

THE MYTH OF AFRICAN CULTURE IN ISLAM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF CULTURAL RETENTIONS IN
THE WESTERN
SUDAN

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ABSTRACT

The point of my research is to reassess themes and notions of cultural imperialism and African perceptions and responses to foreign influences, while at the same time explore traditional cultural patterns, cultural identity, and continuity within the context of an ethno-history. It further brings together and subsumes scholars and Muslim intellectuals of nineteenth and twentieth-century African history from a variety of backgrounds and their learned and unique perspectives on the self-perceptions of African Muslims in the Senegambia. My initial project is to construct a historical and cultural account regarding how Murids in the Senegambia distinguish themselves as a particular group of African Muslims in West Africa based on identity and religious practices. It is significant because it attempts to examine the cultural and traditional identities of Wolof and Murid communities in the Diaspora within the social collective, while at the same time examine the interplay between the Arab cultural influences of Islam in conjunction with African religious customs and practices through the historical experiences of Cheikh Amadu Bamba Mbeke 1853-1927. By combining archival and oral testimonies with historical research, this paper will shed light on the initiatives and creativities of Amadu Bamaba, and how he shaped Wolof culture and continuities that distinctively characterizes the Senegambia. Further, it investigates how the continuity of Wolof history, culture, and identity is directly linked to Cheikh Amadu Bamba himself who is a central figure to Wolof collective identities. Moreover, it reveals how Amadu Bamba's tariqa served as an instrument for Wolof in the Senegambia to not only share essential attributes that constitute their identities as distinct Muslims, but also manifests how their practice of Islam sets them apart from the broader world of the religion itself. Although much of the scholarship of Africa pays particular attention to the legacy of imperialism and how it shaped post-colonial policies, there has been very little research regarding the idiosyncrasies and the ontological nature of conquered people, and how they have shaped alien influences to be compatible with their cultures.

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The Myth of African Culture in Islam: A Critical Analysis of Cultural Retentions in The Western Sudan

“I find it strange that people write the history of people by ignoring what those people actually think about themselves.”

-Dr. Cheikh Anta Babou

CHAPTER 1

AFRICAN OR ARAB: CHEIKH AMADU BAMBA’S CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURAL RETENTIONS AND SELF-PERCEPTION IN THE SENEGAMBIA

In this thesis I will examine the distinctive ways in which Senegalese Muslims within the Muridiyyan Sufi order retained Wolof culture under Arab influence by demonstrating how Amadu Bamba’s visit to Mauritania between 1883-1884 and the decline of educational values in Mbakke Bawol was central for him to reshape Islam and furthermore preserve Wolof culture. Africa is a continent that has an amalgam of influences, not just from experiences and relations within its vast boundaries, but also from Europeans and Arabs who have greatly contributed to altering the social relations and traditional structures. Cheikh Amadu Bamba used Islam to transform the politics and traditional social structures in the Senegambia and fashioned a new tradition between 1865 and 1913. The dissemination of his new teachings and educational philosophies in Bawol and Kajoor resulted in a very unique system of beliefs and practices exceptional to the Senegambia. In

fact, it is Amadu Bamba that makes the tariqa he established the most distinctive and widely studied practice in Islam today. Although many analysts of contemporary Senegal examine the role of the history of Islam, few have explored how Cheikh Amadu Bamba's school of thought produced one of the efficacious and prominent institutions that presently protect Wolof identity. The Murid tariqa which he established shaped Wolof ideas of self-perception that furthered their sense of culture, tradition and belonging.

At the same time, this research also examines how Murids in Senegal modified an alien faith to be compatible with their culture, thus retaining it. Further, I am particularly interested in the process of how Murids redefined and restructured Islam to appropriate their cultural identities as a distinctive group of African Muslims in the Senegambia and abroad. During the early part of the eleventh century many traditional social structures in West African states were altered due to the imposing momentum and cultural influence of Islam. By the middle of the nineteenth century most of West Africa was under the suzerainty of France and Britain. Although West Africans experienced various periods of alien influence and the erosion of Islamic practices in West Africa contributed to shaping a very distinctive culture in most of the Senegambia region.

Bound by common identity rooted in language, culture, territorial association and history Murids see themselves as unique Africans who have a very exceptional practice of Islam that is directly linked to an African ancestor. Whereas many African Muslims apotheosize Muhammad in Islam, Africans in Senegal acknowledge Cheikh Amadu Bamba as the paragon of virtue and link their expression of the faith to him. Albeit the Koran is the holy book used in many Muslim communities in Senegal, the teachings are centered on Amadu Bamba. From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century Muslim and indigenous communities in the Senegambia had initiated a period of major reforms intended to quell the challenges of Arabization and hold at bay threats of the

establishment of French and British colonial rule. However, such conditions also conferred to resistance. It is erroneous to assert that these Africans simply acquiesced to foreign influences and institutions. Undeniably, Africans in the Senegambia did experience social and aesthetic changes. Yet, one cannot maintain a complex of ignorance to cultural retentions. In fact, the adaptive practices that they accepted were modified to serve their purposes, which in many ways resemble their traditional values. Much of what reinforced this paper is the process in which African Muslims in Senegal have retained their culture.

I examine how religious acculturation in the Senegambia did not disrupt identity, purpose, and direction within Murid communities. Moreover, the introduction to an alien faith was central to a very erudite reform movement that solidified an ideology which preserved cultural identities in the Senegambia. The following pages will demystify how Muslims were and continued to be viewed with regard to their practice of Islam, and how they have cultivated spaces to preserve their culture as long as possible. Exploring this issue is not intended to romanticize African culture in the Senegambia in its relation with Islam, nor castigate the scholarship regarding the social relationships between Africans and Arabs in their practice of Islam. It is, however, intended to build a comprehensive framework of the different approaches and debates from historians and reveal how Africans were not only able to contest Arabization, but use a religion of Arab origin to ingeniously secure specific polities, structures, and their culture. Further, the arguments that Africans acculturated into Arab culture through Islam can be countered on many fronts.

The interplay between religious and cultural influences is of great significance regarding the contemporary political history of the Senegambia. Conversely, it must be reexamined to appreciate its dynamics and consequences. Hereof, the distortion regarding how Africans lost their cultural identities due to the imposing momentum of Islam continues to open spaces for

investigation. If Africans in the Senegambia did conform to an Arab religion, one must pay particularly close attention to the visual culture within the interior and exterior of their communities. The setting of hairstyles, cloths, foods, and even sometime the names used point to the conclusion that they take pride in their identities and Africanity. Though their blackness represents dual-cultural experiences between African and Islamic practices, most retained identification with their African heritage in the Senegambia.

Historian A. Adu Boahen argues that of all the changes experienced in Africa, none came as swift as the religion of Islam and the imposition of Arab culture.¹ This suggests that many Africans were significantly influenced by Arab culture and the religious practices of Islam. However, Boahen's contention does not imply that the spread and momentum of Islam disrupted the collective memory of all Africans, nor does it maintain that Africans lost their ideas of race and identity. Indeed, the introduction of Islam between the seventh and the early nineteenth-century produced a series of Jihads that transformed the socio-cultural interior, thus Africa was becoming Islamized with the intent to purify the continent.² Mervyn Hiskett claims that the goal and objective of Islamic expansion was intended to replace African cosmology with Islamic culture, and contest African explanations of life and death.³ Very often the spread of Islam and the influence of Arab culture and trade came at the same time, therefore, those who acquiesced with the practices, polices and culture that evolved around the religion, had both commercial and religious motives. Yet, does this mean that the acceptance of the religion subsequently contributed to the loss of identities and cultural traits?

Arabic became the principal language as the religion expanded, in Africa and many began to acquire the rudiments of Arab culture. Yet, this does not imply that domains were not available for various African groups to maintain some form of cultural retentions. Although south Sahara

Africa adopted the Islamic religion, Arabic was not the official language as the native tongue. Many Africans sustained their tribal identities and relationships to various clans through the means of retaining language. Contrarily, many historians of Africa suggest that cultural retentions and continuities of various groups have been absorbed into a dominating Islamic or European ethos which altered the way Africans identify themselves. Such themes presents very broad generalizations that further suggest African cultures and the sense of defining oneself have been eradicated due to the imposing alien influences of Islam. However, many historians and literary scholars of African history would perhaps benefit by further investigating ethno-histories and spaces where Africans sustained collective memories regarding how they see themselves, and processes in which those memories transcends notions of a cultural authority and identity.

HISTORICAL CONTENT

Africa is a continent that has an amalgam of influences, not just from its experiences and relations within its vast boundaries, but also from Europeans and Arabs who have greatly contributed to altering the social relations and traditional structures. Throughout history, Africans have been known for their practice in international trade and economic relations with both Arabs and Europeans. Such relations in commerce contributed to the development of enterprise that motivated interests of all groups, each psychologically contingent upon who would reap the rewards and economic advantages of various commodities to further strengthen the individual, city-state, nation, or empire. Contests and notions for power between Africans, Arabs and Europeans are significant to these conflicts. What is particularly interesting to me in this thesis is the evolving process of cultural power and configurations of conquest between Africans, Arabs, and Europeans, and how this process shaped the various ways Africans in the Senegambia organized their relations to new influences in the continent. With such a focus, this thesis demonstrates that in spite of

accepting an alien religion, African Muslims in the Senegambia have collectively maintained their cultural identity as a distinct group Muslims through the educational and social experiences of Cheikh Amadu Bamba. Further, his reputation for piety and high standards of learning not only influenced hundreds and thousands of Africans in the Senegambia, but also created a space for them to retain both their culture and collective identity. This examination also demonstrates that Amadu Bamba's ability to construct the theosophical ideology of Muridism and revamp Islam in the Senegambia is distinctly a Wolof or African phenomenon. Conversely, Amadu Bamba's social, spiritual, and educational contributions to African, or rather world history is central to how Wolof personally preserve their sense of history, culture and community.

The history of Islam in Africa is of great importance because it not only contributed to the growth of trading communities in the continent, but also increased power for many rulers and major chiefs. As Islam expanded in North Africa and the sub-Sahara, Muslim communities established mutually beneficial relations with communities and political leaders practicing traditional religions. The expansion of Islam also led to tension between Islamic and indigenous groups. Although conflict was common between the two groups, there also emerged a distinctive Muslim African culture. Various regions in the continent experienced rapid change religiously and culturally. The three major invasions and influences outside of Africa included the Almoravid incursions of the eleventh century, which was aimed at the markets of ancient Ghana; the Moroccan expedition of the late sixteenth century, aimed at the wealth of Songhay; and the nineteenth century onslaught of the Europeans, aimed at the whole continent.⁴ The introduction and transition to new systems and new institutions, whether they were religious, cultural, economic, or political, fostered new African attitudes based on the changing geo-political demands for goods and labor, specifically throughout the eleventh to the nineteenth-centuries. These centuries are

important in Africa's history because not only was the continent experiencing a socio-cultural metamorphosis in the religious sector, but also the transition from the slave trade to the export of natural resources and products further weakened Africa's interior and was central to the continent's demise. In the seventh and the fifteenth centuries Arabs came into North and East Africa, adding their names to the list of invaders who had come in the past. Arabs were inspired and united by the teachings of Islam preached by the Prophet Muhammad who died in A.D 632.⁵ Islamic education no doubt began to spread with unparalleled speed in West Africa when the University of Timbuktu was established 970 years ago.⁶

Many of the Africans who were able to penetrate the western Sudan were mixed between Arab and African peoples. In John Hendrik Clarke's *Islam in Africa*, Clarke contends that after several generations of inter-marriage between both African and Arabs there were enough black looking Arabs to move into the western Sudan to further the spread of Islam and commerce. As Islam spread throughout Africa, the social and economic relations between both, Africans and non-African Arabs was a semi-partnership that was skillfully interwoven into a dominating religious presence. Although Islam originated in Arabia, the acquiescence of the faith in Africa bonded the two regions to marketing and trade throughout the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. In many ways one may maintain that it was somewhat fraternal. However, does this mean that Africans who accepted Islam fully assimilated into Arab beliefs, and values? And does this also imply that they adapted and conformed themselves to their host culture as fully as possible? In the pages that follow I will provide the reader with historical and cultural information to demonstrate the ways in which the Wolof in the Senegambia have not fully assimilated to Arab beliefs, and sustain their collective identity through the contributions of Cheikh Amadu Bamba.

METHODOLOGY

To further my question regarding identity, culture and self-perception of African Muslims in the Senegambia I conducted an interview at Temple University's Blockson Museum with Mamadu Diallo. Diallo was a Senegalese Muslim who was a graduate student in the African American Studies Department studying African American culture and music. To support my contention that Cheikh Amadu Bamba's tariqa created a space for Africans in the Senegambia to preserve their sense of culture and identity, I asked how Amadu Bamba was able to contest Arabization and French colonialism. Diallo stated, "Amadu Bamba is a cultural leader of black Africa, and he introduced a new context of Islam to people in the Senegambia regardless of their sect and practice in any Mosque...yuh know...see Amadu Bamba's methods protected us, and it taught us to fight Arabism...Cheikh Amadu Bamba turned the people of the Senegambia into a political consciousness by using Sufism to create Muridism, and Murid philosophy as a weapon against Arabism and French imperialists.... Yuh understand, he used Muridism as a cultural tool to protect his people and their identities, their histories, and he did it through the use of spirituality...you have to keep in mind that African people are faith people, faith in God ...and Cheikh Amadu Bamba taught us to view him in our own culture."⁷ Here, too, one can see how Babou and Diallo share congruent views regarding the value of Cheikh Amadu Bamba's life and teachings. It also signifies that they are bounded by attributes or characteristics that each one possesses. Conversely, there is a particular emphasis on the role of Amadu Bamba's moral principles and how such methods served as a cultural and spiritual revival of his people. It further supports my contention that Cheikh Amadu Bamba's version of Islam is heavily Africanized. And although Bamba's philosophy regarding the practice of Islam is a universal message offered for all humanity, he laid the foundation for the continuity of Wolof culture in West Africa.

Cheikh Amadu Bamba's construct introduced not only a worldview of peace, but it also regulated and brought balance to the tumult in the Senegambia. According to Diagne, Cheikh Amadu Bamba felt that he had a responsibility towards humanity that he had to educate his people out of darkness into the light of knowledge, true worship and the action of transforming his people's condition, through peaceful means, from oppression to emancipation, from inequality to injustice, from poverty to development.⁸ By using a wide range of materials, such as formal and informal interviews, historical documents, ethnographies, and visual observations, one will have a better understanding of the self-perception of African Muslims in the Senegambia. In doing so I will attempt to convey to the readers that the ideological perspectives of Amadu Bamba has provided spaces to preserve their sense of culture and identity personally, socially, and linguistically, which gives meaning to accepted modes of behavior based on who they are as African people. If African Muslims in the Senegambia abandon modes of culture and action, and deny their identities, histories, and cultures of origin, for example, their lives begin to lose meaning in the context of their history and deteriorate. It is thought the historical contributions and experiences of Cheikh Amadu Bamba that Muslims in the Senegambia have maintained their sovereignty, including self-identity and self-definition.

CHAPTER 2

ISLAM AND WESTERN SUDANIC CULTURAL SYNCRETISM: AN INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

Scholars of Africa, such as Robert Collins, Eugene Rogan, Chancellor Williams, Daniel Butler, and Paul Lovejoy have built themes around the notions that with the spread of Islam in Africa, Africans became culturally removed and detached from their traditional histories and cultural identities. The insinuation that the spread of Islam was central to the demise of the continent reinforces such notions. Although these historians have explored specific factors shaping the pre-modern and contemporary plight of the continent, contentions maintaining Islam facilitated the continent's demise leaves room for nuance. Eugene Rogan's *The Arabs*, Rogan argues that the history of Arab conquest between the seventh and fourteenth-century maintained a very dominant cultural presence in Africa. He further contends that the cultural influences of Islam significantly changed ethnic and religious identities within various native communities.⁹ In Robert Collins' *Dafur: The Long Road to Disaster*, Collins' maintains that although Islamic invasion in the Bilad al-Sudan provided economic and geographical bonds between Arab and Sudanic aristocracies, Arab influence transformed the social order defined by indigenous kings, Cheikhs, rulers, chieftains and warriors, thus reforming their sense of piety, literacy and knowledge of themselves.¹⁰ Indeed, the cultural influences of Islam did have a significant impact in various local level communities in Africa. However, one can not imply that through the spread of Islam Africans lost their sense of community and identity. In *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, Chancellor Williams contends that the penetration of African culture came easy under the banner of Islam. He further argues the advance of Arab culture and religion was three-pronged: proselytizing missions claiming one brotherhood; widespread marriages and concubinage with African women; and forced conversions at sword point. According to Williams the tumultuous

advance destroyed not only African heritage, but also their very African identity psychologically; therefore, they were forced to change their names, thus boring the names of their enslavers and oppressors.¹¹ In studying the history of race and the introduction to Islam and Arab culture, Williams claims that only those Africans who were mixed up and confused of racial identity would believe their religion is being attacked.¹² Daniel Butler takes a similar approach in *The First Jihad*, in which the author astutely argues that not only do the roots of Islam run deep throughout many African societies, but more interesting, how the religion is distinctly Arab in origin and culture.¹³ The marriage between forced migrations, labor, commodity markets, and racial social theories are directly linked to new phases of Arab and western expansion in which these groups voraciously moved into Africa. These scholars differ from the insights of Martin Klein, David Robinson, Christopher Harrison and Timothy Cleveland who skillfully analyze not only the historical, cultural, ethnic and social factors that contribute to social change and continuity in African cultures in the mist of foreign or alien influence, but also the various practices in which Africans have shaped their societies to function accordingly. Further, few scholars have taken up the issue of cultural syncretism. Additionally, there has been relatively minimal research regarding how interwoven African customs are with alien religious practices.

Moreover, the emphasis of this paper has been influenced by the approaches to the history of Africans and the social relations with Arabs, and how cultural relations shaped American academic circles in the 1960s and the 21st century. Most commonly known for their work regarding Islamic and Arab influences and the re-vamping of African cultures are historians Robert Collins, Eugene Rogan, Chancellor Williams, Daniel Butler, and Paul Lovejoy, whose arguments and approaches contrast sharply from Cheick Babou, Fallou Ngom, and Souleymane Bashir Diagne. Though the context of cultural retentions and the need to retain various forms of

continuity may have appeared to be a dormant argument, it does not imply that it is undeserving of study. The intent of this research is to introduce a new approach to the relations between culture, religion, practice, tradition, and identity. It is further intended to present a careful analysis to the criticisms of how African in the Senegambia see themselves in the broader Muslim world. What is more, the revisionist viewpoint of African culture and its relation to Arab influences is central to one's understanding regarding the self-perception of African Muslims in the midst of an alien religion. Further, how do we come to understand the ontological nature of conquered people? To answer these and additional questions, in the section that follows I will demonstrate that Africans in the Senegambia are indeed African, and by no means have equated themselves with being Arab and aspiring to Arab cultural values. Using primary and secondary sources this paper will introduce to readers the continuity of both the African identity and practices of cultural syncretism while practicing Islam in the Senegambia.

REASSESSING ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SYNCHRONIZATION AND CONTINUITY OF AFRICAN CULTURE IN THE WESTERN SUDAN

If the role Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan (land of the blacks) represents a standard and pervasive Arab culture, perhaps it was unsuccessful in the Senegambia. In West Africa's region known as the Senegambia, Islam became a central instrument that supported the continuity of Wolof culture and produced many eminent scholars who then went to all walks of life to spread the message. However, it is significant that Islam spread rapidly in Africa as compared to Eastern Europe. In North, East, and West Africa, Muslim proselytizers achieved success along the coast. Philip Curtin argues that urban centers were created or revived by Arab occupiers and enslavers, and because of a larger Arab presence, Arab culture and Islam marked its print in the continent of Africa.¹⁴ After the death of Muhammad, many of the followers of the faith spread the teachings of Islam by means of both peaceful conversion and the sword during jihad. Many Africans were

Influenced by Arabs and chiefs who were converted or forced to accept an alien faith. As the religion expanded so, too, did trade ports and commercial centers. The spread of Islam is paramount to great wealth that served as a direct consequence to the rise of great Sudanic kingdoms and empires in West Africa such as the Manding, the Toucouleur, and the Futa Tallon and Futa Jallon.

Although Islam in the western Sudan served as the foundation for centralized kingdoms, empires, and city-states, such as Mali, Sengai, Kanem, and Waalo, one would have to question its cultural influences on local, cultural or political practices, considering how such influences were subsumed into local social structures. As I demonstrate, local communities in the Senegambia who ultimately embraced Islam found it difficult or impossible to accommodate many practices that accompanied it. To embrace Islam meant professing the oneness of God, observing Ramadan, building of masjids, and attempting the hajj at least once in one's life. With Islam also came a new and important form of education. Whereas traditional education was local and concerned with initiating the young into knowledge of local custom, their duties within the local society and skills they needed livelihood, Islamic studies covered an international field of law, theology, politics, history, geography and the natural sciences.¹⁵

In this way, Islam introduced to West Africa seemed to have also introduced the art of academic criticism.¹⁶ It may be difficult, however to estimate the exact religious, cultural, and educational impact of Islam on the people in the western Sudan. Many travelers and historians commented favorably on the standard of Islamic piety, scholarship and some features of government in the important trading cities such as Timbuktu, Gao, Salaga, Zamrafa, Bamako and Jenne. On the other hand these travelers and historians recorded the continuance of traditional customs and ceremonies unacceptable to Islam. Possibly the efforts for Muslims to adapt

traditional customs and practices to Islamic purposes had the opposite effect, and it was Islam that became assimilated into basically non-Muslim systems and institutions. According to Jali Suso, Islam in the Senegambia before the 1800's was little more than an imperial cult of great prestige existing interchangeably with traditional African customs.¹⁷ One could hardly expect that African rulers, let alone their subjects would be fully converted from their ancestral beliefs overnight.¹⁸

Suso also argued that many Africans of the Senegambia before the 1800's worshipped Allah, but still retained much of their traditional practices.¹⁹ Many rulers and merchants in the Senegambia were known for their syncretic practices, which combined Islamic practices and traditional customs of venerating of ancestors. Such practices and customs in Sufism shaped a Muslim African culture that distinguished them various Islamic practices in the continent. The combination between the Islam and traditional practices in the Senegambia resulted in the form of a cultural hybrid that may perhaps have some form of continuity to this day. If Islam did enter Africa as a foreign religion, this could also mean that the introduction of the new faith was not only shaping African personalities and attitudes, but at the same time was being shaped by African cultures. This goes without saying that the teachings of Islam acculturated all Africans who embraced Islam, nor does it maintain that religious and local cultures with Islam were not interwoven throughout the western Sudan. As historians of Africa continue to examine Africa's past and present, and the role of foreign cultural influences one must be very careful not to skew the relations between culture and religion, and Islamic law and customary law. Although the two clashed repeatedly, the synchronization can still be observed through values, visual culture, and the veneration of one's ancestors.

The force of this clash varied with the times and often there came a compromise. According to Basil Davidson, some accepted Islam, but none the less kept many of their old

beliefs and customs.²⁰ Therefore, syncretism is a characteristic of West African Islam. In fact, during Sonni Ali's rule of the Songhay Empire in 1464, Ali was known to adhere to the traditional religion of the Gao, and although he was Muslim, the mixture between Islam and traditional African beliefs was common.²¹ Further, the African cultures are sustained, albeit is fused to an alien presence. What is noteworthy here is the fusion of two cultural influences which are seemingly in conflict. The combined elements between Arab and western Sudanic cultures created new cultural forms that supported the continuity of not only an African consciousness, but an African identity linked to the value of their ancestors. Such values are decisively rooted in many African cultures. Today, despite the widespread influence of Islam, Africans in the Senegambia are advertently known as people who acknowledge their ancestors. These practices are skillfully interwoven and deeply embedded into many of their institutions and daily activities. The acknowledgement and reverence of their ancestors constitutes who and what they are.

The responses regarding the Arab cultural presence and influence of Islam in Africa, has in turn produced important interpretations and argumentations. For example, in Eugene Rogan's *The Arabs*, Rogan argues that the history of Arab conquest between the seventh and fourteenth-century maintained a very dominant cultural presence in Africa. He further contends that the cultural influences of Islam significantly changed ethnic and religious identities within various native communities.²² In Robert Collins' *Darfur: The Long Road To Disaster*, Collins maintains that although Islamic invasion in the Bilad al-Sudan provided an economic and geographical bond between Arab and Sudanic aristocracies, Arab influence transformed the social order defined by indigenous kings, Cheikhs, rulers, chieftains and warriors, thus reforming their sense of piety, literacy and knowledge of themselves.²³ Indeed, the cultural influences of Islam did have a significant impact in various local level communities in Africa. However, one can not imply that

through the spread of Islam Africans lost their sense of community and identity. In *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, Williams contends that the penetration of African culture came easy under the banner of Islam. He further argues the advance of Arab culture and religion was three-pronged: proselytizing missions claiming one brotherhood; widespread marriages and concubinage with African women; and forced conversions at sword point. According to Williams the tumultuous advance destroyed not only African heritage, but also their very African identity psychologically; therefore, they were forced to change their names to Arab names, thus boring the names of their enslavers and oppressors.²⁴ In studying the history of race and the introduction to Islam and Arab culture, Williams claims that only those Africans who are mixed up and confused of racial identity would believe that their religion is being attacked.²⁵ Daniel Nathaniel Butler takes a similar approach in *The First Jihad*, in which the author astutely argues that not only do the roots of Islam run deep throughout many African societies, but more interesting, how the religion is distinctly Arab in origin and culture.²⁶ Although, Butler pays particularly close attention to the role of “Militant Islam” in the Sudan under the suzerainty of the Ottoman and British Empires between the early and latter part of the nineteenth century, he maintains that there is something akin to how Africans who acquiesce with Islam, and the thoughts it inspired coalesced an Arab value system.²⁷

According to Butler, such a coherent body fosters a sense of Arab identity. Similarly, Paul Lovejoy accepts the negative character of the African presence in Islam. In his most famous work *Transformation in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, Lovejoy argues that the bellicose nature of Islam and its influence of Arab culture shaped African attitudes and disrupted both culture, and traditional systems of bondage and servitude.²⁸ Although Lovejoy presents a very interesting study of the economic evolution of the slave trade in Africa, there were various ethnic groups in Africa that modified Arab cultural ideologies of Islam to be compatible with their cultures. Although the

aforementioned scholars have greatly contributed to the history of Africa, very little attention has been provided regarding the cultural identity of African Muslims in the Senegambia and how they use the historical context of Amadu Bamba to appropriate spaces in which they define themselves. In David Robinson's *Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Amadu Bamba and The Murids of Senegal*, between 1865 and 1927 Amadu Bamba found a new framework in the Murids in Senegal and a form of Islam that worked in conjunction with their own backgrounds.²⁹ Insufficient research in this area supports the notion that there is no distinction between culture and religion.

Rather than disrupting African traditions and culture, Islam provided spaces for many Africans to organize and situate themselves politically and culturally. For example, Hiskett contends that during the Islamic reform of Gobir in Hausaland in 1803 (Northern Nigeria) many Fulani Muslims were known to carry indigenous charms, talismans, amulets, and field medicines that were used for both, the prevention of battle injuries and to augment one's physical prowess in combat.³⁰ Here, too, one can maintain that aspects of traditional religion were fused with Islam. This clearly reveals that not only did these West Africans possess a body of Islamic beliefs, but also traditions that were closely tied to indigenous customs. Despite the fact that these Africans were Muslims, their principles and traditional behaviors before engaging in combat clearly reflects their cultural ideas as a particular group, and how these ideas were synchronized into an African structure of Islam.

Christopher Harrison shares synonymous views in *France and Islam in French West Africa*. In this study he assiduously argues that Islam in West Africa was not only redefined and accommodated within the understanding of black African culture, but also how ethnically specific traditions shaped a distinct form of Islam practiced nowhere else in the Muslim world.³¹ Additionally, African Islam in the Senegambia was heavily influenced by local traditions and that

there were as many different types of Islam in West Africa as there were ethnic groups.³² Indeed, Africans were subsumed under the umbrella of Arab and Islamic influences, but this does not suggest histories, cultures, and traditional notions of one's identity were lost.

Ethnic and social tensions were common in Africa's history. However, the long-standing and dichotomous debates between Muslim and non-Muslim, cultural retentions and acculturation in Africa has very little to do with Islam, and much more to do with the acquiescence of new economic systems and contest of who controlled nascent trade-routes and inter-regional economies in specific geographical locations of the continent. At the University of Pennsylvania's History Department I interviewed Dr. Cheikh Anta Babou regarding the role and imperialistic nature of Islam, and Babou stated, "Don't look at Islam, look at Muslims, there was a long period of economic negotiation and if all one looks at is Islam as an essence one really misses a lot."³³ Conversely, Babou suggests that such broad generalizations are central to demonizing the faith and that one must distinguish economic interest from devotional and clerical practices. Let us examine these "African Muslims" in greater detail. In so doing will remove the ongoing ambiguity regarding how Senegalese Muslims personally and socio-psychologically identify themselves and provide a clear distinction between Arab influences and African cultures.

CHAPTER 3

AMADOU BAMBA AND THE MURIDYYA OF THE SENEGAMBIA

Cheikh Amadu Bamba's revamping of Islam in the Senegambia between 1865 and 1927 provides one with a balanced understanding of how both religion and ethic practices are interchangeable, specifically within the Muridiyyan Sufi order in Senegal. Muridism is Senegambian and largely a Wolof phenomenon. Its founder, Amadu Bamba Mbeke was a member of a marabout family of Toucouleur origin, which had settled in Bawol, and became Wolofized. Amadu Bamba studied the Quran and gained a sound foundation in Islamic learning. Although his theosophical views were shaped by the Sufi Tijaniyya sect, Amadu Bamba demanded more regarding his understanding and practice of Islam.

Further, Amadu Bamba was very passionate about his faith and in its proclamation he seemed to be the type of individual that skillfully sought to transform the social fabric of the Senegambia through education. He had a strong devotion to Islam in his character, and is known by many Murid oral historians to expand his studies in Sufism, the most esoteric and ethereal branch of Islam. In the second half of the nineteenth century, some local Muslim scholars had become critical of Islamic education Senegambia. They lamented that the teachings of the Quran had become a scholastic exercise that focused almost exclusively on memorizing the book and that Islamic knowledge was increasingly dissociated from wisdom.³⁴ This decline in the quality of education was blamed on the betrayal of values that had traditionally shaped the life of ulama (Islamic Community). They competed with each other and became complacent with the aristocracy, whose bad behavior they justified.³⁵ Suffice it to say that such behaviors and actions within the local level communities of M'Backe and Bawol were central to Amadu Bamba's development of specific doctrines which distinguished his teachings from that of other marabouts.³⁶

The system of Islamic education that Amadu Bamba's promoted between 1885 and 1886 was a response to the internal crisis and turpitudes in Muslim leadership in Bawol and Kajoor.³⁷

What makes the Muridiyya of Senegal exceptional is the spiritual and political philosophy of its erudite founder, who insightfully redesigned and reformed Islam during the period of French occupation in West Africa. Cheikh Amadu Bamba also shaped and influenced a society in which education and religion was a central instrument by which people gathered a stronger sense of social power and identity. His spiritual and educational philosophy fostered not only a response to the contemporary socio-political situation in the increasingly dysfunctional Wolof states, but also shaped a Murid ethos that allowed the cohesion and cultural continuity to maintain the group's existence. Cheikh Amadu Bamba's educational system itself was designed to promote a singular perspective, a certain set of beliefs and practices. The gradual transformation of Murid education and doctrinal stipulations into ethical behavior became an alternative to the traditional culture of the royal court.³⁸ Islamic education and Sufi brotherhoods evolved very early in West Africa. It was characterized by, among other things, the importance of religious fraternities known as tariqas. The tariqas developed out of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) which first appeared in the Arab world in the second century after the hegira as a reaction to the coldness of orthodox rationalistic theology.³⁹ Much of Islamic educational history in West Africa consists of a dialogue between Sufism and orthodox theology, but while orthodoxy has maintained its hold over the Middle East, Sufism has shaped both popular religious beliefs and the adaptation of non-Arab cultures and beliefs. According to Klein, Sufism in West Africa has been influenced by sources as diverse as the early Christian monastics and Berber animists. Educational practices in Sufi brotherhoods are often formed around a teacher known for his piety or his ability to work miracles. In this sense, disciples were known to seek initiation into the master's tariqa, or "way."⁴⁰ It was through the educational ideologies and practices of Sufism in which Cheikh Amadu Bamba was able to explore spaces and crevices to construct the ideological practice Muridism.

According to Babou, the values and practices of Murids provided them with a structured sense of solidarity.⁴¹ The introduction of Cheikh Amadu Bamba's new pedagogy in Mbakke Bawol in 1885 was rooted in service that was to reflect the deeper moral truths of everyday life, the difference between right and wrong, between good and evil, and between the expectations of the individual and his obligations to society. His conception of Sufism and reshaping of Islamic practices in the Senegambia were greatly influenced by Sufi scholars of the western Sahara such as Abu Talib Al Makki (d. 386H/996), Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn AttabAllah (d. 1309) and Al Yaddaali. However, it was Ghazali's scholarship as legalist, and his ability to reconcile the rigorous and rational interpretation of Islam by the ulama with the spirituality and esotericism of the mystics.⁴² The system that Amadu Bamba designed was geared toward the transformation of the character and behavior of disciples.⁴³ What marked Cheikh Amadu Bamba's uniqueness as both marabout and revolutionary in the Senegambia can be noted in not only in his quality of learning law and theology, but also his effectiveness as a teacher and proselytizer within Kajoor and Bawol. As a result, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's pedagogy was known to lure substantial numbers of Africans from the Senegambia and the surrounding areas such as slave warriors from the defeated armies of Lat Joor, tyeddo and peasant farmers. Further, it was the job of his disciples to both serve as appropriate modeling examples and disseminate the teachings of Bamba's new pedagogy. To this service, the proverbial wisdom of Murids in the Senegabia can also be noted in their verbal expressions such as beliefs, hopes, and feelings. Conversely, Bamba's teachings and modeling examples were not only used as a way to protect his people from external treats and the ever changing circumstances during the establishment of French colonial rule, but also an incubator to preserve identity and the continuity of Wolof culture in the Senegambia. In fact, many Wolof in the Senegambia cannot fathom the idea of practicing Islam without Bamba, who is entrenched into the very culture itself.

If Murids speak for energy and life, they also speak for discipline, restraint, and right behavior. They also speak in many ways that echo back to Bamba himself. According to Babou, Amadu Bamba maintained that venerating an honest and knowledgeable teacher is tantamount to venerating God.⁴⁴ Such a statement insofar provided a space for the veneration of not only African ancestors, but also the continuity of one's culture, identity, and purpose. As a result, Amadu Bamba produced a counter-culture that contested Arabization; the French colonial administration, and co-opted African chiefs that supported their perfidious policies.⁴⁵ If Cheikh Amadu Bamba played a crucial part in shaping new ideas and practices that surrounded Wolof culture, decisively one examine his biographical path and how the Wolof use his past to identify themselves.

Through interviews among the Senegalese community in Philadelphia, I found that Murids believe that the preservation of their history, identities, and culture as a distinct group of African Muslims is of the utmost importance and should be passed on to their children. This is best achieved by attending various Muridiyyan organizations, participating in religious activities, and socializing with other Murids, and travels to Senegal. Further, the historical context in which they see Cheikh Amadu Bamba is central to the transmission of how they culturally balance an alien faith within an African social structure. Conversely, the cultural balancing act is not a form of conformist adaptation. Additionally, this value reflects something much more than a functional selection of behavior.

Bamba's teachings serve to reinforce a sense of separateness between Arab and European. This separation in turn helps reinforce one's place in a larger matrix within Islam. Most Murids feel that they can act and interact in the faith of Islam without becoming "Arab." Furthermore, rather than facilitating a sense of adaptation, this separateness keeps Murids from viewing themselves as members of an Arab culture. The prioritizing of cultural values and cultural

selectivity further indicates that this is a key mechanism to maintain the survival of the group's culture.

Murid self-perceptions as a distinctive group of African Muslims is closely linked to the educational and social experiences of Cheikh Amadu Bamba when he was developing his political and intellectual authority in Kajoor, Bawol, and Mauritania. His ability to reform the Koranic schools in Kajoor and Bawol perhaps marked his greatest contribution as a revolutionary African thinker. Amadu Bamba's spiritual and cultural aesthetics were nourished not only by his enthusiasm and devotion to Islamic mysticism, but also his interactions with Arab intelligentsia. According to Babou, Amadu Bamba experienced how the fraternity between Muslims could be ambiguous in practice when it involved people of different skin colors and cultures⁴⁶ Babou further argued that many Moors in Mauritania did not have much respect for their black fellow Muslims, implying that blacks fail to understand Islamic law, ethic, and principle. Such phenomena and racial experiences were central to him writing his most salubrious work, *Massalik Al-Jinan (Paths to Paradise)*.

Furthermore, to counter such pejorative and ethnocentric relations with other cultures and races in Mauritania, Bamba stated, "Do not let my condition of a black man mislead you about the virtue of this work because skin color cannot be the cause of ignorance or truth."⁴⁷ Indeed, this became the intellectual and ideological focal point to reform the Islamic climate in which African culture was set in the Senegambia. Moreover, Bamba's intellectual sagacity and social background made it possible for him to challenge Islamic courts, political corruption, slavery, racial social theories and the mendacious policies of the French colonial administration, which shaped Cheikh Amadu Bamba's thinking regarding the structural quality of African life. The theosophical fabric of Cheikh Amadu Bamba's ideology consisted of the transformation of Islamic mysticism in the

Senegambia. Advertently, he revamped traditional Sufi methodology such as, the spiritual transformation of one's soul from a *taaleb* (student) to a *Murid* (aspirant); the cultural preservation of Wolofal; and the establishment and settlement of a holy site known as the *Tuubba*, which to this day accommodates the tomb of Cheikh Amadu Bamba. What makes the construct of the *Tuubba* particularly interesting is that not only was it constructed by a black African during the end of the nineteenth century, but also it serves as a "Black Mecca" and pilgrimage for many *Murids* in Senegal and abroad.

During an interview with Ahmadou Bamba Mbengue's a Senegalese immigrant who resides in Philadelphia, I asked question regarding the spiritual significance of the *Tuubba* and how it contributes to shaping the communitarian identities of many *Murids* within the broader world of Islam. He briefly smiled and said, "What makes the *Tuubba* unique is that Allah blessed Amadu Bamba to locate it, and although many have tried, none were successful.....you see, in the history of West Africa there has never been a black prophet of Islam until the coming of Amadu Bamba, he not only introduced the true teachings of Islam, but also a place where Islam is really practiced...in Mecca there is no Islam because a person can go there and drink and smoke...when Amadu Bamba found the holy site, he extended the spiritual significance and substance of the faith in Africa, and we are a part of that history..... you see, Amadu Bamba said that any man that sets foot in *Tuubaa* will never go to hell."⁴⁸ As a consequence, the exceptionality of the *Tuubba* marks it as the nexus and focal point for *Murid* religious activity, social life, history, and more importantly race. It further signifies the collective self-perception of Africans in the Senegambia. Decisively, the founding of Amadu Bamba's holy site demarcates itself politically, ethnically, and religiously from Mecca. And although *Murids* are Muslims who aspire to Muhammad, they do not equate themselves to being Arab culturally. Moreover, the *Tuubba* constitutes the intelligible and cultural

communion of various likes of Africans in the Senegambia and its surrounding borders. It also suggests that African Muslims who make pilgrimage to the Tuubba share identities that have been shaped and influenced by internal conditions which influenced origins of their collective development. The solidarity of Wolof culture and society is characterized by the fertile institutions established by Amadu Bamba.⁴⁹

What is significance here is that although various Islamic societies such Sunnis and Shi'ites link themselves to the either the teachings of Muhammad or his lineage, the followers of Cheikh Amadu Bamba aspire themselves to Bamba's contributions, and see themselves through his lens and worldview. The connection and relationship between Cheikh Amadu Bamba and the Prophet Muhammad can be noted not only in Islam, but also in the political characteristics and social reformism of the faith. Although Bamba aspires to the Prophet Muhammad, his experiences with Arabs in Mauritania became the focal point in which he transformed Islam to meet the cultural needs of Africans under the influences of western and Arab forces. Similarly, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's fusion of an alien religion with African culture makes him ingeniously one of the most erudite figures in the contemporary history of West Africa. Cheikh Amadu Bamba's exceptional intellectual ability and pious personality attracted Africans from various geographical locations of the continent. His teachings introduced new processes and practices in which students commit and dedicate themselves to their Cheikh's teaching, known in Wolof as *Aslamtu Nafsi* (giving oneself to one's guide between himself and God).⁵⁰

The system that he designed was a lifelong education geared toward transforming the character and behavior of the disciple.⁵¹ Here, too, one may contend that the Africanization of Islam, through Bamba's teachings, not only disseminated his new pedagogy, but also marked the appropriation of a new system in which the reverberations resulted in recalcitrant culture that

served as an effective alternative to assimilation between French and Arab influences. This also maintained Wolof culture in the Senegambia. In doing so, Bamba's pedagogy enabled many Africans to adapt quickly to the radically changing conditions in their environments. For example, between 1893 and 1904, French Governor General Ernest Roume and the Inspector of Education, Risson, in their efforts to control Islam, or regulate its expansion was a resounding failure, none more so than the effort to regulate Quranic schools through the implementation of licensing of all religious leaders announced, and the integration of the French language into all local level Quranic schools.⁵² As a result, French authorities had significant difficulty, and could not restrict or control Quranic schools due to the aroused suspicions of missionaries and their efforts to induce Africans into French public schools.⁵³ Cheikh Amadu Bamba was acutely aware that not only was education synonymous with socialization, but also the culture. Perhaps Cheikh Amadu Bamba also realized that the French language was central to the acculturation and assimilation process. Furthermore, Amadu Bamba sought to avoid any association with the French and their mission to civilize.⁵⁴ His ability to contest French educational policies were skillfully interwoven into Murid philosophy and education. Characterized by his commitment to the highest level of mysticism, many teddo, peasant farmers and warriors of Lat Joor's army found the dissemination and teaching methodology of Amadu Bamba very influential. They were, moreover, lured by his aura and school of thought which also provided spaces for protection from alien influences and maintained the cultural survival of the group.

Despite the aforementioned arguments that Africans lost their cultural identities by imposing Arab and Islamic influences, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's practice of Islamic mysticism intellectually and environmentally contributed to his visionary experiences internally and externally during the colonial and post-colonial era in the Senegambia. In an interview with Cheikh Anta

Babou, I asked questions with regard to the Wolofization of Islam in Senegal, and Cheikh Amadu Bamba's attitude regarding the continuity of African culture and Babou stated, "His visit to Mauritania became tainted once he was exposed to Arab racism... therefore, he constructed a model that preserved African culture, and perfected a spiritual atmosphere to see the culture and new pedagogy succeed."⁵⁵ These, experiences and conditions cultivated Cheikh Amadu Bamba's thinking to produce what Babou further calls, "a counter-culture." Thus, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's effective teaching methodology became the catalyst needed to not only fuse a new political and religious authority, but also served as an effective alternative to assimilation between both, French and Arab influences.⁵⁶ The system that Cheikh Amadu Bamba designed was a lifelong education geared toward the transformation of the character and behavior of the disciples. It comprised three main steps: exoteric education or *taalim* which aimed at feeding the brain by the study the Quran and the Islamic sciences, and esoteric education or *tarqiyya*, which aimed at educating the soul. However, his teaching methodology did not abandon classical instruction. He believed in the necessity of providing different options to respond to the diversity of demands stemming from the social and political context of his time.⁵⁷ Babou argues that if Cheikh Amadu Bamba had longed to stay in the land of the Arabs where he could devote his life to the study and practice of Sufism, his trip to Mauritania might have convinced him once and for all that his future was in the Senegambia.⁵⁸ Conversely, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's ideological perspectives regarding culture were very decisive.

What is more, Cheikh Amadu Bamba was able to clearly distinguish cultural disparities between different racial and ethnic groups, despite his once romantic claims of Islamic fraternalism. Although many historians of contemporary Africa have studied the piety and idiosyncratic methods of the *Tarriqa* (Sufi school founded by Cheikh Amadu Bamba between

1865-1927), none have articulated Bamba's need to preserve Wolof culture as Cheikh Amadu Bamba Mbenge, Cheikh Babou, and Serigne Abdou Khadir, who maintain that Bamba himself refused a Moor from marrying his daughter due to him equating himself with Arab culture.⁵⁹ Additionally, they realized the significance and power of cultural transmission and how it serves as the womb for preserving Wolof and Murid culture. Clearly, the historical significance and contents of sustaining Wolof culture is directly linked to Cheikh Amadu Bamba's social experiences. Consequently, many Wolof believe that his experiences bring meaning to the transmission of their culture and identity.

SELF-AWARENESS AND THE COMMUNITY OF MURIDIYYA IN PHILADELPHIA AND SENEGAL

Due to Cheikh Amadu Bamba's racial experiences with Arabs in Mauritania, he realized that the necessary prerequisite to transform traditional political systems in Kajoor and Bawol was to introduce a new religious movement that was taught with a Wolof accent.⁶⁰ Historian Martin Klein shares very congruent views in *Imperialism in Senegal*, in which the author argues that religious movements such as Islam and Christianity were forced to find common ground with African cultures in the Senegambia.⁶¹ Moreover, the changes and continuity of Wolof culture in the Senegambia is, insofar, interwoven through a series of personal and historical experiences of Amadu Bamba. His experiences shaped the socio-cultural contours regarding how Murids existentially see themselves as an exceptional group of Muslims. Bamba's approach to altering institutions, beliefs, customs, and traditions include not only his derivative forms of learned behavior but also the manifestations of his own intellectual and spiritual creativity. He produced something new and distinctively African within a range of forms and patterns which are a part of his educational, religious, racial experiences.

Although Rogan, Oliver, Williams, Lovejoy, and Butler's criticisms suggest that Muslim proselytizing has disrupted and eradicated African culture, the synchronism between African cultures and Islamic practices continue to manifest vitality everywhere in the Senegambia. Paradoxically, of all the Senegalese people, the Wolofs have probably changed the least while changing the most. While many of the formal elements of the social, religious, and political structure has changed due to Cheikh Amadu Bamba's social milieu and spiritual experiences, Murid culture has survived and is part of a newly developing culture based on Cheikh Amadu Bamba's teachings. The striking fact which emerges from this study is the degree of cultural stability. According to Fallou Ngom, Cheikh Amadu Bamba is an esteemed African hero in the Senegambia who successfully resisted blind Arabization and the Westernization of his people.⁶² This suggests that the influence of Arab culture in Islam has done very little to alter basic patterns of social behavior and interpersonal relations within Murid communities.

Klein astutely argues that Senegal is far from being totally shaped by outside forces, and its African past preserves the means to reinforce the cultural continuity for its future.⁶³ In 1986 the BBC funded a television documentary called *The Africans*, in which historian Ali Mazuri contended that though Africanized Islam is growing, conservative Muslims fear that the reverence of saints like Bamba could create rivals to the prophet Muhammad and that the Africanization of Islam will result in the elevation of the ancestors. What is particularly interesting here is how Senegalese Murids, collectively commemorate not only the cultural, moral, spiritual, and political contributions of Cheikh Amadu Bamba on Amadu Bamba Day, which is held during the month of August, but also the Magal (Bamba's exile to Gabon from French colonial officials). These activities involve a variety of duties including, prayer sessions, recitations of Amadu Bamba's religious poems (Khassaid), exhibits, collective dinner gatherings, and parades through the street,

Ross suggests.⁶⁴ They also constitute Murid history, geography and identity for Africans in Senegal and those who are abroad. Hereof, the intersection between Islamic influences and Murid customs are skillfully interwoven into an African social structure.



Modern Day Self-Perception- Senegalese Muslims (Murids) collectively commemorate Amadu Bamba Mbeke on Amadu Bamba Day August 2nd 2011 in Harlem New York. Various Muslims wear small beaded necklaces with pictures of Amadu Bamba Mbeke. This marks not only the commemoration of Amadu Bamba, but also the veneration of an African ancestor who is a central figure to way Murids see themselves as African Muslims. (ph.Cheikh Amadou Lo)

In an interview at Harcum College on April 2nd I spoke with an ELA (English Learning Academy) student who was a Sunni Muslim from Saudi Arabia named Turki Aljarboua regarding the religious practices of Islam in the Senegambia and weather pictures and the veneration of one's ancestors is appropriate in the faith and he stated, "such practices in Islam are haram.... not only are photos forbidden, but also drawn or sculpt images in the home or Mosque."⁶⁵ Contrarily, Murids are commonly known to have pictures of Cheikhs and ancestors in their homes. In doing so also shows differences in belief and perception of two distinct ethnic groups who practice the same religion, however, differently. Additionally, this of great significance because it focuses on the dissimilarity of Islam based on culture, thought and practice adhered to by Arabs and Africans. My objective in this research is to afford the reader an opportunity to understand that African

Murids who practice Islam in the Senegambia have not equated themselves to being Arab ethnically or culturally. Such practices within the Muridyya clearly reveal how Murids expressively distance themselves culturally and religiously from the Arab interpretation and practice of the faith.

It further signifies that the remembrance of Cheikhs and ancestors are not only rooted into Wolof culture, but also how such commemorative practices are a central part of the Wolof collective memories. The distinctiveness of the Muridyya in the Senegambia clearly illustrates specific points where religion and ethnic practices meet.⁶⁶ Similarly, the foundation to their identity and cultural solidarity is directly linked to Cheikh Amadu Bamba himself. Although Cheikh Amadu Bamba's method of practicing Islam is very salubrious in the Senegambia, his ideological perspectives of Islam connect Murids to land, language, and culture. Theosophically, they further believe that Cheikh Amadu Bamba's prayers for the well-living and continuity of culture and community have already been accepted by God and that now it is their duty to make this acceptance real, by contributing to the fulfillment of Bamba's continuing mission. In so doing, they hope to reap the rewards in this world and the world beyond.⁶⁷ When questioning one of several at a Dihera in Philadelphia (Murid religious gatherings) Murids regarding the cultural ideology of Murid religiosity and what Islam in Senegal would be like without Amadu Bamba, Amadu Bamba Mbengue maintains, "The distinction is Muhammad, because the form of Islam Arabs practice is different and Amadu Bamba changed the practice. You see, Africa would not be the same, he taught us to do right, he was the last savior, and what Allah allowed him to do, others cannot because Cheikh Amadu Bamba brought the straight and righteous path during a time of chaos."⁶⁸ The relevance of Cheikh Amadu Bamba's mission and purpose is deeply embedded into the socio-psychological ethos of Murid communities. Furthermore, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's teachings are central to how Murids personally identify themselves and develop a sense of

community. During another Dahira, (Murid religious gatherings) Mbengue pointed out how Amadu Bamba serves as their catalyst to Sufi philosophy, maintaining, “He is our idol, our guide.”⁶⁹ According to Souleymane Bashir Diagne, the celebrated works of Cheikh Amadu Bamba is a perfect illustration of the eternally adaptable message of the inner dimension of Sufism.⁷⁰ Moreover, Sufism and the influence of Islamic mysticism provided a very sacred space for Cheikh Amadu Bamba to serve as a modeling example for good Muslim leadership to his people. The Africanization of Islam was skillfully designed by Cheikh Amadu Bamba to shape both, culturally stabilized African structures, and secure a theological framework that maintained their identities. Indeed, Bamba’s cultural and political contribution during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century is also the most fundamental feature which serves as the body of national unity to people in the Senegambia.

For example, in 1967 Mercer Cook, the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Senegal translated a speech regarding identity and national unity by Leopold Senghor at the Sorbonne conference in France. Although Senghor was a Catholic and strongly acquainted with Europe’s political tradition, he was elected Senegal’s first president in a predominantly Moslem land. In his speech, Senghor stressed the power and significance of African socialism. He further contended that the uniqueness of strong African qualities could be found and achieved within Murid communities. It was at the conference that Senghor suggested that African culture could only survive thorough a shared ideology, and that the Murid community is the purest expression of black unity that bounds black men together the world over.⁷¹ To the amazement of most of his audience, his speech was a defense of African cultural values, a warning that Africans must assimilate, and not be assimilated.⁷² What is captivating about Senghor’s public address is that although he was a native son to Senegal who had mastered much of French culture, his delivery

advertently gave agency to Murid communities. Murid leadership in Senegal was central to the dynamics of power bargaining at play during Senghor's second term. Nevertheless, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's intellectual revolution generated an African racial consciousness and personality that is directly linked to a unified nationalistic identity. It also shows the reciprocal relationship between the people, identity, and land, which has come to resemble one another. Senghor's speech also shows the attributes that characterize the nation itself, both as a cultural and spiritual collective linked to Cheikh Amadu Bamba. Moreover, Senghor's speech is a clear representation of nationalism, and how it is primarily a cultural phenomenon, although it often takes a political form.

What is noteworthy here is the relationship between Senghor and the contributions Murids has made in Senegalese history, and how such contributions has been respectfully referenced to the founder of the Muridiyya. Such a testimony insured that the Wolof past would be sustained as part of both, their collective history and memories. Similarly, during a Dihera in Philadelphia on November 17th Serigne Abdou Khadir shared very congruent views regarding the cultural idiosyncrasies of Murids in their relation with Cheikh Amadu Bamba. He stated that, "Cheikh Amadu Bamba, our leader, before he transcended said that he would be here for another 400 more years to come, which means, that Cheikh Amadu Bamba is among us. Although we don't see him, he is still here in this world. So wherever we are, whatever we are doing let's think of him."⁷³ We must know and be forever mindful that he is watching us, he sees us and he'll always be around forever. And also, we should stick together, and without unity we cannot achieve much, so work together, stick together and move together."⁷⁴ According to Suso, many West African people from the Senegambia still regard their ancestors as important spiritual leaders of everyday life, although Allah or God is worshiped formally.⁷⁵ One may concur with Marzuri's claims regarding

the homage of the ancestors, thereby granting his argument socio-cultural legitimacy. What is more, the memory of Cheikh Amadu Bamba's commitment as a mystic saint is central to his veneration and the accretion of Murid disciples. It is from these statements that a form of pan-Muridism was cultivated. It also signifies how Murids use their social and institutional spaces to shape a specific cultural motif.

Indeed, the purview of one Murid is synonymous with the other. This further clarifies that the combination between Islamic practices and African cultures has been modified in the course of adaptation based on the given political changes of the time. Conversely, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's ability to define, construct, and bestow meaning to Islam fostered an exceptional practice to Sufi mystics in the Senegambia. The suddenness and growing recognition with which Murids emerged into world history is not only one of the most striking happenings of African cultural solidarity in Senegal, but it also reflects the direct result of how power is organized. Diagne argues that the Cheikh's teachings transformed the darkness of the lower soul (*nafs*) into the light of the spirit (*ruh*) that is beyond the reach of oppression, beyond the reach of violence, division, discord, destruction, and the tormenting chains of oppression.⁷⁶ Due to Cheikh Amadu Bamba being such an intellectual and accomplished mystic, his teachings became the impetus needed for Senegalese Muslims to retain knowledge and transmit it to the next generation.

Such a process further solidifies the survival of his people, culture, morals, and values. This is the foundation to how Murids see themselves as an exceptionally erudite group of African Muslims. Additionally, Murids seek to participate in the manifestation of Amadu Bamba's *baraka* (blessing) in this world.⁷⁷ Perhaps the most electrifying factor here is the inculcation of spiritual and social practices that are used to excel in piety. These practices are of the highest significance, and thereby used to assert their cultural identity based on the teachings of Cheikh Amadu Bamba.

Although criticisms by Rogan, Williams, Lovejoy, and Collins have been directed against African Muslims, Murids take pride in their cultural identities as distinguished Muslims in the broader world of Islam. Observation during Dahiras confirms that Murids are very proficient in oral and written traditions. Interviews regarding oral traditions and recorded history suggest that Murids recognize genealogy and can recall the political, economic, and cultural contributions of various Sufi elites such as, Cheikh Amadu Bamba Mbeke, Ibrahima Fall, Cheikh Massamba Mbacke, Al-Hadji Abdoulaye Niase, and Malik Sy. Oral tradition and recorded history, rightly examined indicates the importance of Murid self-perception. In so doing, Murids have skillfully traced and modeled the relationships of these leaders with their people at many points in the history Murridiyya. This sheds considerable light on both, their cultural development and spiritual perspectives, which are interwoven into the social fabric of Murid piety.⁷⁸

Likewise, Zain Abdullah's *Black Mecca*, unveils a very assiduous ethnography of black Muslims in Harlem New York, while at the same time expose readers to their social relations with various Africans from the Diaspora, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Abdullah's up close and personal ground level approach to both, domestic issues and contests and notions of power and belonging between the aforementioned groups makes his book a very sagacious read. In one of many interviews conducted by Abdullah, the author asks one of his interviewees a question regarding why he wears African attire, albeit he is Muslim? The interviewee responded, "Of course I love wearing African cloths! You see African American imams don't like dressing in African cloths. They suffer from an identity crisis. They don't know who they are. So they try to follow another culture-- Arab culture. But when I dress in African cloths it tells everyone I am African."⁷⁹ What is particularly interesting here is that although he is Muslim, he claimed and affirmed his identity as an African. Additionally, Abdullah is right to argue that clothing marks

racial and religious boundaries. To further solidify such claims, I asked Ababacar Diagne why Cheikh Amadu Bamba did not dress in Arab attire and he stated, “Because Cheikh Amadu Bamba is an African, you have to keep in mind that Cheikh Amadu Bamba protected black culture by speaking and dressing as an African not an Arab, he showed us a sense of pride and thought us how to submerge into the collective sense of who we are through the teaching of values and morals.....understand, he is our spiritual and cultural leader and what happened in other African countries did not happen here.”⁸⁰

Furthermore, African Muslims from the Senegambia wear traditional clothing to assert their African presence in an Islamic ethos. In so doing they also reveal that wearing African clothing demarcates them from the Arab cultural attires worn in Islam such as the Thobes and Bishts for men, and Hijabs and Abayas for women. It also maintains that Wolof culture is distinguished from Arab culture and how that culture expresses itself through clothing. This, too, is directly linked to the historical experiences and contributions of Cheikh Amadu Bamba whose visual culture and appearance is rooted in the collective memory of many African Muslims in the Senegambia. The fact that Murids acknowledge themselves as a particular group of Muslims further separates their association with Arab culture and identity. Babou argues that Murids take pride in their self-sufficiency and independence from Arab intellectual resources and culture.⁸¹ It is for this purpose that the tariqa (school of Sufism) founded by Amadu Bamba is perhaps the most exceptional and most studied.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE: THE NECESSARY INSTRUMENT TO SUSTAIN WOLOF CULTURE

Of the many cultural traits, and mannerisms that characterizes Murid identity and self-perception, none can be applied more than in the sector of language. Language is a significant component of identity due to its ability to organize and sustain communal memory and culture.⁸² Albeit we cannot prove an ultimate unity in African languages, there are, just as in other parts of African cultures features that make their languages the cultural and historical foundation to unification. Additionally, the study of cultural retentions involves not only the institutions that shape Murid reactions to the fellow members of his society, but also the existential aspects of human behavior, such as language. The relationship between language and behavior, between personality and culture and the system of values that gives meaning to the accepted modes of behavior in a people can be directly linked to the process of how Cheikh Amadu Bamba transformed an Arab religion into a unified African social structure.

Although many scholars of African history have studied the Muridiyya and its passive resistance movement to counter French imperialism and Arabization, the relationship between Cheikh Amadu Bamba and the preservation of Wolofal (Wolof language) remains one of the most unexplored and unexamined areas in Wolof culture.⁸³ The focal point in which Wolofal was preserved is deeply rooted into the personal experiences of Cheikh Amadu Bamba after his first visit to Mauritania between 1883 and 1884. As mentioned previously in this paper, Bamba's contact with Arab racism contributed to a fundamental shift in his thinking, specifically regarding the obligatory demands to familiarize oneself with Arabic. According to Eugene Rogan, Arabs perceive themselves as the chosen people of Islam (the Quran stresses no less than ten times that God bestowed his final revelation on humankind in Arabic).⁸⁴ Although Arabic is deemed the

mandated language of Islam, Cheikh Amadu Bamba constructed a new pedagogy that insured his people to not only familiarize themselves with Arabic, but also retain one of the most important characteristics in African culture: language. Many Murids that I have interviewed readily identify their language as a central component to Wolof culture and identity.

Language is the keystone to culture and gives human beings a history, while at the same time provide access to social experiences and accumulated knowledge of previous generations. Frantz Fanon argued, “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to assume the weight of a civilization.”⁸⁵ In other words, language is central to the cognitive and social psychological development which shapes character and personality of the culture. Language is of great significance because the specific group understands the internal social systems of the culture. To further the connection between language and culture, I asked Cheikh Babou how important language was in local level communities. He stated, “Cheikh Amadu Bamba perhaps realized that his people would be more receptive to his message if it were introduced to them in Wolofal...you have to keep in mind that Wolofal was not only central to the integration of Islamic practices, but a formative and collective part of one’s culture.”⁸⁶ In other words, the preservation of Wolofal in the mist of Arab and Europeans influences gave shape to reinforce identity within the Murid collective.

What is more, Wolofal carries with it the cultural contours and customs in which Murids see themselves, and how they act in the world. On January 14th I ventured to another interview at the University of Pennsylvania where I met with Professor Mbeke Thioune who taught Wolofal to students interested in joining the Peace Corps, and I asked how Cheikh Amadu Bamba used language as an instrument of cultural space to define religious and ethnic boundaries. He stated, “Amadu Bamaba knew that language was a valued cultural possession because it marked the

identity and cultural specificity of the group or individual, and it is the totality of who they are and what they are.... Amadu Bamba realized that in order to sustain his tariqa the language had to be maintained.⁸⁷ Amadu Bamba's greatest contributions in African history can be directly linked to language and how he altered the influences of both the Arab language and Islam to create institutions to ensure the ideological existence and cultural authority of his people in the Senegambia. My pursuits regarding the social relations between identity, culture, language and history led me to further inquiries.

In a short interview at a Senegalese restaurant called "Kilimanjaro," I met with Iraha Mbaye and asked how the Wolof or Murids differ from the Arab speaking regions in Sub-Sahara Africa if Cheikh Amadu Bamba consistently spoke Arabic in local level communities. He stated, "There would be no difference, but keep in mind that Amadu Bamba is what makes us different linguistically.... yuh understand, we only see him as a symbol of virtue spiritually and culturally."⁸⁸ In any case he is the model of how to practice Islam in Senegal...I also think Amadu Bamba knew that language was the only means to access and develop one's culture and keep your self-consciousness... your language is you, it is your history, your memory."⁸⁹ What impressed me the most regarding his response was how he used Amadu Bamba as an instrument of distinction, and the primary figure to his own sense of identity, culture and purpose. Although Islam and Arabic have shaped various events in the Senegambia, historians must come to realize that Arab and European influences did not shatter or destroy African culture, but rather fostered new practices in which they were able to adapt, innovate, and change their present conditions in a manner that was palatable to them. Thus, Amadu Bamba used language as a means to improve the social welfare of Africans throughout the Senegambia. Additionally, language is the womb to Wolof culture. The retention of language is the most important historical process of learning the art of coding and

decoding social systems of human society.⁹⁰ Similarly, language is of great significance, specifically regarding the understanding of Wolof thoughts and systems during Cheikh Amadu Bamba's founding of the Muridyaa. According to Fallou Ngom, there are extensive materials throughout written and spoken in Ajami (the modified Arabic script used to write African languages) in areas stretching from Senegambia to the horn of Africa. These languages include Wolof, Mande languages, Haal-Pulaar, Hausa, Swahili, Amharic, Kanuri, and Yoruba, among others.⁹¹ Although some historians may view Cheikh Amadu Bamba as a pragmatist, he was acutely aware that the best way to preserve the transmission of African culture and his new pedagogy was through language.

Perhaps the best way to gain an understanding of Murid self-perception and assertion themselves as a community is to explore the history of how Cheikh Amadu Bamba secured Wolofal in the Senegambia. Bamba perhaps realized that the retention of language was central to the preservation of Wolof culture. Wolofal literature was used to disseminate Cheikh Amadu Bamba's Sufi teaching among Wolof and the surrounding masses.⁹² While Cheikh Amadu Bamba exclusively wrote and spoke Arabic due to his contact with Arab intelligentsia during his era, he equally expressed himself in Wolof, and encouraged the dissemination of his teachings to the masses to be conducted in their native African tongue: Wolof.⁹³ Here, too, one can acknowledge how language is consistent with culture, and insofar influence interpretations of reality. It may be noted that Wolofal was used as a means to communicate ideas, emotions and desires in an indirect and direct way.

Within local level communities Bamba deemed Wolofal theodesian. In doing so Bamaba retained not only language, but culture and identity, which bounds them one to another. What is captivating here is how the retention of Wolofal can throw light on social history. It also reveals

how it contributes and subsumes other disciplines under its umbrella such as psychology, anthropology and sociology. Ngom contends that although Arabic literacy and education is often acknowledged, African linguistic traditions have been left aside as insignificant sources of knowledge.⁹⁴ Despite such claims, Ngom suggests that the source of African knowledge and culture can be gained by tapping into Wolofal.

Conversely, the preservation of Wolofal would give meaning to their existence as Africans and Murids. Further, Wolofal literature serves as significant sources of knowledge that provide valuable insights in Murid culture. Ngom argues that these documents are major sources of knowledge that capture Murids' own accounts of the life and mission of Cheikh Amadu Bamba's Sufi teachings, ideals, pedagogy, and blessings he brought to his people.⁹⁵ He further maintains that Amadu Bamba's senior disciples such as Serin Moor Kayre (1869-1951), Serin Samba Jaara Mbay (1870-1917), Serin Muusa Ka (1883-1967), and Serin Mbay Jaxate (1875-1954), among others, have developed a literary tradition both as a sign of pious gratitude toward their leader, and as an act of spiritual generosity designed to culturally educate the masses in their own tongue.⁹⁶ One of the many theological and linguistic features that form the core of Murid cultural ideology is *liggeey* (a form of piety and an investment in spiritual, cultural and material independence, which engenders the work ethics of Muridiyya followers).⁹⁷ The focus on *liggeey* (work) in Murid theology appears to be a major pedagogical innovation of Bamba's realistic approach to holistic education.

Conversely, Bamba's emphasis on the importance of Wolofal further maintains that it is a culturally organized system of means of communication, in which one can understand another morphologically and etymologically. Notwithstanding Ajami has its roots in Islamized Africa as far back as the 16th century, Cheikh Amadu Bamba's experiences with both Arabs and Europeans was

central to the creation of a new pedagogy that ensured not only the cultural continuity of his people, but also engendered educated individuals who would not be detached from their intellectual traditions that begot them. In doing so, many Africans were grounded in their own cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. As a result, Africans have esteemed Cheikh Amadu Bamba as a hero who successfully resisted blind Arabization and Westernization.⁹⁸ Serin Moor Kayre provides very congruent views regarding the significance of Wolofal and its relationship with culture, contending that the Wolof word “xel” (mind) or “reason” challenges the racist assumption held by some Westerners and Arabs who do not associate “intelligence or the use of reason” with the black race.⁹⁹

Most importantly, Wolofal holds the moral philosophy of the people. There is a deeper need for historians of Africa to examine the ethno-cultural practices of various ethnic groups within various African communities, and how the introduction to new religious, economic, and political conditions of Africans changed and evolved based on specific moments in history. Such conditions have shaped their ability to adapt and respond accordingly to alien influences. The lens of the historiography of pre-modern and modern Islamic Africa continues to have historical distortions and nuances, specifically in areas which address Arab and European influences in the western Sudan. The objective of this study however, is not intended to fundamentally disagree regarding the interpretations in academic literature on black African Muslims, but to subsume an ethno-cultural structure that works in conjunction with Islam. In the section that follows I will justify the significance of this study by presenting to the reader why there is a deeper need for historians of Africa to examine and interrogate ethno-histories of various clans. In doing so will allow one to take notice of how Africans adapted and responded to foreign influence. It will also further one’s understanding regarding how Africans found spaces within foreign influences to

shape practices that served their interests and protected their identities. The process of innovation and adaptation of conquered peoples is of great significance to understanding any historical phenomena, specifically in regards to the social relations between groups that have been inundated to and exposed to foreign influence. The modification of foreign influences is not new in Africa, nor is the syncretic practice of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. However, there is minimal research regarding how African leaders such as Cheick Amadu Bamba renamed, redefined, and reconstructed foreign influences to serve the purposes of African people in the Senegambia. My examination of how the Wolof in the Senegambia use the history and contributions of Amadu Bamba to preserve their identities and communities, as well as preserve them, contributes to an emerging literature that further examines the relationship between language and power, and how Amadu Bamba used Wolofal in local level communities to maintain their places in them. His methodology was central to the reorientation of Wolof identity and community. As a result Wolof societies in the Senegambia and diaspora acknowledge Amadu Bamba as the central figure who constitutes cultural and social continuities. The African had to adapt to new circumstances and in doing resulted in their ability to defend themselves from external treats. In the Senegambia, the success of maintaining Muslim Wolof culture was greatly do to Amadu Bamba's ability to use his educational and social experiences to reshape local level African polices in Kajoor and Bawol.

Many historians have tended to exclude or overlook perspectives and interpretations from African sources. As a result, a one-sided historical perspective has been produced. To introduce a balanced understanding regarding the social relations between African responses to foreign influences requires a reconstruction of the history of Africans which embodies their social experiences and interpretations of the past. In so doing one will have a greater understanding how past experiences shaped African responses to foreign influences, and the ways in which Africans

resisted, accommodated, and changed to meet the oppression and opportunities associated with foreign influences in the Senegambia. This study has found that such experiences shaped the historical and cultural contours that constitute Wolof identity and culture. It further maintains that the study of structures and the relative positions of Murids are directly linked to their present sense of identity. Contrarily, the Arab cultural influences of Islam did not destroy African cultures in the Senegambia, nor did it disrupt their sense of culture and identity. Amadu Bamba's greatest contribution to African history was how he astutely transformed activities and religious structures, which as a result provided spaces for Africans to explore and examine their creativity and maintain their sense of identity.

Although Rogan, Lovejoy, Collins, Williams and Butler argue that the pervasiveness of Islam distorted and disrupted the African's psyche and traditional systems throughout the continent, their arguments are not persuasive and further ebbed by their erroneous views of ethno-history. They would have benefited from establishing how the social and institutional structures in Islamic Africa varied based on cultural values which naturally bound groups. Additionally, their books seem to examine one side of Islam, the Arab and militant side, which portrays Islam as being fanatical and recalcitrant. Ultimately, they fail to identify not only how African cultures were shaped by alien influences, but also how alien influences too, were being shaped. Cheikh Amadu Bamba's tariqa embodied a set of values that not only constructed a space to appropriate one's own culture, but also to secure a unique identity. His ability to construct authentic cultural institutions using religion, language, and his racial personal experiences in Mauretania attest to the health and continuity of Wolof culture. Further, their neglect of attention to the syncretism in African cultures, and the subculture which existed within such institutions can be countered on many fronts. Contrary to their argument, many Africans rose to power based on how well they

progressed through Islamic teaching. In doing so, sacred spaces were explored to preserve their sense of culture, community, and identity. The religious and social formations that Cheikh Amadu Bamba revamped and organized were constructed through his ability to use history, language, and culture. His contribution to African and world history provides insights to the relationship between language, culture, and the generation of power in local level African communities. It also constitutes the autonomous inner quality in which African Muslims in the Senegambia personally identify themselves.

Unlike Rogan, Lovejoy, Collins, Williams and Butler, Cheick Babou, Fallou Ngom, and Souleymane Bashir Diagne present very balanced and incisive studies of the ethno-cultural factors which cultivated Islamic African culture in the Senegambia. Their salubrious historical examination presents the ingenious process of how Islam was made compatible with African culture. What is most impressive about their work is their ground level approach, which makes their work rich and eclectic. Additionally, their work is genuinely a social history that demonstrates captivating studies of African culture, while also absorbing insights from sociology and anthropology. Moreover, their approach addressing the social and ideological relationships between Islamic practices and ethnic customs is not misleading, but discussed in a great detail. Rogan, Lovejoy, Collins, Williams and Butler tend to focus on the social, political and economic processes of Islam in Africa, rather than how the ideological foundations of alluring leaders were used to solidified their cultures during periods when Africans had to adjust to change and alien influence.

Even though Arabic influences have to a high degree shaped much of the life patterns of African people in the entire Sudan and much of East Africa, the continuity of African culture in spite of drastic changes is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the Muridiyya of Senegal.

Although western and eastern influences have permeated Africa's interior, this is not to say they have necessarily weakened African cultures. Additionally, Ngom argues that critics who predicted the demise of the Muridiyya and failed and those who continue to disparage Murid followers' so-called "blind submission to their leader" have missed their dynamism, optimism, and their work ethic, which have made them an important cultural force to be reckoned with in Senegal and abroad.¹⁰⁰ Whatever the degree of influence, Murids have maintained that African culture can, and in fact has been able to adapt and respond accordingly to Arab and European influences. On the basis of knowledge of Murids and their descendants in Senegal and abroad, there is little reason to believe that African culture will have any difficulty in persisting with more than reinterpreted modifications.

Despite the harsh conditions of acculturation under Arab and European imperialism, the ingenuity of African thought has been able to flourish under the conditions of alien influence. The synchronization between African customs and Islamic practices fostered a very unique and exceptional form of Islam in the Western Sudan. The diversity of African cultures and of African reactions to European and Arab culture presents a major obstacle to understanding contemporary Africa, even for experienced scholars and students. It makes the task of describing Africa to those who have never seen or studied it more difficult because of the temptation to draw generalizations that are valid only for various African regions. Many of the cultural differences in relation to alien influences are far too numerous to detail. Equally if not more important is the established patterns of African culture within Murid communities in the Senegambia. Nevertheless, the tariqa established by Amadu Bamba serves as the center to support and educate Murids, while at the same time provide a framework in which they may assert their cultural identity.

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