enraged hungry lion. The lion came to him and laid down next to him like a sheep familiar with his/her owner⁵¹. “When assisted by The Prophet, even if one encounters a lion in the forest, the beast will be docile.”⁵² “My sale did not stay without customer, and I made good profits.”⁵³ The lion became docile in my presence.”

⁵⁰ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan). The battle of Badr was the first victory of Muslim soldiers against the numerically superior army of the Quraysh who compelled Muḥammad to go into exile in Medina. The soldiers were believed to have been assisted by an invisible army of angels sent by God. It is customary for Muslims to mention them in their prayers in the hope of receiving similar assistance and protection from God when exposed to difficulties.

⁵¹ It is common to raise sheep in Senegal as pets. Such sheep become familiar with their owner and docile like dogs. The event is one of the three instances in which Bamba is said to have encountered a lion and to be miraculously unharmed in the Murīd hagiography. The second one occurred in Dakar. The renowned Murīd Wolofal poet Muusaa Ka notes in *Jazaa’u Shakóor bu yoonu géej gi* that Bamba was pushed into a lion cage in Dakar. Ñañ indicates in the interview conducted on June 27, 2008 that the third event involving a lion occurred in Touba. It occurred when a warthog chased by a lion took refuge behind Bamba. The lion saw Bamba, it became disoriented and left. These events are recounted in Murīd internal literature to underscore Bamba’s supernatural powers.

⁵² This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Nūniyya khad ṭāba” (A poem ending with “n” or “nūn”) in which he cites Imam Muḥammad Busayri (1212-1296 CE)’s “Burdu” (The Prophet’s Mantle). It is said that, after suffering a stroke, Prophet Muḥammad healed him using his mantle (Arabic: “burd”), hence the name “Burdu.” It is popular in the Muslim world and is often recited to cure and purify hearts.

⁵³ “Sama njaay làmbut, jot naa njëgam” (My sale did not remain without a customer and I made good profits) is a translation of a verse in one of Bamba’s poems called “Jawartu bi’l Furqāni” (I live with God through The Qur’ān). The metaphor refers to the fact that Bamba’s efforts did not go in vein, because his exclusive devotion and trust in God helped him to endure and overcome all the ordeals.





The tree and the place where Bamba's episode with the lion occurred is called Jardin d'Essai in the district of Eau Claire, Saint-Louis, Senegal. Currently, there is a Qur'ānic school for children in this place. Pictures taken by Fallou Ngom on April 25, 2008.

Ndakaaru (Dakar), Senegal

“God chased away all the harm that Iblīs planned for me in Dakar. There, I praised The Prophet, a praise that made Iblīs run away from me. But it is the Qur'ān that finally removed for me the difficulties that occurred there.”⁵⁴ The ugly things that they did to him in Dakar included putting him in an exiguous and filthy place. He writes about Dakar the following: “Whenever I remember the night I spent in Ndakaaru and The Leader who gave the instruction to keep me at that place; whenever I think about that, my

⁵⁴ This excerpt comes from Bamba's poem called “Ayyasa minnī'Lāhu” (God subdued Satan). He was brought to Dakar to board the boat for his deportation to Gabon.

mind goes to armed resistance, but God protected me and obstructed the adversaries.”⁵⁵

The Enraged Bull in Dakar

The ugly things that they did to him also included sending a mean bull trained to charge people to him in a narrow street. The bull ran toward him, jumped over him, fell in front of him and continued running. It did not touch any part of his body. The Leader did not even lift his eyes to look at it. He simply praised God and was silent. He continued to work as if nothing happened. This story can also be found in “Jazā’u Shakūr al-‘Atūfī fī Jawābi ‘Abdu’l Latīf” where Bamba notes that when the bull was jumping over him, it was as if it had wings. It was as if it was flying over him and flapping its wings.

Inside the Deportation Boat to Gabon⁵⁶

“It is inside the boat that I learned from God that I am a worker at the service of The Prophet. It is there too where I praised The Prophet, a praise that grows and finds him where he is.”⁵⁷ Inside the boat, he was first kept in a pleasant room appropriate to

⁵⁵ This excerpt comes from “Jazā’u Shakūr al-‘Atūfī fī Jawābi ‘Abdu’l Latīf”, (Merit Reward in Response to the Moor ‘Abdu’l Latīf) which is one of Bamba’s works where he chronicles his life, his deportation to Gabon and to Mauritania, his house arrests, divine privileges that he received during his ordeals with the French, among others.

⁵⁶ Ba (nd:73) argues that the boat that brought him to Gabon is a commercial boat called Ville-de-Pernambouc, and not Cap Lopez as others claim. During the deportation of Bamba, the Gabon was part of the French Congo colony. The colony consisted of Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville, with Libreville as its capital. The colony was split in 1906 by the French administration resulting in the two nations of Gabon (with Libreville as its capital) and The Republic of Congo also known as Congo-Brazzaville or Congo (with Brazzaville as its capital). Congo-Brazzaville is not to be confused with Congo-Kinshasa or The Democratic Republic of Congo.

⁵⁷ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan). It underscores his special relationship with The Prophet based upon the Sufi hierarchy. “Liggeyal yonent bi” (Wolof: working for The Prophet) and “liggeyal Serīñ Tuubaa” (working for Serīñ Tuubaa) are popular beliefs in the Murīdiyya today. They are based upon the “Sufi chain of spiritual command.” As a servant of The Prophet, Bamba considers himself as someone who continues The Prophet’s mission. His disciples in turn work for Bamba, their “immediate superior in the chain of command.” Regardless of the hierarchy, the ultimate goal of the disciples’ work is to gain God’s satisfaction and be rewarded in this life and the afterlife. This belief is better captured by the transitivity relationship in Mathematics in which when A is in relation with B, and B is in relation with C, then A is in relation with C. Following this line of thinking, Murīd disciples working for Bamba are also working for The Prophet and God. Bamba attributes his special divine privileges to the intercession and satisfaction of The Prophet in relation to his work and his numerous panegyrics

worship God. But some people who worked in the boat came and removed him from the room. They brought him to a very windy and cold place where it was impossible for him to write anything. Suddenly, the boat broke down, and refused to move. They tried their best, but it did not work. They returned The Leader to the room where he was first kept; suddenly the boat became functional and started to move. Another event that occurred in the boat was his prayer on the water⁵⁸. As discussed earlier, The Leader was committed to “never offend a fellow human being, and to never offend God.” When Bamba wanted to pray in the French boat, they tested his faith in God and supernatural powers. The French told him that that he could not pray in their boat, because doing so would offend them, and if he did not pray at the appropriate time, he would offend God. Bamba began to take his ablutions and they continued to disturb him. He took his prayer mat, threw it on the water and jumped onto the swimming mat, stood up on top of it and prayed. When he finished praying, he returned onboard.

He seems to be referring to this event when he stated that it was in the middle of the sea, the ordeal to which I was subjected by my adversaries gave me the certitude that I possessed extraordinary powers. The Most Generous honored me without difficulty with the ability to fulfill my wishes and perform extraordinary deeds. During that period of ordeal, God guided me and I had the certitude that I am a servant who possessed gifts and supernatural powers. My exclusive worship of God protected me from all that harm.

dedicated to him. He uses the metaphor of his poem as a plant that flourishes to find The Prophet where he is to underscore his spiritual connection to Muḥammad, and the powers of his writings.

⁵⁸ This is one of the most popularized events in the Murīd internal literature. Paintings, songs and poems illustrating this event are pervasive in Murīd sources and areas.

This exclusive worship also became a light that illuminated for me any type of ordeal, and preserved me from any conspiracy.”⁵⁹

Bamba’s Stay in Conakry, Guinea

“God took away from me everything that leads to unrighteousness in Conakry, and protected me from it. I praised The Prophet there, and he provided me with a guidance that guarantees that I will not be lost, with God’s approval.”⁶⁰

Bamba’s Stay in Grand Bassam, Ivory Coast

“God chased away my adversaries in Grand Bassam, guided me thanks to my praises of The Prophet”. “He also saved me from death in the year 1313 of the Muslim calendar.”⁶¹

Bamba’s Stay in Dahomey (Present-day Republic of Benin)

“God has blessed me with a gift in Dahomey that provided me self-sufficiency, and I need nothing else except it.”⁶²

Bamba’s Stay in Libreville, Gabon

“Thanks to the praises of The Prophet that I wrote in Libreville, God gave me a privilege that every “waliyyu” wants, but no one has.”⁶³ The ugly things they did to him there included keeping him in a cemetery. He told them that the cries of those buried there and their screams disturbed him. He left there and moved to a very dark forest to be

⁵⁹The source of this citation cannot be found. It is possible that it is in one of the numerous lesser known writings of Bamba.

⁶⁰ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan).

⁶¹ The date corresponds to 1895 in the Gregorian calendar. The first part of the excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan). The second part can be found in his “Jazā’u Shakūr al-‘Atūfī fī Jawābi ‘Abdī’l Latīfī” (Merit Reward in Response to the Moor ‘Abdī’l Latīfī).

⁶² This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan).

⁶³ “waliyyu’l Lāh” are holy men of God characterized by their complete devotion and love of God who come to this world to guide people to the path of righteousness. The excerpt also comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan).

alone with God, his Owner. The place is called Montagne Sainte (Holy Mountain). They found him there and told him that at a given time, the time he was to pray there, anyone or anything there will be burned, and be reduced to ashes. When the time came, they sent soldiers with heavy weapons there. When the soldiers arrived, they saw The Leader standing up to pray surrounded by mysterious beings on horses that wore white clothes and were carrying shining swords. The soldiers called their chief. When the chief arrived, he waited until The Leader finished praying to ask him whether he had brought those beings there. Bamba told him that they came there for him. The chief asked him if he could ask them to leave so that the two of them could discuss. Bamba agreed and uttered some words and those beings disappeared. Then the chief told him that he had some questions for him. He told Bamba that: “I know you are an honest man who keeps his words, and whenever you agree not to do something, you will never do it; and whenever you agree to do something, you will do it forever.” Part of what the chief asked him is: “Say that you will not purposefully wage war against us.” Bamba replied: “I am Someone’s “surga,” I only do what I am instructed to do. At this moment, I am not instructed to do it, but a “surga” only knows where he will be instructed to work today, and does know where he will be sent to work the next morning.”⁶⁴ Then, the soldiers and their chief went away and left The Leader who continued his work. Bamba said that he was accompanied by soldiers that God sent to protect him during his travels, and that this was evident to the adversaries of God (the French administration) who wished him ill

⁶⁴ The Wolof word “surga” refers to a seasonal worker. In the rainy season, there are numerous seasonal workers who come to work in the local farms of their hosts. They are typically fed and sheltered, given a piece of land to farm for themselves, and sometime paid with money or with a share of the harvest, depending on the agreement with their hosts. The work and actions of seasonal workers depend largely on the instructions of their “masters,” their hosts. Bamba used this Wolof metaphor to underscore that his actions depend on the will of God, his Master.

when God's soldiers came with their horses to rescue him. His adversaries were afraid of them and subsequently run away.

I visited the place where this happened on Tuesday the 18th in the month of Ramadan in 1411, corresponding to January 5, 1991. I found a puddle of water at the place where The Leader used to take his ablutions. There was a papaya tree, palm tree, mango tree, and badam tree ⁶⁵ at the place. We⁶⁶ paid respect there, and learned that the place was owned by a Senegalese named Saada Njaay (or Sada Ndiaye) from Saint-Louis who used to work for some former French companies in the area and was sent there as part of his job. The place was his farm. God made him love The Leader. He was the one who invited him to come to the place.

Now the port where The Leader landed when he arrived in Libreville is a place with beautiful grass, with trees and benches facing the palace of the President of the Republic of Gabon. When his feet touched the soil of Libreville, the first thing that he did was to pray two rakkas⁶⁷. A big store called Malā'ika (or Malaka) is now located at the place where he performed these prayers. In the district where he first landed, which was located at the cemetery, a monument of love is now built there. There is a very big mango tree, numerous bushes and different trees at the place where he stayed. At the place where he used to pray, the first mosque of Gabon is built there and the five daily prayers are

⁶⁵ Badam tree is a large tropical tree. Its scientific name is *terminalia macroptera*. It belongs to the *combretaceae* family.

⁶⁶ The author alternates between the first person singular "I" and the first person plural pronoun "we," suggesting that he traveled with a group during his fieldwork trips.

⁶⁷ These two rakkas (a set of prayers involving two genuflexions) are optional prayers commonly used to thank God or to request some special assistance.

performed there every day. The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Gabon is now built at the place where he used to bury the money that he used to be given⁶⁸.

Bamba's Stay in Lambarene, Gabon

The distance between Lambarene and Libreville is 246 kilometers. At that time, the entire territory of Gabon was covered by a forest thick with trees. There was no road. There was nothing. There were only rivers throughout the country. Only canoes could be used to travel. Therefore, it was a far away country inside the forest, very dark in all aspects, with lots of hardships, inhabited by some unusual people called Galwaa (or Galoa/Galouoa). It was there where The Leader was sent. He remained there alone with God for years, underwent hardships and pains that cannot be expressed orally or written down with a pen. His views on the place can be found in “Jazā’u Shakūr al-‘Atūfī fī Jawābi ‘Abdu’l Latīf” (Merit Reward in Response to the Moor ‘Abdi’l Latīfī). [The hardships he experienced at the place were so great that] he decided not to even name the place in his writings. The name cannot be found in any of his qasidas. He only used the name of the inhabitants of the area called Galwaa, when referring to the place.

“I arrived to God in Galwaa, and he shielded me from all things that bring calamity. My status as a worker of The Prophet which shielded me from troubles seriously pained Satan there.”⁶⁹ I visited the place on Tuesday in the Wolof month of

⁶⁸ Murīd sources argue that Bamba did not grant any importance to money and used to bury illicit money. It is reported that he used to fill the holes in the roof of his hut with money. The money that he used to bury in Gabon could be from the monthly stipend of 50 francs that the French administration used to give him for his basic needs. Some Murīds argue that the fact that where Bamba buried money in Gabon is where the Ministry of Finance is now built and that good things occur in all places where he stayed or passed by is not coincidental, but rather evidence of his divine privileges. Some Murīds see a nexus between the fact that Bamba buried some of the money given to him with the current internationalization of the movement. They perceive his action as some sort of “a saving account” that he opened and filled for his disciples to enjoy today.

⁶⁹ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan).

Ndeyu Koor in 1411, corresponding to January 29, 1991, and paid respect to the place where The Leader stayed. There was a big mango tree there too. The city hall of Lambarene is now built next to the site. There is a rock that resembles stairs overlooking the river at that place. It is where The Leader used to sit down to take his ablutions. There too, there a big mango tree that stands next to the river overlooking it. It is also said that French authorities used to summon him, and he would go to respond to a place called Ndirole. The distance between this place and Lambarene is 133 kilometers. The place was also a forest and had no roads in those days. It is to that place that Almaami Samori Tuure (or Almamy Samory Touré) was also sent. He stayed there until his death. The Leader performed his funeral rituals and returned him to his Owner. May God have mercy on him.⁷⁰

Bamba's Stay in Cap la Pêche, Gabon

“I praised The Prophet in Cap La Pêche a praise that protected me from an adversary that God has deprived of righteousness.”⁷¹

Bamba's Stay in Port-Gentil, Gabon

It was a port in an island now called Port-Gentil. A boat is used to travel the distance between this place and Libreville. It takes five hours to reach the place. I visited the place on Tuesday in the Wolof month of Ndeyu Koor in the year 1411 of the Muslim calendar corresponding to January 19. He was brought to the place in 1991 by a boat that

⁷⁰ The colonial archive confirms that Samori Tuure (1830-1900) was exiled in Ndirole (spelled as Njolé) where he died in 1900 (Ba, nd: 92). The source claims that when Samori felt his death coming on, he sent a messenger to Bamba to ask him to come conduct his funeral rituals, but Bamba told him that “what kept him in Ndirole is what kept Bamba in Lambarene.” The colonial source also claims that Bamba gave the messenger an “object” to put in Samori’s grave, and that Bamba performed funeral prayers for him from Lambarene. However, the Wolofal source contradicts this account. The Murīd Wolofal source notes that Bamba physically performed Samori’s funeral prayers in Ndirole where he used to go to respond to French officials, and not symbolically from Lambarene. The use of “On raconte...” (It is said...) in the colonial archive suggests that the credibility of the colonial account is questionable.

⁷¹ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Jazā’u Shakūr al-‘Atūfī fī Jawābi ‘Abdi’l Latīfī” (Merit Reward in Response to the Moor ‘Abdi’l Latīfī).

belonged to the company called IROW⁷². We paid respect to the beach where the boat landed when The Leader arrived there. We prayed Takusaan⁷³ at the place. There is an oil well there now. Boats that transport oil now land there.

Bamba's Stay in Matadi, The Democratic Republic of Congo

“Praising The Prophet made me forget everything I encountered in hardships in Matadi. The place is also located on an island.⁷⁴” It is said that it is the Congolese port of Leopoldville. The Leader was also sent there, but we have not been able to visit the place yet because it is part of the country of Zaire or Congo.⁷⁵

Bamba's Stay in Mayombe (or Mayumba), Gabon

“God has chased away from me everything that I dislike or can bring me pain in Mayombe. I am grateful to God who protected me from sin and chased away Iblīs in Mayombe. Raqīb and ‘Atib are my witnesses in the island of Mayombe.”⁷⁶ It is also an island located in the sea. The distance between it and Libreville is 126 kilometers. The area is also a dense forest filled with trees. It is difficult to see through the trees in the forest, let alone to walk in it. There were no roads and only canoes could go there by rivers. By sea, only cargo ships carrying merchandise reach the place. Now, planes go there, but flights are not regular. Therefore, it can be said that it is the most difficult place

⁷² The company called IROW cannot be found in the existing literature. It is possible that the word is a Wolofized name of a French word or abbreviation.

⁷³ The Wolof word “Takusaan” refers to one of the five daily required Muslim prayers known as ‘Asrī performed before sunset. The Wolof names of the four other prayers are Suba (Subh) performed before sunrise, Tisbaar (Dhuhr) performed in the afternoon, Timis (Maghrib) at sunset, and Gee (Isha‘i) performed around 9 pm (Dieng and Faye, 2006).

⁷⁴ This excerpt comes from Bamba’s poem called “Jazā’u Shakūr al-‘Atūfī fī Jawābi ‘Abdi’l Latīfī” (Merit Reward in Response to the Moor ‘Abdi’l Latīfī).

⁷⁵ The author indicates in the interview that he did not go to Matadi because it was part of Belgian Congo. It is also possible that the instability in the country at the time of his fieldwork was not conducive to fieldwork. The country was affected by a civil war in 1996 and 1997 as the neighboring Rwanda war spilled over the country.

⁷⁶ In Islam, Raqīb and ‘Atib are the two angels whose task it is to record people’s righteous and unrighteous acts. This excerpt also comes from Bamba’s poem called “Ayyasa minnī’Lāhu” (God subdued Satan).

to travel to in the entire country. When the French exhausted all their plans against The Leader in vain, it was to this place where they sent him. It was there that he endured more ordeals. It was also there where they put him in a deep hole, and he got out of it immediately unharmed. It was where the island of Wiir-Wiir also known as Île des Vers is located. It is located between Mayombe and Kabinda in the Democratic Republic of Congo, near Angola and Kiluuw⁷⁷.

Regardless of what the area is called today, it is a remote island in the sea. It is the place where the French used to bring everything beyond their powers so that it will never be seen again. In short, it is to that place that The Leader was brought by boat. They spent days on the way before reaching the island. When they dropped him there and returned, the first thing that he did was to perform funeral prayers for any believer (Muslim) who was ever brought there and subsequently passed away. He prayed that God bestow His mercy on them. When he finished praying for them, he prayed there Tisbaar, Takusaan and Timis. He did not utter a single word during that entire time. Whenever he finished a set of prayers, he would continuously start another set. At sunset, some beings started to emerge from the water and from the dark trees, and were coming toward him. Bamba was with someone called Samba Lawbe Njaay (or Samba Laobé Ndiaye), the former king of Jolof, who was also deported to the same island⁷⁸. The king was so frightened when he saw things that his courage could not handle. He screamed with all the power of his voice.

⁷⁷ Wiir-Wiir is the Wolof name for Île des vers/verts. The place and Kiluuw are not found in present-day maps. But the region in which they are located lies in the Gulf of Guinea region, an oil-rich part of Africa. The island of Wiir-Wiir is portrayed in Murīd literature as the home of jinns (supernatural beings) where it is said that the French administration used to send people they wanted to kill, without leaving traces, when they exhausted all their means. Bamba's having survived the ordeals in the island and his interaction with the supernatural beings that live there are popularized in Murīdiyya's internal literature. Muusaa Ka provides the names of seven major supernatural beings such as Jujayoro, Naba Ayo, Kakunako, Kalirako, Haaskiinu, Qalnatiiru, and Nooru Tamtiir who lived there and subsequently became Bamba's disciples in his Wolofal poem *Jazaa'u Shakóor u yoonu géej gi* translated by Dieng and Faye (2006: 89).

⁷⁸ Samba Lawbe Njaay or Samba Lawbe Penda Ndiaye was installed and later demoted as king of Jolof by the French colonial administration, and replaced by Buuna Ndiaye (the son of Alhuri Njaay). He was subsequently deported to



Painting of two images of Bamba, Samba Lawbe and a supernatural being in Wiir-Wiir found on a wall in the city of Thies, Senegal. Picture taken by Fallou Ngom on May 28, 2008.

The Leader asked him what he wanted. He answered that he only wanted to leave the place. The Leader then answered that it is a pleasant place to worship God, because it is very calm. Then, Samba Lawbe said that he will immediately be killed by something, if he were to spend the night there. He begged Bamba to help him so that they could leave the place because he was afraid of the place. Then, The Leader told him to gather the luggage, to tie them on his back, and climb on his back, to hold tight, and not to open his eyes. Samba did that and they miraculously returned where they were taken from in Mayombe. It is said that they reached the island days before the French officer who brought them there returned after dropping them off. When the French officer saw The Leader upon his arrival, it is said that he took a gun, put it in his mouth and shot himself to death, committing suicide. It is as if that is what The Leader is alluding to when he said:

Gabon five months after Bamba's deportation for refusing to cooperate with the administration, for allegations of preparing to wage holy war and for his close ties with Bamba (Ba, nd:86).

“When unbelief in God, hatred and ill-wishes toward me lead someone to throw me away in the sea, God has tamed everything for me and blessed me with privileges. God saved me from the traps of my adversaries so that the sea in Mayombe became for me what the fire in which Abraham was thrown was for him.”⁷⁹ Bamba also wrote the following: “God saved me from my adversaries, and tamed them for me. He tamed the seas for me. You, Sea of Mayombe, you can witness that I am a servant of God working for The Prophet. You, Sea of Mayombe, praise God and do not compare Him to anyone.”⁸⁰ He said that no one but God resolved his problems when he was in difficulty among the Galwaa and the Baafaliyaa, and needed God. The Galwaa are the people who live in Lambarene, and the Baafali are those who live in Mayombe.

The Leader’s Homecoming

As discussed, the French administration took away The Leader on September 5, 1895 and took him to the sea, to the Congo, and other places that are as yet unknown where he stayed for some time. No one knows everything about his travels to these places except himself and God, The All-Knower. The summary of all that is known about his stay in these places could not fit in this book. His stay in these areas, from when he was taken away up to the month of November 1902, when they brought him back, did not change anything in The Leader’s behavior. Even the way he used to wear his head wrap did not change. When the French authorities realized that they had exhausted all their plans against him to no avail, they returned him to Senegal. He was exactly the way he

⁷⁹ This comes from Bamba’s poem called “‘Alā inna nī usnī” (I will not complain). Bamba said that God protected him in the same manner He saved Abraham from his enemies. The Qur’ān (Surat 21, verse 69) teaches that God saved Abraham when he was thrown in the fire by his enemies by transforming the raging fire into harmless cold.

⁸⁰ This can be found in Bamba’s “Jazā’u Shakūr al-‘Atūfī fī Jawābi ‘Abdi’l Latīfī” (Merit Reward in Response to the Moor ‘Abdi’l Latīfī). The personification of the sea reflects the Murīd belief that God gave Bamba the ability to communicate with all His creatures, including jinns, trees, seas, animals, etc.

was before he had been taken away, and continued to say exactly what he said before, and to do exactly what he did before. In addition, he said that he forgave all of his adversaries⁸¹.

Bamba's Positive Impact on the Places in which he Stayed

One of the most intriguing features of The Leader is that in all of the places to which he was brought in order to be tormented, suffering has subsequently ended there for all Muslims, let alone the Murīd disciples. In all those places, the names of Touba and that of Boroom Tuubaa (or Borom Touba), Shaykhu'l Khadīm (or Cheikhoul Khadim) are written everywhere, in organizations, cars, restaurants, stores, carpentry shops, jewelry shops, companies, tailor shops, and in the activities in those countries.

Starting from Jeewal, their commemoration [of his stay there] is more than just a celebration⁸². In Louga, there is a large federation of Dahira Touba⁸³ Louga. In Saint-Louis, there is a federation of Dahira Touba Ndar, and the two rakkas that he prayed at the office of Governor Merlin, who was to order his deportation, is celebrated.⁸⁴ Now, every year thousands of disciples go there to Ndar to pray when the anniversary of the two rakkas comes, and they will continue to do so forever. Furthermore, a Muslim governor will be sitting where Merlin used to sit forever, God willing, to give instructions that Merlin used to refuse.

⁸¹ The fact that Bamba forgave French authorities who unjustly subjected him to difficulties is construed in the Murīd literature as another feature of his exceptional positive character, and confirms in their eyes his status as a true man of God who is beyond human weaknesses such as revenge, anger and others. It is also argued in Murīd sources that, despite their ill-wishes and the difficulties that the French administration created for Bamba, they have participated unconsciously in the fulfillment of his predestined spiritual mission and success.

⁸² This sentence underscores the importance of the celebration of the day he was arrested in Jeewal in Jolof by the French colonial administration. The anniversary of his arrest has become the biggest event in the town today.

⁸³ "Dahira Touba" is the French-based spelling of the Arabic word "dā'ira" (gathering) and Touba (the religious epicenter of Murīdiyya). These words are pervasively used in the names of Murīd organizations inside and outside Senegal.

⁸⁴ Murīd sources argue that the first thing that Bamba performed, when he arrived in Saint-Louis, when summoned by the French colonial authorities before his deportation to Gabon, was to pray two rakkas in defiance of their authority. The anniversary of this event is one of the biggest celebrations of the city today.

In Dakar, there are unlimited federations of Dahira Touba, signs with the name of Touba and His Owner (Bamba) can be found on everything and everywhere. In Conakry, the name Touba Conakry can be found throughout the city, both in Dahiras and other places. In Grand Bassam, there is no Dahira larger than the one called Touba Grand Bassam among the numerous Dahiras in the country. Furthermore, in each of these countries, a house is built for Sëriñ Tuubaa (Serigne Touba) called Touba in the country. In Dahomey, which is now Benin, the name of Touba is also on everything and everywhere. The situation in Gabon is more intriguing. If one travels to Libreville on a Friday now, it is as if one is in Touba, Senegal because of the numerous mosques filled with disciples. On every street, you will see signs such as “Touba Bijouterie,” “Touba Menuiserie,” “Restaurant Touba,” “Entreprise Touba” or “Darou Khudous,” “Darou Minan” or “Darou Salam” or “Cheikhoul Khadim” throughout the city.⁸⁵ Their dahira is one of the most powerful Murīd organizations in the world.

There are also Touba Libreville, Touba Lambarene, Touba Port-Gentil, Touba Muhanda, Touba Monana and Touba Franceville. In Tchibango, a town located at 612 kilometers from Libreville, there is a Restaurant Touba owned by someone called Móodu Faal (or Modou Fall). There is another Restaurant Touba in the area at 446 kilometers from Libreville owned by someone called Cerno Faal (or Thierno Fall). Similarly, there is a Restaurant Touba in Lambarene owned by ‘Abdul Laahi Fay (or Abdoulaye Faye).

“Whoever thinks that I am interested in anything during this travel except in God and The Prophet, and carries swords and heavy weapons against me, will be dishonored

⁸⁵ The names Touba Bijouterie (Touba Jewelry shop), Touba Menuiserie (Touba Carpentry), Restaurant Touba (Touba Restaurant), and Entreprise Touba (Touba Venture) are written with the French-based spelling because French is the official language of Senegal and the countries where he was brought. Darou Khudous, Darou Minan, Darou Salam, Darou Rahmane and Cheikhoul Khadim are also French-based spellings of the Arabic names Dāru Khudūs, Dāru Minani, Dāru Salām, Dāru Raḥmān and Shaykhu’l Khadīm (The leader of the servants), respectively.

and abandoned by God. Creatures will humiliate him/her, educate him/her, and s/he will live with dishonor and despair. And God will assist me and side with me, and creatures from the sea and the land will follow me for I am someone who brings benefits and is harmless.”⁸⁶

The Leader’s Return from the Sea: How he found Disciples and his Welcome

When he came back, people seemed as if they were drugged. They continuously flocked to him night and day coming from everywhere at any time, to submit themselves to him and to pay their respect to him. The French became angrier. They summoned him again to Saint-Louis in 1903 and told him something⁸⁷. The Leader told them that he is nothing but a servant of God, that he does not worship anything except Him, that He is the only Authority that he recognizes, and that he recognizes no other authority besides God. The French administration managed again to remove him from the country on July 13, 1903 and brought him to Gànnar (Mauritania) where he spent 9 years. His departure was as “if the world was about to end” and everybody headed to Mauritania to see him.⁸⁸ The country (Senegal) was depopulated. French authorities continuously moved him to more distant places, more difficult places, and to places with the least amount of water.

They brought him to Khumaag which is Saḥwatu’l Mā’i, to Jarāriya and Sarsāra, and to Nuttū Mughzīn.⁸⁹ Despite all this, he never complained or became angry.

⁸⁶ This echoes the Murīd disciples’ belief that Bamba came into this world as a harmless divine favor to exclusively bring grace not only to the human race, but to all God’s creatures who live on the earth or in the waters.

⁸⁷ This refers to when the French colonial administration informed Bamba about the decision to remove him from Senegal again and to send him to Mauritania to Shaykh Siddiyya in an effort to separate him from his growing number of disciples.

⁸⁸ The author used the Wolof phrase “mel ni seen àdduna dafa bëgga jeex” (It is as if their world is about to end) to underscore people’s inability to restrain themselves and to live without Bamba as they continued to leave Senegal to go to Mauritania to visit him and be with him.

⁸⁹ The author noted in the interview that Khumaag (or Khomaak) is the Wolof name for “Saḥwatu’l Mā’i” (Saout-El-Ma) located near the northern border of Senegal. It is part of the southern region of Adrar. Jarāriya and Sarsāra (or Jaraariya and Sarsaara) are two distinct places located in the region of Trarza. Nuttū Mughzīn cannot be identified in currently existing maps.

Bamba said that God gives him whatever he asks, and he receives His gifts wherever he is, and even moreso when he was staying in Jarāriya at the well of mercy. He said that he is grateful to God who gave him both visible and hidden privileges, and who made him into someone loved by righteous people. Bamba said that he is thankful to God who brought those who helped him from the Daymāna people in Sarsāraa, and noted that those who came to Sarsāraa to pay respect to him are cleared of their sins.” This is how The Leader lived in Mauritania. In the end, Moorish inhabitants also started to submit to him, to praise him, to sing about him, and to request his assistance in their worldly and spiritual needs to which he provided solutions. Some came to ask genuine questions on issues beyond their comprehension, and he cleared up their confusion. Others came to test him, and he showed them wonders and miracles. Everybody there agreed that he was “Boroom Jamano.”⁹⁰ Shaykh Siddiyya⁹¹, in whose custody he was put, ended up writing numerous praises for him. He testified about Bamba that he is truly a blessing brought by God, and that he is a miracle among God’s own wonders.

If Prophet Muḥammad was not the last of The Prophets, one would have said that Bamba was a Prophet. But, whatever the case, the good work that The Leader performed, if widely distributed, even the nonbelievers would receive blessings that would protect them from hellfire in the afterlife. Shaykhu Sa‘du Abīhi wrote a song for him and praised him.

⁹⁰ The Wolof phrase “Boroom Jamano” (Owner of the Era) is the title given to someone who is thought to be the most prominent spiritual leader of his time and serves as a pole of righteousness and enlightenment.

⁹¹ French authorities sent Bamba to one of their Moor friends, Shaykh Siddiyya (a major Qādiriyya religious leader) in Saḥwatu’l Mā’i in Mauritania on June 19, 1903. The goal was to distance him from his numerous followers and so that Siddiyya could influence him to abandon what the administration perceived as his disobedience and “troubling teachings.”

Muḥammad Bun ‘Abdul Lāhi Sālīmūn and others have also praised him. He was later taken from Mauritania and brought to Ceyeen in Jolof⁹².

Bamba’s Stay in Jolof, Senegal

Because they had no solution with which to deal with him, they removed him again from Mauritania in April 1907 to bring him to Jolof where he spent 5 years. The French administration banned people from travelling to Ceyeen, Dāru Khudūs (or Darou Khoudous), and Dāru Raḥmān (or Darou Rahmane), but people refused and continued to go to him night and day. Then, they removed him from there and brought him to Bawol⁹³. He arrived in Njaarém⁹⁴ at 5:30 pm on January 16, 1912. The French managed to sign a decree to elect him as a member of the Comité Consultatif⁹⁵ responsible for Muslim affairs in French West Africa. The Leader refused even to hear about his nomination with his own ears, let alone to accept the position. In January 1919, when their 1916 plan failed, they managed again to send a medal of “Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur” to be delivered to The Leader by the French Governor. The Leader refused even to lay his eyes on the medal. Thus, those plans also failed⁹⁶. The Leader told them that, in the same way that they have no interest in his business, he has no interest in theirs. He asked them to follow their own beliefs and he would follow his own.

⁹² Ceyeen (Thieyène or Thieène) is located in the present day region of Louga. It was part of the former Wolof Empire of Jolof. Upon his return from Mauritania, Bamba was kept under house arrest there from April 1907 to January 15, 1912 when he moved to Diourbel (Ba, nd: 13).

⁹³ “Bawol” is the Wolof word for the present day region of Diourbel.

⁹⁴ Njaarém is the Wolof name for the present day city of Diourbel.

⁹⁵ The “Comité Consultatif” was an advisory committee set up by the French administration to provide advice on Muslim issues in French West Africa. It was also used to ease the relationship between French authorities and reticent Muslim leaders, and to nurture their collaboration. Colonial sources indicate that Bamba was asked on April 26, 1916 to become a member of the committee, but he declined (Ba, nd.13).

⁹⁶ “Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur” is one of the highest distinctions awarded by the colonial administration. The French administration decided to honor Bamba with this distinction on January 14, 1919. Colonial sources claim that Bamba refused to put on the medal, but accepted to take the diploma.

It is in 1927 that The Leader instructed disciples to celebrate the 18th of the Wolof month of Diggu Gàmmu (corresponding to the Muslim month of Şafar) as the Magal of Touba, because it is the day that he left Mbàkke Baari to “travel to the sea.”⁹⁷ In addition, he instructed that a mosque be built for him in Touba. On the 4th day of the Wolof month of Tamxarit in 1346, corresponding to July 19 of the same year, on a Wednesday in 1927 was when The Leader “came home”⁹⁸ to Touba.

May God enable us to profit from his baraka, and make us be continuously rooted in his teachings, and reward him for his great heart, for the stance that he took for Islam, to spread God’s orders, and for being generous toward all creatures. He fulfilled his duties toward God and toward human beings.

Conclusion

The author has rendered the Murīds’ own perspectives on key religious, historical, political and socio-cultural contexts of the genesis and development of Murīdiyya. He has expressed the Murīds’ endogenous version of the history, genesis, development and internationalization of their Sufi order. The perspectives and beliefs in the book govern Murīd disciples’ beliefs and actions today. In so doing, the book brings new insights into the Murīds’ belief system, and their disciples’ attachment to values and practices often misunderstood or regarded as “atypical” or even “non-Muslim” by outsiders and some critics.

⁹⁷ This refers to the beginning of the major Murīd yearly celebration held in Touba popularly known as Māggal or Magal (Wolof: Celebration). The “travel to the sea” is construed in Murīdiyya as the beginning of Bamba’s difficult mission on earth and the source of his divine gifts. It is also construed in Murīdiyya as the date that Bamba started his predestined mission of bringing grace to humanity.

⁹⁸ The author used the Wolof verb “ñibbisi” (to come back home) as a deferential way to refer to Bamba’s death and his burial in Touba. Colonial sources confirm that Bamba’s death occurred on July 19, 1927 in Diourbel and that he was buried the same day in Touba.

In addition to new insights on the personal traits of Bamba, on the places to which he was brought and the ordeals that he endured, the book shows the Murīds' belief in the exceptionality of their leader, a man who they believe was gifted with special divine favors to face an unjust colonial empire alone, and who won without resorting to violence. His mightiest weapon is believed to have been nothing but an exclusive devotion and trust in God.

The author's point that 1) Bamba never offended God, and never offended a fellow human being during his lifetime, and that 2) he was a harmless being who came to bring grace to humanity, echoes the Murīds' perceptions of the uniqueness of their leader. The positive impact on the places where Bamba was deported (including the "intriguing" fact that the current Ministry of Finance of The Republic of Gabon is built on the place where he used to bury money) provides evidence of Bamba's unparalleled divine gifts in the eyes of Murīd disciples. They believe that Bamba did not inherit his divine favors, but earned them by fulfilling his commitment to God, to the Prophet Muḥammad and to all creatures, despite the fact that he was deprived of his freedom for over thirty years.

The book also reveals the originality of Bamba's pedagogy that provided customized education to disciples who came from different walks of life. He is also perceived among the Murīds as a model humanist whose central focus has always been the human race and thus whose teaching and goals transcend racial, cultural or regional boundaries since his goal was to provide training to all disciples, regardless of their background, and to achieve "paradise in this world and in the afterlife." It is this humanism in Bamba's philosophy that explains his forgiveness and the assistance that he provided at times to the French administration (often misconstrued as "evidence of

collaboration” by outsiders). In many respects, the Murīds perceive him as one of God’s gifts to humanity who brought grace to all creatures that live on earth and in the seas as exemplified by their popular Arabic phrase “fi’l barri wa’l bahri” (inside continental and maritime spaces). Thus, the book brings fresh insights into the Murīds’ internal worldview and belief system, and highlights the need for and the benefit of fostering more data-driven scholarly inquiries on such important, but understudied ‘ajami literatures in Sudanic Africa.

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