

Aḥmadu Bamba's Pedagogy and the Development of 'Ajamī Literature

Fallou Ngom

Abstract: While African literature in European languages is well-studied, 'ajamī and its significance in the intellectual history of Africa remains one of the least investigated areas in African studies. Yet 'ajamī is one of the oldest and most widespread forms of literature in Africa. This article draws scholars' attention to this unmapped terrain of knowledge. First, it provides a survey of major West African 'ajamī literary traditions and examines the nexus between the pedagogy of Aḥmadu Bamba and the development of Wolofal (Wolof 'ajamī). Then, with reference to excerpts from Sēriñ Masoxna Ló's 1954 eulogy, it discusses the role of Wolofal in the diffusion of the Murīd ethos.

'Ajamī Traditions in West Africa

Little is known about West African 'ajamī literary traditions outside areas in which they have originated.¹ This relative neglect is due to a number of factors, including the lack of an 'ajamī public depository, the limited number of individuals with the linguistic skills and cultural background required to analyze 'ajamī documents, and a lack of interest on the part of qualified scholars, perhaps because of prejudice. In French-speaking Africa the neglect of the intellectual history of black Africans is rooted partly in the colonial mindset and the agenda of the *mission civilisatrice*. Recognizing the existence of an African intellectual history was tantamount to purposefully undermining the very agenda that the colonial administration sought to achieve. The African had to be portrayed as intellectually challenged, with a history that began with the arrival of Europeans on the continent.

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These racist views, however, were by no means exclusive to Europeans. While racism in Western societies is the subject of serious on-going discussion, Arab racism against black Africans remains a largely taboo topic, and it is yet to be confronted. Kane (2002:8) notes that the writings of black African authors have long been neglected due to prejudice, as both Europeans and Arab scholars with the necessary linguistic competence to study their works have often deemed their insights of little or no scholarly interest or benefit, and most assume that sources of knowledge on Africa are either oral or written in European languages. These reasons, among others, account for the current dearth of scholarship on African 'ajamī literatures.

While the most celebrated intellectual literary tradition in Sudanic Africa is that of Timbuktu, little attention has been given to centers of learning that thrived in other parts of Sudanic Africa in which Hausa, Fulfulde, Wolof, and other black African scholars developed rich Arabic and 'ajamī literary traditions. Kane (2002) refers to these scholars as "les intellectuels africains non euromphones" (non-Europhone African intellectuals).

The insights in Robinson et al.'s (1994) translation of excerpts from a Fuuta Tooro Pulaar 'ajamī manuscript dealing with the life of Al-Hājj 'Umar Taal (1797–1864) illustrate the significance of 'ajamī to the study of African history. The works of David Robinson and his colleagues and of John Hunwick remain as some of the most significant scholarly efforts to study Islamized societies of Sudanic Africa through written accounts of those who experienced it first-hand as active participants. Their works underscore the need for further studies of this largely neglected terrain at the heart of knowledge production about Africa.

Hunwick (2006:5) indicates that Kanuri, spoken just north of Lake Chad, was one of the first African languages to be written with Arabic script, followed by Fulani and later on Hausa, Wolof, and Yoruba. While the exact date when 'ajamī started in Sudanic Africa is difficult to determine, the waves of Fulani religious revivals that swept across West Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries undoubtedly fostered the emergence of local Arabic and 'ajamī literary traditions. The first Muslim revival (of the eighteenth century) produced a renaissance of Arabic writing and the second wave (of the nineteenth century) resulted in the emergence of 'ajamī writing (Gérard 1981:47).

These movements produced centers of Islamic learning where both Arabic and 'ajamī were used for mnemonic, devotional, and didactic purposes. The best known areas where Arabic was used alongside 'ajamī were (1) in northern Nigeria among the Fulani and Hausa; (2) in Guinea among the Fuuta Jalon Fulani; (3) in northern Cameroon among the Adamawa Fulani; (4) in Senegal among the Tooroobe Fulani (to a limited extent) and among the Wolof; and (5) in northern Ghana among the Hausa and Jula traders (also to a limited extent).

In northern Nigeria Usman dan Fodio (1754–1817) and his family promoted Fulani and Hausa literacy. At the early stage in their drive for an

Islamic revival they felt the need to depart from time-honored customs that restricted the writing to classical Arabic, the holy language of the Qur'ān. If the movement was to obtain popular support and lead to genuine mass conversion, it was necessary to address illiterate people in their own language, and therefore to produce texts that might be read to them (Gérard 1981:47).

The Fulani and Hausa have lived in the region for centuries, the Hausa as *indigènes*, and the Fulani having migrated eastward over successive centuries from points of ethnic origin in Senegal and Guinea (Mack & Boyd 2000:4). Gérard (1981:35) argues that the Fulani Muslim reformers found it necessary not only to conquer pagan people, but also to convert them to Islam, and that for this latter purpose they proceeded as Christian, and especially Protestant, missionaries had done in the nineteenth century. They fought against illiteracy, but realizing the difficulty of teaching the Arabic language to the subjected people, they used Arabic script to transcribe vernacular languages.

In the Fuuta Jalon region of Guinea, as Salvaing (2003:491–92) notes, the development of a huge literature in Arabic and Fuuta Jalon Pular began in the middle of the nineteenth century. Little is known about this literature outside Guinea, however, because of the country's isolation in the years following independence and the lack of public repositories of manuscripts. Sow (1966:14–15) indicates that every village in the Fuuta Jalon region was connected to Islamic learning centers in Dalabâ, Koyin, Micîdi, Labé-Dieppéré, Koula, Touba, and others, and Fulani writers interacted with scholars in Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania. He has identified three main categories of Fuuta Jalon writers: (1) so-called great masters who mostly wrote devotional works, (2) writers of the colonial era (which he calls the "transition") who generally wrote satirical poems, and (3) modern writers who are less religious, more critical, use popular language, and draw from the rich Fulani local oral traditions and folklore.

Today the only public collections containing a substantial number of manuscripts by writers from Guinea are the Fonds Archinard in Paris and the Fonds Gilbert Vieillard in IFAN, Dakar, consisting of mainly Fulfulde manuscripts collected by the administrator Gilbert Vieillard in the 1930s. The majority of the manuscripts are to be found in private libraries owned by scholarly families. Salvaing (2003) notes that the Fuuta Jalon manuscripts are not noticeably different from those found in other areas of West Africa. As in the Fulani and Hausa 'ajamī literature of northern Nigeria, the Fulfulde literature in Fuuta Jalon consists primarily of texts of religious popularization aimed at conveying basic knowledge of Islam to people who do not understand Arabic (2003:491–92). Fulfulde was also written in Fuuta Tooro to a limited degree, but little is known of it other than the famous *qaṣida* from Muḥammadu 'Ali Cam (or Mouhammadou Aliou Tyam), a follower of Al-Hājj 'Umar Taal. Gérard (1981:57) argues that the exceptionally close links of the Fuuta Tooro (the origin of Al-Hājj 'Umar Taal) with

Arabic-speaking centers of learning in the Maghreb likely prevented the emergence of 'ajamī tradition in Fuuta Tooro.

As Salvaing (2003:493) correctly notes, one cannot study 'ajamī literature in Fuuta Jalon without recalling the important role played by Cerno Samba Mambeyaa (1755–1852) in bringing it to existence. Although the use of Fulfulde was common for oral commentaries on Qur'ānic and other religious texts before his time, he was the first to advocate its systematic use as a written language in religious teaching. He composed the famous *Oogirde Malal* (The Vein of Eternal Happiness) in which a number of important Islamic teaching texts are presented in a readily accessible Fuuta Jalon Pular form. Sow (1996:15) notes that Mombeyaa's desire to shift from Arabic to Pular was accompanied by a desire for cultural autonomy. Despite some opposition traditionally attributed to Al-Hājj 'Umar Taal, a significant religious literature in Fuuta Jalon Pular emerged in Guinea from the middle of the nineteenth century onward (Salvaing 2003:493).²

Besides the Hausa and Fulani 'ajamī tradition in northern Nigeria and Guinea, there are smaller and lesser known Arabic and 'ajamī centers of Islamic learning in northern Cameroon and northern Ghana. In northern Cameroon there are indications that written Adamawa Fulani poetry began to flourish at Yola in the middle of the nineteenth century. This literature comprised large numbers of stories, riddles, songs, and tongue twisters, which, according to Gérard (1981) properly belong to oral lore. Gérard also contends that much is still to be learned about the literary consequences of the Hausa trade, which extended throughout West Africa. It is known that Hausa merchants had been trading kola nuts in areas that are now part of northern Ghana as long ago as the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, Arabic learning seems to have come to northern Ghana and adjacent territories along a north–west trade route chiefly frequented by Jula merchants. Already in the eighteenth century, writing in Arabic was common among the Gonja Muslims for private and commercial correspondence, for recording genealogies, and for magical treatises. The arrival in Gonja of the Hausa merchant's son 'Umar ibn Abu Bakr ibn Uthman al-Kabbawi al-Kanawi (1858–1934) led to a renaissance of Arabic writing in the area (Gérard 1981:40).

In Senegal, the country's long exposure to Islam and its proximity to centers of learning in the Maghreb may well be responsible for the country's contribution to the West African corpus of Arabic writing. Inevitably, the development of Islam in Senegal was accompanied by the diffusion of the Arabic language and script, and consequently the growth of poetry in Arabic (see Gérard 1981:42–44). Gérard indicates that creative writing in Wolof emerged in the late nineteenth century as the belated effects of Muslim expansion, which had swept over all of West Africa, and that in Senegal this culminated in the foundation of Murīdiyya.

Since the death of Al-Hājj 'Umar Taal, nearly every generation has seen the foundation of one or more Islamic centers of learning in Senegal,

where an important tradition of Arabic writing developed, but it is among the Murīds that a large portion of writing was done in Wolofal (see Gérard 1981:44–45). Although the religious revival and reform movements that affected West Africa arrived in Wolof society only in the nineteenth century, much later than in Hausaland and Fuuta Jalon, the founding of Murīdiyya accelerated 'ajami literary production in Wolof society, an acceleration that remains unabated to this day. The underlying reasons for the flourishing of Wolofal among Murīds are to be found in the life experiences, the desire for cultural autonomy, and the pedagogy and teachings of Aḥmadu Bamba, the founder of Murīdiyya.

Aḥmadu Bamba's Experiences, Pedagogy, and the Development of Wolofal

As Robinson (2000:208–10) notes, the biography of Aḥmadu Bamba (1850–1927), in its broad outlines, is relatively well known. Like Malik Sy, he was born at mid-century, grew up amid the conditions of disruption, and developed a following, a pedagogy, and a place in the new colonial economy by the end of the nineteenth century. Robinson further notes that Bamba developed a reputation as teacher, saint, and leader among a large number of displaced people, and that his reputation included an attitude of opposition to the practices and agents of power, whether they were members of the *anciens régimes*, the rulers of “Islamic” states, or part of the emerging colonial order. While the general history of Bamba and his brotherhood is relatively well known, the internal religious and cultural forces that motivated his actions remain largely understudied due to scholars' limited access to Murīd endogenous 'ajami literature.

Murīds generally refer to 1884 as the date of the founding of their order. The year 1884 is also when Bamba started his Tarbiyya Education (an innovative method of education for adults linked to action, work, and loyalty), and it is furthermore the year when Bamba reached the age of forty, a symbolic moment in the life of Muslim saints and clerics engaged in a spiritual quest because the Prophet Muḥammad received his first revelations at the age of forty (Babou 2007:111). It is well known that Bamba pursued what is commonly referred to as *Jihādu Nafs*, an individual and internal struggle against the negative instincts that breed hatred, anger, greed, and jealousy (Ngom 2002:218). This form of Jihād is also referred to as the Greater Jihād, the goal of which was to instill Islamic values and shield people against the corrupting effects of negative indigenous and French influences of the era (Babou 2007:5). The ethos of this nonviolent Jihād is captured in a much quoted verse written by Bamba: “The warrior in the path of God is not [the one] who takes his enemies' life, but the one who combats his [own] *nafs* to achieve spiritual perfection” (Babou 2007:5).

One defining feature that distinguished Bamba from his contemporaries was that he demystified the attitude of superiority of his Arab/Moor

colleagues over their black African colleagues in the same way that he demystified the colonial French administration. As Robinson (2000:5) notes, the Moors felt superior toward black inhabitants because they were “white,” not “black”; they were “Arabs” who were “natural” Muslims, not “recent” converts to the faith. As Babou (2007) notes, Bamba experienced how the fraternity between Muslims so celebrated in the Qurʾān and the prophetic traditions could be ambiguous in practice when it involved people of different skin color and cultures, because Sidiyya Baba and his Mauritanian Moorish compatriots did not have much regard for their Senegalese black colleagues.

Bamba’s experience during his first trip to Mauritania prompted him to write the following in the preamble to *Masāliku’l Jinān* (Itineraries of Heaven): “Do not let my condition of black man mislead you about the virtue of this work, because the best of man before God, without discrimination, is the one who fears him the most, and skin color cannot be the cause of stupidity or ignorance” (Babou 2007:62). Bamba’s experience with his Moorish colleagues strengthened his desire for cultural autonomy and triggered his apprehension of unchecked Arabization and acculturation. He differentiated the essence of Islamic teachings from Arab and Moorish cultural practices with no spiritual significance. This may explain why he did not personally claim Sharifan or Arab descent, a common practice of many West African ṭariqa founders.

The following Wolofal excerpt from Sēriñ Muusaa Ka, the most famous Murīd ‘ajamī poet, echoes the Murīds’ loyalty to Wolof culture and language: “Wolof, Arabic and all languages are equally valuable. All poetry is fine that aims at praising the Prophet” (Gérard 1981:73). Muusaa Ka’s view mirrors the general belief among Murīds that Bamba is not only a spiritual guide, but also someone who revalorized the positive aspects of Wolof society which were subjected to French and Arab acculturation. Bamba believed that the creation of Murīd schools in isolated places was the best way to achieve cultural autonomy and to educate the diverse masses who came to him. The following Wolofal excerpts exemplify his innovative education system.

Wolof Latin-Based Transliteration

Sēriñ bi daf daa seet ay wereb yu wéet, yu sori dëkk yu mag yi, mu def fa ay daara. Ku fa dikk jébbalu, soo dee boroom xam-xam, mu farale la ci daaray xam-xam yi, ngay jàngale. Soo dee boroom al-Qurʾān mu farale la ci daaray al-Qurʾān yi, ngay jàng aka jàngale. Soo dee ku tollu ci jàng mu yebal la ci daaray xam-xam walla al-Qurʾān nga jàng la nga tollool.

Yeen taalube yépp, dénk naa leen (1) sàkku xam-xam ak téggiin. Wax na it, maa ngi digal bépp taalube bu wéeru ci man (2) mu dëkke jàng al-Qurʾān, mi gën ci téere yi. Ku sa xel mënula téye ñaar yii nak, mu farale la ci daaray liggéy, ñu yar la xamal la liggéy yépp. Soo weeso liggéy walla mënnoo ko,

Excerpt 1: Murīd Schools



Source: Muḥammadu Maḥmūd Nāḥ, *Jaar-jaari Serīn Tuubaa*, 1997. Dakar: Librairie Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba.

mu seet lu baax lu am tuyaaba mu farale la ca. Waaye kenn du toog loxoy kese muk k fa Boroom Tuubaa. Dadaa wax naan ci *Masāliku'l Jinān*, nīi faatu li nū gēna bēgg mooy dellusi ci ādduna lu mu gāt-gāt ngir defaat fa lu leen di jariñ buñu delluwaatee.

English Translation

The Leader (Bamba) used to look for quiet places, far from big towns, and build schools there. If you came to submit to him, if you were a learned person, he would send you to the knowledge schools, where you would teach.³ If you possessed qur'ānic knowledge, he would send you to qur'ānic schools

The content of the excerpt shows that Bamba created schools that matched the diversity of his disciples' backgrounds. His system emphasized Islamic knowledge, qur'ānic knowledge, discipline, and physical labor. His pedagogy offered early specialization depending on learners' potentials and backgrounds. He organized the system around "knowledge schools," "qur'ānic schools," "working schools," and personalized instruction for disciples with special needs. Through this system, Bamba provided specialized and customized training to disciples with different intellectual and physical abilities and potentials.

Tarbiyya Schools (working schools) were more populated than the other schools in the early days of Murīdiyya, as the majority of people who first came to Bamba had already passed schooling age. Given his difficulties with some Muslim clerics of the time, not many disciples from learned families or with significant Islamic education came to him initially. As part of the strategy to manage the growing number of people, mostly illiterate and semiliterate, who gathered around him, Bamba consecrated the first Murīd Shaykhs from among his senior disciples between 1886 and 1888 (Babou 2007:70). These Shaykhs were at the core of the social fabric underlying Murīd communities. They served as spiritual guides, imams, advisors on social issues such as marriage, divorce, and death, healers, and intermediaries between the secular authorities and the people.

Bamba's major educational goals were the dissemination of values such as solidarity, hard work, self-reliance, political stability, cultural autonomy, and Sufi spiritual elevation among disciples from many different walks of life. He drew from the wisdom of Wolof society and the essence of the Islamic message to achieve his goals. The educational system that he developed was a clear response to the cultural, political, and spiritual crises of that era. In the tradition of Muslim scholarship, he formulated his thoughts and ideas about education in books, letters, and sermons presented as responses to questions posed by his disciples and colleagues (Babou 2007:80). While his books, letters, and poems were written in Arabic, Bamba used Wolof proverbs and insightful popular sayings in his discussions to simplify foreign Islamic concepts and to make them understandable to his disciples. These discussions were transcribed in Wolofal for wider dissemination in Murīd communities.

Wolofal literary tradition most likely developed from these communities and schools, particularly in Tarbiyya Schools whose diverse student body consisted mostly of illiterate and semiliterate adults such as former slaves and former crown warriors, peasants, and women and children. As Gérard (1981:73) notes, some of Bamba's senior disciples (such as Muusaa Ka, Mbay Jaxate, Moor Kayre, and Samba Jaara Mbay) developed Wolofal as they realized that the genuine conversion of the Wolof masses could be achieved only through writing that could be sung or read out loud to illiterate village audiences. He further notes that Bamba's favorable attitude vis-à-vis 'ajamī was in line with activities of the Fulani reformers in Fuuta Jalon

and in Hausaland, but in direct opposition to the Arabism of Al-Hājj ‘Umar Taal, who was afraid that ‘ajamī writing might lead to the neglect and disappearance of Arabic, the sacred language, in West Africa.

Robinson (2000:216) indicates that the most lasting contribution of Bamba’s seven-year exile was his writing about the tribulations and how he survived them, and that this material in turn spawned a hagiographic literature from his followers, and a set of images that have inspired Murīds up to the twenty-first century. Besides writing praise poetry celebrating Bamba’s achievements and prominence, senior and learned Murīd disciples regularly copied, translated into Wolof, and disseminated his classical Arabic writings. These efforts boosted the early development of Wolofal in Murīd communities and sustained the intellectual and spiritual life of Murīd schools and communities. The works were chanted, memorized, quoted, copied, discussed, and interpreted, and they served as sources of inspiration, motivation, and *baraka* (blessing).

Consequently, after spending years in Tarbiyya Schools, where they chanted, recited, memorized, and discussed both Bamba’s Arabic poems and his senior disciples’ Wolofal poems and studied their “tafsir” (commentaries), initially semiliterate and illiterate disciples acquired Wolofal literacy skills such as mastery of the Arabic script and its modified letters and familiarity with the dialectal and idiolectal features of key Murīd authors. The literary works of Wolofal scholars were not solely confined to religious writings. Like many of their European and Arab contemporaries, they were African intellectuals socially engaged in the issues of their time (whether religious or secular). In addition to being able to read devotional Wolofal writings, the disciples also gradually could write and read personal letters, keep records, and run their own businesses. Thus Wolofal evolved to become a full-fledged medium of written communication in Murīd communities that served a number of purposes: not only the dissemination of Bamba’s teachings and the writing of praise, satirical, and polemical poetry and eulogies, but also record keeping, and the communication of other secular information. In creating Tarbiyya Schools and encouraging the use of Wolofal as an educational tool among senior disciples such as Muusaa Ka, Bamba, it can be argued, was aware of the pedagogical and cultural benefits of using Wolof, the language of the masses.⁴ Nowadays, Bamba’s classical Arabic poems and the Wolofal literature constitute the bedrock of educational materials used by Murīd sages to educate and to transmit Murīd ethos to future generations.

Wolofal and the Diffusion of Murīd Ethos

Wolofal is used today for different purposes in Murīd communities. There are roughly four major categories of Wolofal scholars trained in Murīd schools: (1) Wolofal “social scientists,” referred to as “Gëstukat yi”; (2) Wolofal esoteric scholars, or “Boroom xam-xamu baatiin yi”; (3) Wolofal poets,

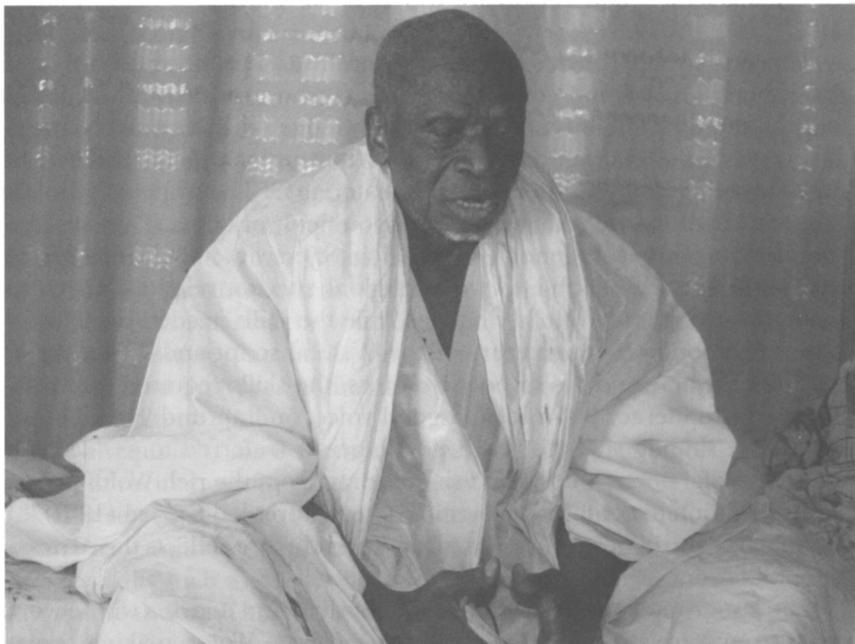
or "Taalifkat yi," and singers, referred to as "Jàngkat yi" or "Woykat yi"; and (4) Wolofal scribes and copyists, referred to as "Bindkat yi" or "Móolkat yi."⁵

The first group consists of professional historians, genealogists, and biographers. The second consists of scholars whose primary work lies in research and dissemination of esoteric knowledge (such as prayers, magical protective devices, and interpretations that unlock secrets hidden in Bamba's writings and in other religious materials).⁶ The works of scholars in these two groups are primarily based upon fieldwork data. They are also grounded in their endogenous criteria for objectivity.⁷ The third group consists of poets whose job is to write religious and nonreligious poetry to be sung by specialized Wolofal singers. While the skills needed for Wolofal poets are, among others, mastery of the Wolofal script and some understanding of Arabic and Wolof poetic devices, the skills required for Wolofal singers are literacy in Wolofal, a good voice, and an understanding of appropriate singing styles for each poetic genre (referred to as "daaj" in Wolof). Wolofal poetry writers and singers draw from the rich Wolof praising tradition in content and form. These features led Gérard (1981:73) to argue that Murīd poetry in its musicality and rhythm reflects the Africanization of Islam.

The last group consists of professional scribes and copyists whose work ranges from translating Bamba's Arabic poems into Wolof, making copies of important Wolofal manuscripts, and writing letters for illiterate customers who want to communicate with their Wolofal literate friends or relatives, to preparing public announcements, road signs, and advertisements in Murīd areas. It should be underscored that this professional categorization of Wolofal scholars is not rigid. It is only meant to reflect the major trends of Wolofal scholars and their methods of production and dissemination of knowledge. In Murīd communities one can be both a respected Wolofal poet and a scholar deeply versed in esoteric sciences, as is the case of Sēriñ Masoxna Ló.

The Poetry of Sēriñ Masoxna Ló

I met Sēriñ Masoxna Ló in the summer of 2006 when I was working on the "Diversity and Tolerance in the Islam of West Africa" project.⁸ The picture below was taken as he was preparing to read excerpts from his 1954 mourning poem in honor of Sēriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa Mbàkke, also called Amdi (1886–1945), the oldest son of Bamba who served as the first Khalīfa of the Murīd Sufi order from 1927 to 1945. Masoxna Ló was chosen for this study due to his personal ties with Bamba's family, his education, and status in Murīd circles. Born around 1924 in the village of Ndam Keur Ndiaye Mame in the region of Louga, he studied the Qur'ān from his father Moor Koddu Ló, a disciple of Bamba and the brother of Soxna Aminata Ló, one of Bamba's wives and the mother of Sēriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa Mbàkke.

Figure 1: Sëriñ Masoxna Lô in his living room

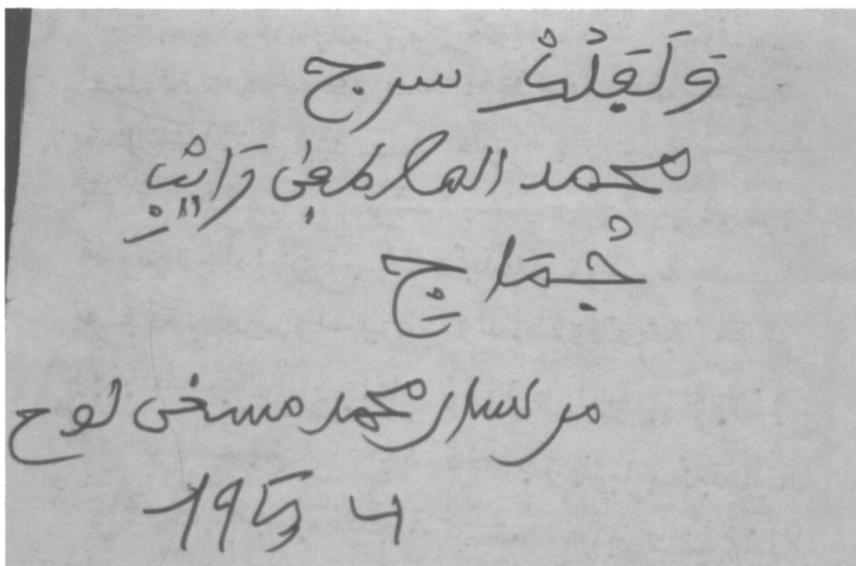
Source: Fallou Ngom, "Ajami in the Senegambia." *The Diversity and Tolerance in the Islam of West Africa*. African Online Digital Library (forthcoming). www.aodl.org/ticfia.

After his father's death in 1945 Masoxna Lô studied "knowledge" (Islamic sciences) with several Murīd teachers.

Lô himself was a disciple of Sëriñ Shaykh Mbàkke (commonly known as Gaynde Fatma), the first son of Sëriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa Mbàkke. Today he lives in Médinatoul in the city of Diourbel. He is one of the twenty-eight Murīd scholars chosen by the Sëriñ Saaliw Mbàkke for the five daily recitations of the Qur'ān in the mosque of Diourbel, a practice said to be a tradition recommended by Bamba.⁹ As a young Murīd disciple Lô was involved in the beginning of the construction of the mosque of Touba and the Diourbel-Touba railway under the leadership of Sëriñ Mustafaa Mbàkke.

Mustafaa is best known in internal Murīd sources for starting the construction of the mosque of Touba and for bringing the railway to the city of Touba, the religious epicenter of Murīdiyya. Wade (1991) indicates that one of Bamba's goals had always been to build a mosque in Touba, a location which he chose himself. He also notes that the mosque of Diourbel, which Bamba built with his own money, was meant to be the prelude to what he intended for the mosque of Touba. After Bamba's death Sëriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa Mbàkke, as the oldest son and the first Khalīfa of Murīdiyya, had

Title page of the poem

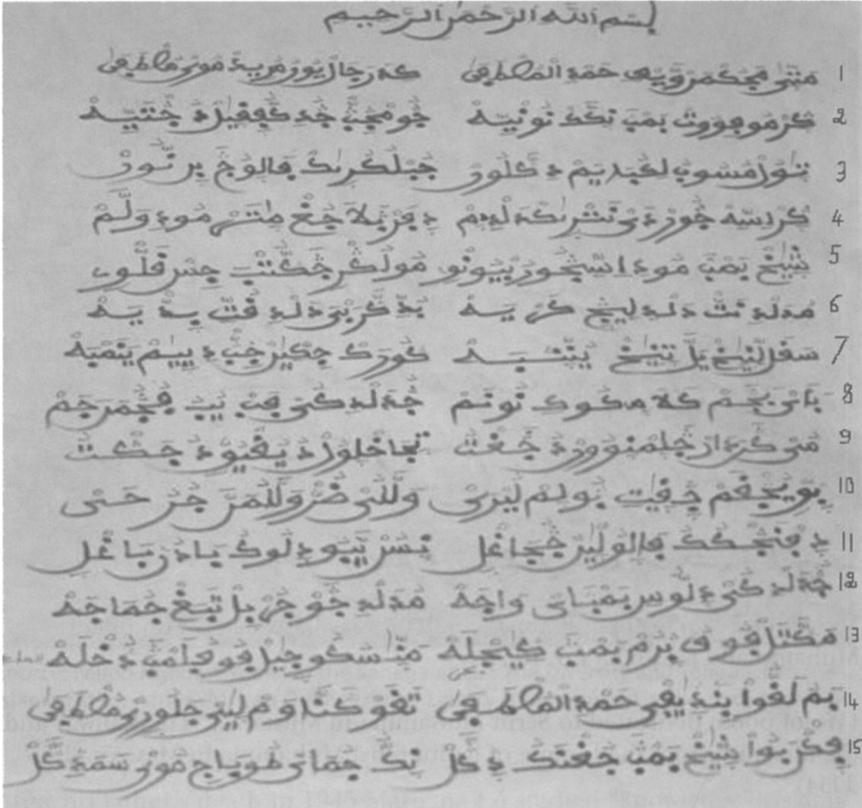


Walafaluk Sēriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa: “Raay bi-Jumaa ji” Min lisaan Muḥammadu Masoxna Ló, 1954

(Wolof poem dedicated to Sēriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa: “The Railway and the Mosque” from the tongue of [written by] Muḥammadu Masoxna Ló, 1954)

the responsibility of starting the foundation of the mosque of Touba in accordance with his father’s wishes. Drawing from his own recollections of major events that occurred in Mustafaa’s life, in which he participated as a disciple, Sēriñ Masoxna Ló wrote this Wolofal mourning poem in 1954 to eulogize the achievements and the unique personal qualities of this first new leader, to highlight the daunting challenges that he faced in his mission to lead the nascent brotherhood, and to fulfill Bamba’s wishes. The poem reflects various aspects of the Murīd ethos. Following are excerpts from Ló’s Wolofal poem.

Excerpt 1 from the poem



Bismillāhi-ar-Raḥmāni-ar-Raḥīmi
(In the name of God, The Beneficent, The Merciful)

Transliteration of Excerpt 1

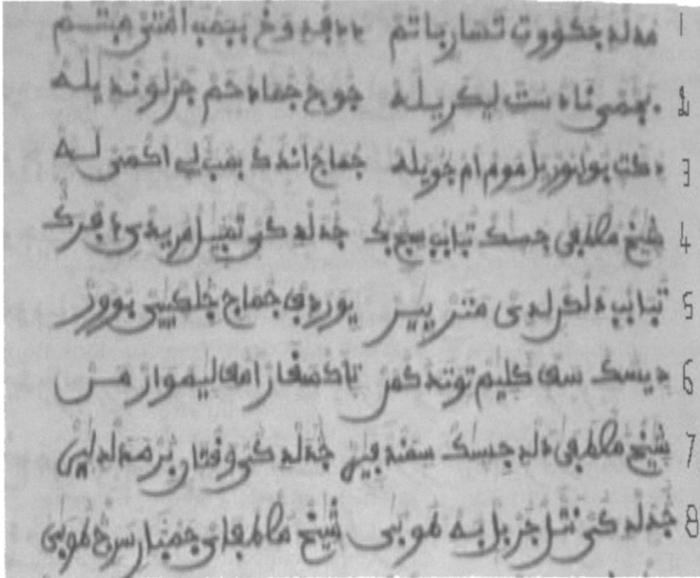
1. Mo! tee maa jóg man woy Amdi
Mustafaa, ki darajaal yoonu muriid
mooy Mustafaa
2. Ngir moo fi wuutu Bàmba nekk ak
noon yi, ñoom ñépp ñu di ko fexeel
duñu tàyyi
3. Teewul mu sóobu lu ko baayam
digaloon, jublu ko rekk faalewu ca
benn noon

Translation of Excerpt 1

1. Let me rise and sing about Amdi
Mustafaa, thanks to whom the
Murid way became prominent.
2. For he is the one who represented
Bamba, while all his enemies did
everything in their power to hurt
him.
3. Despite that, he strictly followed his
father's instructions, and did not
worry about any of his enemies.

4. Ngir isiñoor day nàtt rekk daaldi dem, defar palaa jox meetar moo di wàllam
5. Seex Bàmba moo di isiñooru yoon wi, moo longri ca gott ba jis xàll wi
6. Mu daaldi nàtt daaldi liiñe kër ya, buddi garab ya daaldi xotti mbedd ya
7. Saxe li neex Yàlla te neex yonent ba, góor ak jigéen ñépp di yéem yenam ba
8. Ba ay bañam kalaame kooki noonam, ñu daaldi koy fab yobbu fuñu mēna jēm
9. Muy gēna dēr ca li mu newoon te du ñaxtu, te jaaxlewul du yoxyoxi du jàngtu
10. Pexe yuñ xam ci xeeti mbooleem luy rey, walla luy lor, walla lu mēna jur ay
11. Def nañu ko ko faalewuleen ñu jaaxle, ne suñu yeboo delloo ko mbaa duñu baaxle
12. Ñu daaldi ko delloosi Bàmby waa ja, mu daaldi ñów Jurbel tabax jumaa ja
13. Ma gàttal foofu mbirum Bàmba gééj la, mēneesu koo jeel foofa làmb ndox la
14. Ba mu làqoo mbindéef yi Amdi Mustafaa, taxaw gannaawam leey jaloore Mustafaa
15. Fekk na boobu Seex Bàmba jox na ko ndigal, ne ko jumaay Tuubaa jee mooy sama ndigal.
4. Because an engineer's role is to design a plan, and to give it to the master builder,
5. Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba is the engineer of the way. He is the one who surveyed the forest and designed the main roads.
6. He measured and aligned the houses, uprooted the trees and built the roads.
7. He did all this while following God and the Prophet's instructions. Both men and women were dazzled by his responsibility (work),
8. To the extent that his opponents created trouble between him and his enemies. Then they brought him away anywhere they could.¹⁰
9. Yet, he continued to be more determined in his work, would not worry, would not waver, and would not panic.
10. Anything they thought could kill or hurt him, or anything they thought could bring hardship to him,
11. They used against him. Yet, he ignored them. This worried his enemies. Then they said: "We better bring him back to avoid creating trouble for ourselves."
12. Then they brought him back. Bamba is our hero. Then he came back to Diourbel and built the mosque.
13. To be brief here, Bamba's work is (as mysterious as) a sea. Anywhere you touch (turn) there is water.
14. When he became hidden from the mortals, Amdi Mustafaa was the one who rose to the task with distinction.¹¹
15. At that moment, Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba had already given him his order by telling him: "I order you to build that mosque of Touba."

Excerpt 2 from the poem



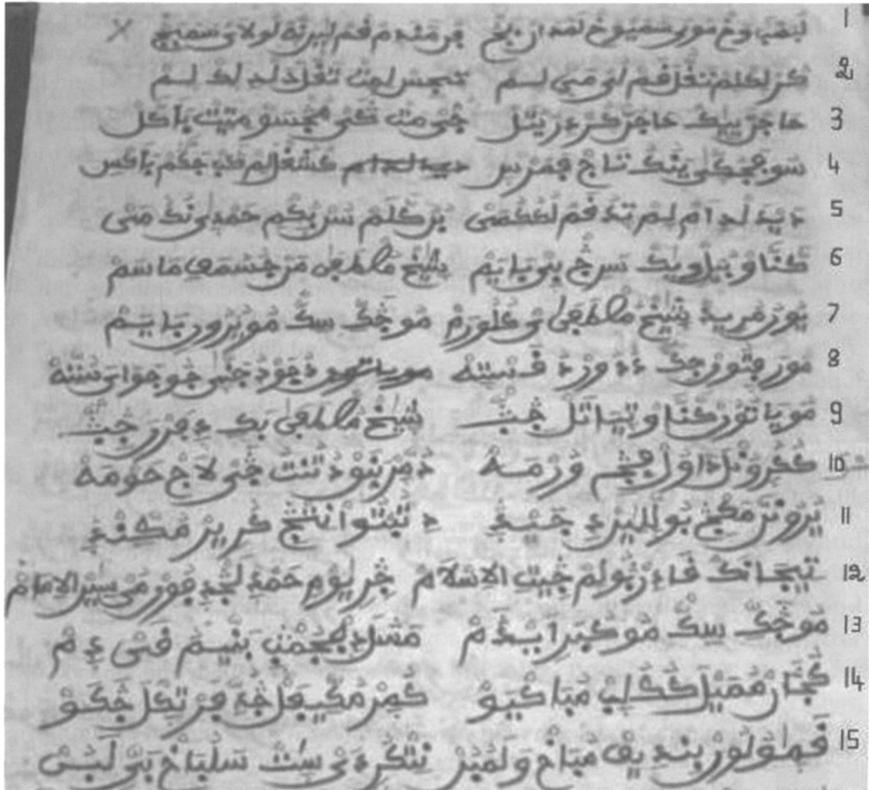
Transliteration of Excerpt 2

Translation of Excerpt 2

1. Mu daaldi jóg woote tasaare baatam, di def di wax ba Bàmba am tey mébétam
2. Bàñam yi naa du sotti lee ka reelu, jooju jumaa du am jarul wëndéelu
3. Ndekete boobu buur Yàlla moom am juuy la, jumaa ju ànd ak Bàmba lii ak may la
4. Seex Mustafaa jiseek tubaab bi siñe boñ, ñu daaldi koy tàmpeel muriid yi defi rañ
5. Tubaab bi daal ko ni lii diy matarjeer, yi wara def jumaa ji ci liggéy bu wóor
6. Deesu ko séf gèléem te wata du ko mèn, te ak saxaar amu fi, lee ma war man
7. Seex Mustafaa daaldi jiseek simandafeer, ñu daaldi ko waxtaane mbir ma daaldi leer
8. Ñu daaldi koy nàttal Jurbel ba Tuubaa, Sèriñ Mustafaay jàm-baari Sèriñ Tuubaa.

1. Then he (Mustafaa) went out and spread his (Bamba's) word. He worked on it and discussed it to Bamba's satisfaction.
2. His opponents kept saying that the project would not succeed, that it was ridiculous, that the mosque would not stand, and deserved no attention.
3. But they did not know that Almighty God is The Master of surprises, and that a mosque intended by Bamba is a blessing.
4. Shaykh Mustafaa then met with the French and signed the order (documents). Then they then stamped the documents, and Murid disciples lined up.
5. The French told him that the materials needed to build the mosque correctly
6. Could not be transported by a camel or a car, and there is no train here. That is my responsibility (Mustafaa replied).
7. Then Shaykh Mustafaa met with the railway (agents), discussed the issue and took care of everything.
8. Then they measured the distance between Diourbel and Touba for him. Sèriñ Mustafaa is Bamba's hero.

Excerpt 3 from the poem



Transliteration of Excerpt 3

1. Lu Bamba wax mooy samay wax lam daa bañ, fun mēna dem xam leen ne loo lay sama mbañ
2. Ngir lekk lem taxula xam luy maye lem, te jis lem it taxuta daaldi lekk lem
3. Aajo na yéeg aajo na gor di raytal, ñuy màtt ngay muñ saw metit ba àggal
4. Soo fa jógee yenu ko taaj fa marse, ku soxla lem nêb njëgam ba agsi

Translation of Excerpt 3

1. I (Mustafaa) say what Bamba said, and dislike what he disliked no matter where.
2. Simply because you eat honey does not allow you to know how it is collected, and simply seeing honey does not guarantee that you will taste it.
3. To collect honey, it takes climbing, cutting branches, chasing away (bees), bearing the pain of their stings until the end (of the process).
4. After that, you can bring it to the market, and anyone who needs honey can then come to buy some.

5. Day daaldi am lem te du xam lu ko ko may, bunu gëlëm sunu mbég mi Amdee nu ko may
6. Gàннаaw bu Yàlla week Sëriñ biy baayam, Seex Mustafaa man gisuma fi maasam
7. Yoonu muriid Seex Mustafaaay kulóoram, moo ñàkki sikk moo yorooni baayam
8. Moo rafetooni jikkó du dóor du xaste, du jów du jànni jooja waay a sotti
9. Moo yaatuwoon gàннаaw te yaatal ñépp, Seex Mustafaa Mbàkke defar na ñépp
10. Ku gorewoon la daawul fecci worma, du mer ba nêx du tontu ñay laaj “aw ma”
11. Yoroon na mag ñi boole leen di jayndi, di toppatoo nit ñi ku réer mu gindi
12. Tijaan ak qaadir mbooleem njiiti lisaam, ci réew mi Amdi lañ defoon muy seen limaam
13. Moo ñàkki sikk moo ka bari ay ndam, mësula def njombe ba ni mu xêy dem
14. Ku ñaan mu may la ku ko leb mu baak yow, ku mer mu giifal ñoddi far teg la ca kaw
15. Xàmmewuloon mbindéef mu baax walla mu bon, nit ku ne day seet sa lu baax bàyyi la bon.
5. That person can then (easily) have honey without knowing what it takes to get honey. Let us not be confused, we owe our joy to Amdi.
6. With the exception of God and his father, I have not seen Mustafaa’s equal here.
7. He is the embodiment of the Murid way. He lacked flaws and took care of the elders.
8. He had great qualities, a man who did not hit, did not criticize, did not speak unfavorably about anyone and did not scold. He was a man with no flaws.
9. He had a large crowd behind him, and welcomed everybody. Shaykh Mustafaa took care of everybody.
10. He was loyal, never betrayed, never lost his temper, and never said “no” to anyone who asked for something.
11. He was someone who cared for the elders and supported them all. He assisted everybody and guided anyone lost.
12. All the Muslim leaders including the Tijān and the Qādir in the country regarded him as their Imam.
13. He lacked flaws. What a glorious man. He was never involved in any wrongdoing until he left (passed away).
14. He gave to anyone who asked for something and forgave anyone who owed him something. If you were angry, he would calm you down, and would even draw you closer and lift your spirit.
15. He did not differentiate between a good person and a bad person. For he looked only at good qualities in everybody, and overlooked their bad ones.

These excerpts from Masoxna Ló's poem express some of the beliefs and practices that undergird Murīdiyya. The name Amdi Mustafaa in the poem is an endearing name for Sēriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa Mbàkke. The poet uses the word *isiñoor* (the Wolofized French word "ingénieur," engineer) to portray Bamba as the engineer who paved the way for Sēriñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa and Murīd disciples in the midst of difficulties. Mustafaa is portrayed as a model Murīd Khalifa, a faithful representative of Bamba on earth. The poet compares Mustafaa's challenges and resolve to overcome them with Bamba's own struggle (with the French, some local clerics, and traditional rulers who attempted to undermine Murīdiyya in its early days). Just like Bamba, Mustafaa is described as someone who overcame difficult challenges and the malevolent intentions of those who wished him ill.

In excerpt 1, Masoxna Ló expresses the well-established Murīd belief that some of the sufferings experienced by men of God (such as Bamba and Mustafaa) are divine tests, the price for receiving exceptional divine privileges. The *baraka* and aura of Murīd spiritual leaders are measured in the number of difficult challenges that they overcome miraculously. Just as Bamba is presented as the "isiñoor" who founded the brotherhood and successfully paved the way amid insurmountable obstacles and animosity, Mustafaa is presented as someone who overcame difficult challenges and hostility to achieve the demanding goal of leading the brotherhood after Bamba's death. Thus, by comparing Mustafaa and Bamba, Masoxna Ló highlights Mustafaa's outstanding leadership in the early days of Murīdiyya and his Murīd values such as faith, hard work, determination, courage, and optimism.

The poet ends excerpt 1 with two key Murīd beliefs captured in the words "Mbirum Bamba géej la" (Bamba's work is a sea) and in the "ndigal" (the order or instructions given to disciples). The first belief relates to the Murīd conviction that everything about Bamba is mysterious and beyond human comprehension, a pervasive tenet of oral and written internal Murīd sources. In the Murīd literature, Bamba is generally compared to a sea filled with wonders and divine privileges that cannot be completely comprehended by mortals. In the eyes of Murīd disciples, Bamba is an exceptional saint with the power to act and protect his disciples in this world and in the afterlife. He is someone with mystical powers and divine privileges who can perform miracles in this world and intercede in the afterlife on behalf of his followers. In Murīd internal sources genuine Murīd disciples are said to be assured protection and success (often to their own amazement) in whatever they do and wherever they are, and those who wish them ill are equally guaranteed shameful failure. These beliefs continue to underpin Murīd optimism today.

The concept of "ndigal" (order or instruction) is also a central precept of Murīdiyya. It entails absolute submission, loyalty to one's leader, and scrupulous obedience to his instructions. Shaykh Ibrahīma Faal (or Ibra Fall),

the founder of the Baay-Faal branch of Murīdiyya, is popularly regarded as the ideal disciple and the embodiment of Murīd work ethics. According to the popular image of Shaykh Ibrahima Fall and his portrayal in the external literature, he is someone who neglected basic Islamic precepts such as praying and fasting. However, the contents of his book, entitled *Jazbu'l Murīd illa Khidmati'l Ashyūkki* (*The Attraction of the Murīd Disciple to the Service of Masters*) contrasts sharply with this conception. Indeed, the unquestionable knowledge of the Qur'ān and tasawūf (Sufi mysticism) exhibited in his book suggests that Shaykh Ibrahima Fall may be the most misunderstood figure in the history of Murīdiyya. As some Murīds argue, he may well belong to the category of Malamatiya, the saints whose banal appearance is a mask hiding their spiritual reality (Roberts & Roberts 2003:112).

The poet presents Sērīñ Muḥammadu Mustafaa as both a model Murīd leader and disciple who scrupulously abides by Bamba's ndigal. Murīd sources generally emphasize the fact that Bamba regarded his own children as disciples and expected them to live by the ndigal instructions. Being a good disciple is generally more valued than being the offspring of a spiritual leader in Murīd internal sources. It is for this reason that the poet indicates that Bamba gave to Mustafaa the ndigal to start the construction of the mosque of Touba, a task to which he devoted his entire life. His performance and those of other prominent Murīd leaders and disciples in the accomplishments of their missions (which are construed as continuations of Bamba's own work) are regularly popularized in internal Murīd Wolofal literature. They serve as educational materials and sources of inspiration for disciples inside and outside Murīd areas.

In excerpt 2, the poet dwells on Bamba's miraculous powers that enabled Mustafaa to overcome the ill wishes and obstacles that he faced in his mission of initiating the building of the mosque of Touba, and finally confers on Mustafaa the enviable Murīd title of "Jāmbaari Sērīñ Tuubaa" (Bamba's hero). For Murīd disciples, the title highlights Bamba's satisfaction, and therefore God and Prophet Muḥammad's satisfaction, which always comes with mystical divine assistance and protection.

In excerpt 3, after emphasizing the fact that Mustafaa never strayed from Bamba's teachings, Masoxna Ló uses an example drawn from Wolof society that could easily be understood by average Murīd disciples. He contrasts the perspective of someone who collects honey with no protection from bee stings with that of a customer who comes to the market to buy honey with no idea about the dangers involved. Honey in the poem symbolizes the survival and ultimate success of the brotherhood despite the challenges it faced. The honey collector represents Mustafaa, the leader, and the honey consumer represents the average disciple. This symbolism contrasts the hardships that Mustafaa experienced in the early days of the brotherhood with his achievements that gave significant benefits and pride to Murīd disciples. The construction of the Diourbel-Touba railway and the

building of the mosque of Touba were certainly the high points of Mustafaa's life in the eyes of Murīd disciples.

The poet ends the third excerpt with a description of the personal and human qualities of Mustafaa such as his capacity for hard work, perseverance, fairness, generosity, and compassion for all. Masoxna closes the poem with the words "he did not differentiate between a good person and a bad person. For he looked only at good qualities in everybody, and overlooked their bad ones."

The Role of Wolofal in the Diffusion of Murīd Beliefs, Practices, and Customs

The perceived qualities of Bamba and Mustafaa, and the beliefs discussed in the poem, represent a few of the many Murīd beliefs and values that are disseminated and popularized in Murīd communities through Wolofal materials. The Wolofal literature and Bamba's Arabic poems continue to serve as the core didactic materials and sources of inspiration for disciples at home and abroad. They are in free circulation in marketplaces and Murīd areas throughout Senegambia and continue to be recited and studied to nurture and instill among disciples Murīd values, identity and character, and the hope for "paradise in this life and in the afterlife."

However, the Murīds' determined pursuit of "paradise in this life and in the afterlife" (through hard work and faith in Bamba's teachings and his *baraka*) has often subjected them to criticism of arrogance and even blasphemy by outsiders (for allegedly equating Bamba with God). Whether this criticism is fair or not, it is accurate to say that Murīd optimism, work ethic, and pragmatism have made the brotherhood a powerful cultural, economic, and political force to be reckoned with in Senegal today. As indicated in the *Economist* (2006), the Murīd work ethic has propelled the followers out of their country in search of work, and has helped make them one of the most successful African communities at home and abroad. The *Economist* further notes that even while Murīds are criticized for their so-called cult of saints and shrines, these self-sufficient, generous, and often wealthy people do not care, as they raise their own money for their favorite causes, and appeals to the faithful to fund a new hospital or water system can bring in millions of Euros.

Today Murīd communities consisting mostly of businessmen (commonly known as Modou-Modou or Bawol-Bawol) are found in almost all major African and Western cities (in Europe and North America). They have managed to build successful businesses throughout Senegal and abroad. Many of them remain primarily Wolofal users, and most have never attended the French-based Senegalese school system. Yet they control a significant part of the Senegalese economy and own some of the most successful businesses in the country. In many ways, Murīds' economic success in Senegal and

abroad is ascribable to Bamba's pragmatic and optimistic teachings. While many Murīds are now learning European languages in order to participate in the Westernized digital era, Wolofal remains their primary internal medium of written communication, and Bamba's poems and the works of great Wolofal masters continue to be their sources of inspiration, strength, motivation, and optimism.

Conclusion

While 'ajamī initially developed in sub-Saharan Africa as a means of transmission of Islamic teachings to illiterate masses (to be sung or read out loud), it has evolved in Murīd communities to become the medium of literacy through which Murīd hagiographies, teachings, and values are recorded and disseminated. By focusing on Murīd Wolofal literature, this article seeks to draw scholars' attention to these rich but largely overlooked areas of intellectual history of Africa, to foster new comparative studies on Hausa, Fulani, Berber, Kanuri and Kiswahili 'ajamī literatures, to investigate whether they serve similar purposes as Wolofal, and most important, to unearth the wealth of information still hidden in them.

Although 'ajamī users are officially considered illiterate, it is obvious that they are not. This misconception is ascribable to the fact that the term "illiterate" is often equated in Africa with literacy in European languages and Arabic; because 'ajamī users do not fall into either category, they are often excluded. Consequently, the flow of knowledge between 'ajamī scholars and those trained in Western schools is virtually nonexistent, and although they live in the same societies, their intellectual universes remain largely separate. As a result, Western educated scholars who are literate in 'ajamī are rare, in the same way that few 'ajamī scholars are literate in European languages.

Diagne (2003:5) rightly emphasized the need to build a bridge in African academia between scholars trained in modern universities and these 'ajamī scholars. Studying 'ajamī manuscripts will open new doors for scholarly inquiry on the history of ideas in Africa, African responses to Arabization and Westernization, African responses to crises based upon autochthonous sources, and the pivotal role that African identity has played in the genesis and development of local political and religious movements.

Ultimately, creating an International Center for 'Ajamī Studies (to bring together the continent's 'ajamī wisdom in areas ranging from history, conflict resolution, local economies, traditional medicine, and agricultural methods), studying and disseminating the insights of 'ajamī, and enriching these with recent advances in medicine, science, and technology could pave the way for a new mode of knowledge production about Africa and engender endogenous models of socioeconomic development customized for African realities.

The *Economist's* (2006) statement that the Murīds have a lot to teach the rest of the world, not only about how to respond to globalization, but also how to practice religion in a peaceful way, echoes the unique contribution that the 'ajami world can bring to this era of growing intolerance. If genuinely studied and disseminated, the rich African 'ajami heritage could be a powerful intellectual contribution of tolerance and moderation in this troubled era in human history.

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Notes

1. The word ‘*ajamî*’ (also written as *ajami* or *a’jamî*) comes from the Arabic root ‘*j-m*’ (foreign). It was also used to refer to non-Arabic-speaking Persians. The word has evolved to refer to modifications of the Arabic script to write languages other than Arabic.
2. Gérard (1981:57) notes that when Al-Hājj ‘Umar Taal visited Fuuta Jalon before launching his Jihād, he congratulated Samba Mambeyaa for writing *Oogirde Malal*, but cautioned him against future translations from Arabic into Pular, warning that “You will cause the Arabic language to disappear.” ‘Umar was concerned that the use of Pular to teach Islam could lead people to forget Arabic, the holy language.
3. The Wolof word *jébbalu* refers to the Murīd act of allegiance. It is a key Murīd precept through which the disciple agrees to submit himself or herself to the guidance of a spiritual leader. “Knowledge schools” are schools in which the Qur’ān and Islamic sciences are concurrently taught.
4. Camara (1997:168) also notes that, besides Bamba’s own encouragement, Shaykh Anta Mbàkke (Bamba’s half-brother) and Soxna Muslimatu Mbàkke (Bamba’s daughter) had asked Muusaa Ka to compose stories of Bamba’s exiles in Wolofal.
5. There is a well-developed informal Wolofal writing and copying business at the place called Kër Sēriñ Bi located near the Sandaga market in Dakar. Access to the place is difficult for outsiders. I cannot realistically do justice in this article to the scribal works performed there. The issue deserves a research paper of its own.
6. During my fieldwork in Senegambia studying ‘*ajamî*’, I have been struck by Murīd scholars’ willingness to share their esoteric knowledge. Their knowledge is generally open to the public who can read Wolofal. Authors generally encourage wider dissemination of their materials in their introductory remarks because they see themselves first and foremost as disciples fulfilling their share in what

they believe to be the blessing and educational mission of Shaykh Aḥmadu Bamba.

7. Wolofal "social scientists" such as Al-Hājj Mbàkke generally rank the credibility of their sources in their works. For instance, Al-Hājj Mbàkke ranks his sources from "wér na lool" (very credible), "wér na" (credible), "war na" (must be/probable) to "siw na" (popular). The ranking depends on whether the sources are written archival documents, witness accounts, hearsay, or rumors.
8. Galleries resulting from this project are forthcoming at the African Online Digital Library website managed by MATRIX at Michigan State University.
9. Saaliw Mbàkke or Saliou Mbacké (1915–2007) served as the fifth Khalifa of Murīdiyya (1990–2007). He was the last living son of Bamba. After his death he was succeeded by Sēriñ Muḥammadu Baara Mbàkke. Baara is the first grandson of Bamba to be Khalifa.
10. This refers to the well-known deportations and house arrests of Bamba by the French colonial administration.
11. Murīds typically use phrases such as "bi mu wàccee liggéy" (when he or she completed his or her work), "bi mu làqoo" (when he or she hid himself or herself) or "bi mu génee àdduna" (when he or she departed from this world) to refer to someone's death. These structures reflect the Murīd belief that people come to this life for a mission and will leave it after the mission is completed.