

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF ISLAMIC STUDIES**

MASTER'S THESIS

**THE SOURCES OF AHMADU BAMBA'S
WORKS ON SUFISM**

KHADIM MBACKE

**THESIS ADVISOR
ASSIST. PROF. NASER DUMAIRIEH**

ISTANBUL, 2025

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WORKS ON SUFISM**

**by
KHADIM MBACKE**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Islamic Studies**

THESIS JURY MEMBERS
ASSIST. PROF. NASER DUMAIRIEH (THESIS ADVISOR)
ASSIST. PROF. NAVID CHIZARI
ASSOC. PROF. AHMET MURAT ÖZEL

ISTANBUL, 2025

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been read by us, and it has been decided that it is sufficient in terms of scope and quality to obtain a master's degree in the field of Islamic Studies Department.

Thesis Jury Members

Title – Full Name

Opinion

Signature



It has been confirmed that this thesis has been written following all the standards set by Ibn Haldun University Graduate School of Graduate Studies.

Date of Submission

Seal/Signature

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Full Name:

Signature:



ÖZ

AHMADU BAMB'A'NIN TASAVVUF ÜZERİNE ESERLERİNİN KAYNAKLARI

Mbacke, Khadim

Temel İslam Bilimleri Yüksek Lisans Programı (%30 İngilizce)

Öğrenci No.: 214018030

Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0002-4858-8101

Ulusal Tez Merkezi Referans No.: 10696314

Tez/Proje Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Naser Dumairieh

Şubat 2025, 134 Sayfa

Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, “*Khadîm ar-Rasûl*” (Peygamber Muhamme'in Hizmetkârı) olarak bilinen, Batı Afrika İslâmı'nın entelektüel ve manevi tarihinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Senegal'de *al-Murîdiyya* tasavvuf tarikatının kurucusu olarak, Bamba'nın öğretileri iman, sadakat ve ahlaki davranışları vurgulayarak dini uygulamaları etkilemiştir. Bu tez, Bamba'nın tasavvuf düşüncesini şekillendiren tarihsel bağamlar, etkiler ve katkılar üzerinde durarak onun entelektüel gelişimini incelemektedir. *Al-Murîdiyya*'nın etkisi kabul edilirken, Bamba'nın entelektüel temelleri yeterince derinlemesine ele alınmamıştır. Bu çalışma, Bamba'nın klasik tasavvuf literatürü ve onu etkileyen entelektüel şahsiyetlerle olan etkileşimini analiz ederek bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, Bamba'nın geleneksel tasavvuf öğretilerini, sömürge dönemi Senegal'inin siyasi ve sosyal gerçekliklerine nasıl uyarladığıını tartısmaktadır. Metin analizi, karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar ve tarihsel bağlamın dikkate alınması gibi yöntemlerle, bu araştırma, Bamba'nın entelektüel ve manevi gelişimini şekillendiren önemli tarihsel âlimler ve etkili metinlerin rolüne kapsamlı bir bakış sunarken, onun katkılarını ve tasavvufun tarihsel zorluklara yanıt olarak evrimini anlamaya yönelik içgörüler de sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ahmadu Bamba, *al-Murîdiyya* Tarikatı, Batı Afrika, Senegal, Tasavvuf.

ABSTRACT

THE SOURCES OF AHMADU BAMBA'S WORKS ON SUFISM

Mbacke, Khadim

MA in Islamic Studies (in 30% English)

Student ID: 214018030

Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORC-ID): 0000-0002-4858-8101

National Thesis Center Reference No.: 10696314

Thesis Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Naser Dumairieh

February 2025, 134 Pages

Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, known as *Khadīm ar-Rasūl* (the Servant of the Messenger Muhammad), played a significant role in West African Islam's intellectual and spiritual history. As the founder of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order in Senegal, Bamba's teachings have influenced religious practices, emphasizing faith, devotion, and ethical conduct (*iḥsān*). This thesis explores Bamba's intellectual development, focusing on the historical contexts, influences, and contributions that shaped his Sufi thought. While the impact of *al-Murīdiyya* is recognized, Bamba's intellectual foundations have not been thoroughly examined. This study fills this gap by analyzing Bamba's engagement with classical Sufi literature and the intellectual figures that influenced him. It also discusses how Bamba adapted traditional Sufi teachings to the political and social realities of colonial Senegal. Through methods such as textual analysis, comparative studies, and consideration of historical context, this research provides a comprehensive examination of the role played by prominent historical scholars and influential texts in shaping Bamba's intellectual and spiritual development, while also offering insights into his contributions and the evolution of Sufism in response to historical challenges.

Keywords: Ahmadu Bamba, *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi Order, Senegal, Sufism, West Africa.

DEDICATION

To the memory of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, whose legacy inspires this work and countless others, may this research serve as a gateway to deeper academic exploration of his profound teachings. To my family, with heartfelt gratitude: to the soul of my grandfather, Sheikh Muhammad Maḥmūd Niang, whose wisdom continues to guide me; to my father, for his unwavering support; and to my mothers, siblings, and fiancée, for their endless love, prayers, and encouragement. Finally, to my friends, whose steadfast companionship and encouragement have strengthened me throughout this journey.



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Khadim Mbacke
İSTANBUL, 2025

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The study of Islamic intellectual history is enriched by figures whose contributions have shaped religious thought and left enduring legacies within specific socio-cultural contexts. One such figure is Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke. Bamba, as the founder of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order in Senegal, is revered for his spirituality and transformative teachings that emphasize faith, devotion, and a disciplined spiritual journey towards Allah. His rooting in a life dedicated to knowledge, religious practice, and pursuing moral excellence (*ihsān*) made his legacy profoundly influence the Sufi tradition in West Africa, particularly in Senegal.

1.1. Research Problem

At the heart of this research lies the problem of a fragmented understanding of Ahmadu Bamba's intellectual roots within Sufism. Despite his pivotal role in establishing *al-Murīdiyya*, an Islamic Sufi movement that has shaped the spiritual landscape of Senegal and beyond, the specific sources and figures that influenced his ideas remain inadequately addressed in existing scholarship. This knowledge gap prevents a full appreciation of how Ahmadu Bamba's thoughts relate to and diverge from traditional Sufi doctrines and his historical and cultural context. Previous studies have touched on his life, spiritual practices, and socio-political contributions; however, the intellectual foundations that underpin his Sufi thought require deeper analysis. This study suggests that Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought is rooted in a selective yet profound integration of traditional Sufi sources, guided by both his predecessors and contemporary Sufi figures. Additionally, it suggests that his unique historical and cultural context contributed to his innovative approach to Sufism, setting him apart within the broader Sufi tradition.

To investigate these issues, the study addresses several specific research questions: (1) What are the key sources in Bamba's Sufi literary corpus, and how do they reflect the

influence of preceding Sufi heritage? (2) How did the historical, cultural, and religious context of his time influence his interpretations of Sufism? (3) How did Bamba engage with existing Sufi traditions and adapt them to his context and teachings? By addressing these questions, the research will clarify Bamba's position within the broader Sufi tradition and uncover the intellectual foundations of his distinctive contributions to Islamic thought.

1.2. Objectives of the Research

This study aims to advance scholarly understanding of Ahmadu Bamba's intellectual legacy by focusing on two key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to identify and analyze the primary sources and influences embedded in Bamba's written works, particularly his engagement with classical Sufi literature. By analyzing these sources, the research intends to reveal the intellectual underpinnings of Bamba's thought and provide a structured overview of his intellectual foundations. Secondly, the study will explore the historical, cultural, and religious contexts that shaped Bamba's worldview; it will investigate how his environment and interactions with other scholars and traditions shaped his spiritual approach. Through these objectives, the research aims to establish a foundational understanding of Bamba's intellectual legacy that can serve as a springboard for future scholarship on *al-Murīdiyya*'s Sufism and its significance within the global Sufi tradition.

1.3. Importance of the Research

This research holds significant importance for several reasons. First, it broadens scholarly understanding of Ahmadu Bamba's intellectual legacy and unique contributions to Sufi thought. Given the influence of *al-Murīdiyya* order in Senegal and its diaspora, understanding the intellectual foundations of its founder is essential for appreciating the movement's role in West African Islam. By examining Bamba's sources and intellectual influences, this study will deepen insights into the intersection of tradition, cultural adaptation, and individual agency within the Sufi tradition. Such an investigation not only provides a more complete view of *al-Murīdiyya* but also contributes to broader discourses on the adaptability of Sufism across different contexts.

The study is further expected to bridge a crucial gap in the existing scholarship on Ahmadu Bamba by offering a systematic analysis of his intellectual foundations. It reveals how Bamba's teachings were shaped by a combination of inherited Sufi doctrines and his unique historical setting, thus positioning him within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. This fundamental understanding hopefully will inspire additional research, allowing scholars to investigate his influence in fields such as Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and pedagogy. As a result, it will foster a more nuanced understanding of *al-Murīdiyya*'s historical and intellectual roots, and encourage future research into Bamba's contributions to Islam's intellectual and spiritual heritage in West Africa. Moreover, this study highlights various dimensions of the dissemination of classical Sufi texts in West Africa, as well as their reception within this region of the Muslim world.

1.4. Research Method

This research adopts a multi-methodological approach to dissect Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought:

I. Textual Analysis: This research is built upon a close reading of Bamba's primary texts, which include books, poetry, Sufi treatises, and letters. This analysis will look for recurring themes, sources, and references in his writings, revealing how traditional Sufi concepts appear and evolve.

II. Comparative Analysis: To ascertain the unique elements within Bamba's intellectual framework, his sources will be analyzed in relation to a wider corpus of Sufi literature. This comparison aims to highlight his alignment with or divergence from classical Sufi thought and clarify his distinctive contributions.

III. Historical Contextualization: Exploring the historical, cultural, and social conditions surrounding Bamba's intellectual development provides crucial context. By situating his thoughts within these dynamics, the study seeks to uncover how the challenges and transformations of his era influenced his engagement with Sufi heritage.

IV. Interviews: The study also incorporates interviews with contemporary *Murīdī* scholars and community members to enrich the understanding of Bamba's legacy.

The interviews were conducted with members of *al-Murīdiyya*'s highest scientific council, Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn. Distinguished *Murīdī* scholars, such as Muhammad Mustapha Diop al-Kokkiyyu,¹ Same Bousso 'Abdu-r-Rahmān,² Khadim Sylla,³ and Cheikhouna Mbacke 'Abdul Wadoud,⁴ provided invaluable guidance that enriched the study's analysis and interpretation.

The complexity of transliterating Arabic terms, particularly given variations between English and French documentation of these terms, necessitated adopting a consistent transliteration system. In this study I use IJMES Transliteration System, and the Chicago Manual of Style's guidelines for footnotes and bibliography. Long vowels (ā, ī, ū) are marked with a macron, while short vowels (a, i, u) remain unmarked, and each Arabic consonant has a Latin equivalent that reflects its unique sound. Special characters denote 'ayn (‘) and *hamza* (‘), with consonant doubling (*shadda*) indicated by repeating the consonant (e.g., "hadd"). The Arabic definite article (ال) is rendered as "al—" and hyphenated with the noun, assimilating before "sun letters" (e.g., "ash-Shams" instead of "al-Shams"). The Arabic feminine ending (ة) is rendered as (a) when silent, rather than as (ah). Common names follow conventional spellings (e.g., "Ahmad" and "Muhammad" rather than "Ahmad" and "Muhammad"), while technical terms are fully transliterated for consistency. Furthermore, Arabic plurals are simplified to an English "s" for readability (e.g., "sheikhs" instead of "shuyūkh"). For certain indigenous names or terms, Arabic or French spellings may appear where an English equivalent is unavailable. Although letters in the English language such as "e" and "o" have no equivalent in Arabic, they appear in many proper names in West Africa due to the influence of the French language. I have retained them as commonly recognized and written by their original authors.

¹ A researcher, philosopher, and member of Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn, known for his contributions to the study of the *al-Khidma* doctrine. He authored several works, including *al-'Umda fī Naẓariyyati al-Khidma*, a key work exploring the theoretical aspects of the order doctrines.

² A member of Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn. He is an educational inspector and researcher with work including *Grand Magal de Touba: Dimension religieuse et sociale*, focuses on the social and religious aspects of the Grand Magal celebration.

³ A sociologist and researcher; noted for works such as *al-Ishkāliyyāt* and *al-Khidma fī fikr ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*. His scholarship addresses the challenges and methodologies of the Khidma doctrine.

⁴ A researcher, imam, jurist, and member of Rawdu-r-Rayāḥīn. He has authored numerous books in Arabic, French, and Wolof, alongside articles published in both Senegalese and international journals.

1.5. Literature Review and Scholars' Methodologies for Studying Ahmadu Bamba's Life and Sufi Thought

Ahmadu Bamba's works and teachings have influenced West African Sufi scholarship and tradition, especially in Senegal, where he lived and established his revivalist Sufi order, namely *al-Murīdiyya*. Ahmadu Bamba was not only a Sufi but also a jurist, theologian, linguist, *hadīth* scholar, and an exegete (*mufassir*). His diverse expertise is evident in his literary legacy; it encompasses scholastic volumes in Sufism, jurisprudence, theology, linguistics, and *hadīth*, alongside Sufi poetry revering Allah and the Prophet Muhammad.

This section begins by discussing Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought and its originality. It raises the question of whether he was innovative in this field or simply an imitator of his predecessors. Furthermore, the main approaches proposed for studying Bamba's Sufi thought will be discussed. In the end, previous studies will be reviewed and categorized based on their objectives and the methodologies employed in the research.

1.5.1. Between Creativity and Selectivity

Ahmadu Bamba's heritage is significant for its historical and cultural ties to the *Murīdī* community and its appeal to researchers from diverse backgrounds. Western interpretations often reflect sociological frameworks, projecting their historical narratives onto other societies, including Sufi communities. A thorough understanding and engagement with this heritage requires an awareness of the biases and subjectivity of authors influenced by their cultural contexts. Caution should be exercised in relying on external solutions, whether from Eastern or Western perspectives, as they may not fully correspond to African and Senegalese traditions' distinctive intellectual and cultural frameworks. This underscores the need to develop indigenous perspectives and methodological approaches to engage authentically with the *Murīdī* heritage.⁵

The lack of appropriate tools and methodologies for objectively studying Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought has led to interpretations by some Western scholars that tend to

⁵ See Muhammad Gallay Ndiaye, “*al-Jadal al-‘aqīm bayn al-anā wa-l-ākhar fī qirā’at at-turāth al-khadīmiyy*,” *al-Wa‘y al-Murīduy* 1, (May 2008): 35-37.

abstract his ideas, often overlooking their originality and creativity on both conceptual and ideological levels. Among these scholars Fernand Dumont⁶ (d.1997), is a prominent figure. In his book *La pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba*.⁷ Dumont analyzes Bamba's Sufi thought and suggests that Bamba's teachings lacked depth and originality. He criticized Bamba for what he perceived as a simplistic emulation of Prophet Muhammad, devoid of profound Sufi contemplation. Additionally, Dumont argued that Bamba merely compiled existing Sufi thoughts without contributing anything new, particularly in written form.⁸

However, Dumont's critique is challenged by several scholars. He admitted that he did not fully grasp Bamba's work,⁹ relying heavily on foreign researchers instead of primary sources, and failing to grasp the practical aspect of Bamba's creativity in addressing the general public.¹⁰

René Luc Moreau¹¹ (d.2012) countered Dumont's arguments, defending Bamba against accusations of selectivity and fabrication.¹² Moreau argued that Bamba's synthesis of various scholarly sources and experiences was a common practice among Islamic intellectuals.¹³ Moreau also criticized biased Western interpretations of the *Murīdī* movement as mere resistance to colonialism, emphasizing Bamba's intellectual depth and cultural appropriation within Islamic tradition.¹⁴ He also criticized Jean Copans,¹⁵ who, in his view, was the first to promote the idea of evolving studies on the *Murīdī* thought, primarily based on colonial archives and publications.¹⁶

⁶ He was a Canadian sociologist, philosopher, theologian, and poet from Quebec. A longtime professor at Université Laval.

⁷ Fernand Dumont, *La pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba* (Dakar-Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1968), 354.

⁸ See Muhammad Gallay Ndiaye, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Sabīl as-Salām* (Rabat: Maṭba‘at Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2011).

⁹ See Amar Samb, *Essai sur la contribution du Sénégal à la littérature d'expression arabe*, edit: IFAN (Thèse Université de Lille III, 1972), 435.

¹⁰ See Dumont, *La pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba*, 359.

¹¹ He was a teacher at the Catholic Institute of West Africa in 'Abijan (1969-1983) then at the Catholic Universities of Paris and Lyon - Chaplain of Montluc prison (1988-1998) - Specialist in dialogue between Christians and Muslims in West Africa.

¹² Gallay Ndiaye, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Sabīl as-salām*, 16.

¹³ René Luc Moreau, *Africains musulmans* (Paris: Présence Africaine, INADES ed, 1982), 9.

¹⁴ See *ibid*, 166.

¹⁵ Jean Copans (born in 1942) is a French anthropologist, university professor, Africanist and sociologist.

¹⁶ Moreau, *Africains musulmans*, 196.

A similar perspective to Dumont's is what Professor Mohammed Gallay Ndiaye calls "the *Baghdādī* Eastern perspective," a reading – carried out by some researchers, including Murids and others – that directly links Ahmadu Bamba's practical Sufism to various versions of *Baghdādī* Sufism: Illuminative, Symbolic, Sunni, Philosophical, without considering the historical contexts of each era. These researchers delve into the *Baghdādī* Sufi lexicon to understand the meanings of the vocabulary and statements found in Ahmadu Bamba's writings, they neglected the fact that Sufism is inherently individualistic, subjective, and self-referential. This linkage type suggests Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought is a natural and direct extension of *Baghdādī* Sufi thought. This stance is problematic, as it undermines the authenticity and creativity of the thought, both from a conceptual (cognitive) and ideological perspective.¹⁷

Thus, Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought was characterized as both selective and creative, depending on the interpretive perspective. While some view it as selective and lacking in creativity, others highlight its innovative synthesis of Sufi principles. However, the lack of a comprehensive methodology for studying his thought complicates the identification of Bamba's creative contributions, leading *Murīdī* scholars to propose various approaches for understanding his Sufi teachings.

1.5.2. The Problem of Methodology

The complexity of Ahmadu Bamba's teachings, along with the varied approaches shaped by different cultural contexts, makes objective analysis difficult and leads to a range of interpretations. Scholars adopt various methodologies, such as the *Baghdādī* School Approach, which links Bamba's teachings to *Baghdādī* Sufism, and the Historical and Social Context Approach, which situates his ideas within the social dynamics of his time. Additionally, the self-experiential approach focuses on understanding Bamba's personality through his life and statements, moving beyond traditional Sufi frameworks. These diverse methodologies aim to offer nuanced insights into Bamba's thought, considering both its complexity and contextual relevance. Consequently, the study of Ahmadu Bamba's thought is complicated by the

¹⁷ See Gallay Ndiaye, *al-Jadal al-‘aqīm*, 56.

variety of methodological frameworks scholars use to explore different aspects of his life and teachings.

1.5.2.1. The *Baghdādī* Eastern Perspective

The *Baghdādī* Eastern perspective on studying Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought, as introduced by Mohammed Gallay Ndiaye, provides a distinctive approach that examines Bamba's Sufi persona and teachings within the framework of the *Baghdādī* Sufi tradition. It focuses on understanding the subtle meanings and spiritual underpinnings of Sufi terminology, practices, and teachings. Scholars using this approach to analyze Bamba's writings within the context of this tradition to uncover deeper, often hidden layers of his vocabulary and statements. The main ideas of this method involve exploring the symbolic meanings of words, the integration of spiritual concepts into everyday life, and the way these teachings relate to broader Sufi principles.

This approach was the first method Murids used to study Ahmadu Bamba's personality and Sufi thought. This is illustrated in the first books about Ahmadu Bamba, like Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr's work, where he employed this approach, as articulated in the introduction:

I named this blessed book 'Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm fī sīrat Sheikha al-Khadīm,' and I arranged it as follows: an introduction on the abundant intellect of our Sheikh, may Allah be pleased with him, which includes his upbringing, childhood experiences, modesty, courage, piety, and kindness. Then, a section on the science of Sufism, followed by an explanation of the stations of certainty (*maqāmāt al-yaqīn*). Afterward, nine chapters were arranged according to the nine stations of certainty, as his life cannot be explained without mentioning these stations and their states (*ahwāl*), as he lived and acted only by them. I explained what I wrote about him therein after a brief introduction to the station and the states, as commonly known among Sufi people, and I chose the arrangement of Abū Ṭalib al-Makkī in *Qūt al-Qulūb* because his book is the mother of this art and the first to explain Sufism in detail, relied upon by people like al-Ghazzālī and others.¹⁸

Subsequently, he examines Ahmadu Bamba's character through the lens of the nine Stations. The initial section delves into his repentance, followed by chapters focusing on his patience, gratitude, hope, fear, asceticism, and reliance on Allah, also concluding with discussions on his contentment and love.

¹⁸ Muhammad al-Bashīr Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm fī sīratī ash-sheikh al-khadīm*, ed. Muhammad Shakrun (Cairo: Dār al-Muqāṭtam, 2017), 93.

Exploring Ahmadu Bamba's thought through the *Baghdādī* School Approach adds depth to understanding his teachings and their broader philosophical underpinnings within the Sufi tradition. However, over time, due to the reliance on this approach, people began to view Ahmadu Bamba's thought with a traditional and radical lens, imbuing it with an aura of sanctity that completely stripped it of addressing contemporary issues and anticipating future challenges. It is perceived that all this vast and fertile literary Sufi output left behind by this Islamic reformer is only suitable for blessing and chanting day and night in religious gatherings and seasons or sometimes used for esoteric purposes “as talismans to fulfill some needs,” rather than being seen as a thought carrying within it a project brewing in the crucible between religion and the world.¹⁹

1.5.2.2. Historical and Social Context Approach

Studying Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought within its historical and social context is essential for understanding his ideas and their impact. Researchers can uncover valuable insights into the development and significance of his thought by delving into the historical background of the time in which Bamba lived and the social dynamics of the communities he engaged with. Ahmadu Bamba emerged in a period marked by colonialism, social upheaval, and religious revival in West Africa. His responses to these challenges, rooted in his deep understanding of Islamic teachings and Sufi traditions, shaped his thoughts and actions.²⁰ Among the advocates of this approach are scholars such as Sāliḥ Salām and Muhammad Gallay Ndiaye.

In his book *Min ajl i ‘ādat qirā’at al-Murīdiyya /mashrū‘ ru’ya*, Sāliḥ Salām argues that the nature of *Murīdī* texts, especially the Sufi literary works of Ahmadu Bamba, calls for two methodological steps: “differentiation” and “connection” between the cognitive content and the social context. The point is that Ahmadu Bamba’s writing style is predominantly symbolic with a Sufi meaning. This Sufi style, characterized by ambiguity, as seen in all Sufi writings, cannot conceal his stances on political and social realities.²¹ When he discusses issues like “the spiritual journey,” “approaching

¹⁹ Gallay Ndiaye, *al-Jadal al- ‘aqīm*, 58.

²⁰ See Gallay Ndiaye, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Sabīl as-salām*, 13-37.

²¹ Sāliḥ Salām, *Min ajl i ‘ādat qirā’at al-Murīdiyya /mashrū‘ ru’ya* (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī‘, 2023), 55.

Allah,” or practices like “praise and supplication,” “seeking forgiveness,” and “sending blessings to the Prophet Muhammad,” he simultaneously addresses issues of education, social, economic, and political matters.²² In his Sufi literary works in the form of supplications, Bamba writes: “My ink and my pens, today, are devoted to teaching knowledge that benefits the people. [Oh Allah] grant aid to farmers and traders and bestow glad tidings upon them. [Oh Allah] grant safety from all harmful things, [grant] Protection and victory for my family and my homeland.”²³

From this observation, we can infer that dealing with his Sufi writings (poems) should go beyond documentary research and descriptive study, suggesting an interpretation that gives the text meaningful relevance to its social and political environment and contemporary readers. Focusing solely on its linguistic and cognitive content would lead to a one-sided understanding or the sacrifice of one aspect (spiritual or social) for the other. In light of all these considerations, it is necessary to approach the poems from both aspects in the context of their historical framework.²⁴

In his book *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba sabīl as-salām*, Muhammad Gallay Ndiaye employs this approach, stating that he aimed to conduct a rigorous analytical study that unveils crucial aspects of Bamba’s Sufi thought and critical issues. Ndiaye emphasized an internal reading of Bamba’s texts within their epistemological, ideological, and historical contexts, striving to maintain objectivity by avoiding emotional biases and external influences.²⁵ He also published a research paper on this subject titled “*al-Jadal al-‘aqīm bayn al-Anā wa-l-Ākhar fī Qirā’at at-Turāth al-Khadīmiyy*,” in which he elaborated extensively on this approach and its mechanisms and provided examples of how to activate it in studying Ahmadu Bamba’s thought.²⁶

Ahmadu Bamba’s approach to “nonviolence” or “peaceful *jihād*” presents a compelling example of this approach. Instead of resorting to armed conflict against French colonialism like his predecessors, Bamba embraced a novel strategy aligned with global advocates of peace and nonviolence. This stance, recognized by

²² Ibid, 55-56.

²³ Ibid, 56.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gallay Ndiaye, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba sabīl as-salām*, 14-15.

²⁶ See Gallay Ndiaye, *al-Jadal al-‘aqīm*, 35-66.

Muhammad Gallay Ndiaye,²⁷ reflects Bamba's profound understanding of the historical, political, and social factors surrounding his resistance efforts. Bamba's strategic choices, rooted in self-purification and education, aimed for a gradual and comprehensive liberation of society, prioritizing broader emancipation from all forms of oppression over immediate land liberation. This approach underscores Bamba's strategic acumen and his commitment to addressing internal and external challenges through a nuanced understanding of the context.²⁸

1.5.2.3. The Self-Experiential Approach

This approach, pioneered by Muhammad Mustafa Diope al-Kokkiyyu, offers a fresh perspective for studying Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought. al-Kokkiyyu named it the "Methodical Justification Approach" and advocated for a departure from traditional Sufi methodologies, proposing a method that prioritizes understanding Bamba's personality through his own life and statements.²⁹ This approach aims to unravel the multifaceted nature of Bamba's existential and mystical dimensions, emphasizing the need to avoid imposing foreign templates on his writings. Instead, researchers should rely on a broad array of sources about Bamba's life, critically examine his expressions, and define the frameworks of his concepts without rigid adherence to traditional Sufi interpretations. By connecting the threads of Bamba's life stages coherently, this approach seeks to provide deeper insights into his thought while acknowledging its uniqueness beyond conventional Sufi frameworks.³⁰

For instance, al-Kokkiyyu argues that Ahmadu Bamba did not follow the typical 'nine stations' of Sufi spiritual progression. Instead, Bamba was divinely guided from a young age, associating only with the devout and avoiding heedlessness. Bamba himself expressed gratitude to the Prophet Muhammad for erasing his childhood sins. His son, Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashir, noted that Bamba maintained unwavering faith, vigilance, piety, and dedication to worship throughout his life. Thus, according to al-

²⁷ See Gallay Ndiaye, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Sabīl as-salām*, 169-191.

²⁸ See Ibid, 136-137.

²⁹ See Moustapha Diope al-Kokkiyyu, *al-‘Umda fī naẓariyyati al-khidma* (Rabat: Maṭba‘ atu al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2019), 153.

³⁰ See ibid, 155-156.

Kokkiyyu, Bamba did not go through the stages sequentially but acquired them all from the start of his spiritual journey.³¹

al-Kokkiyyu applies Ahmadu Bamba's famous statement to demonstrate the incompatibility of measuring his life and thought against the standards commonly used by early Sufis. Ahmadu Bamba said, "Whoever seeks to know me through the composition of stories and historical accounts preserved by others is the most ignorant of people about me. I am simply a servant whom my Lord has favored. Just as there is no partner for Him in me, there is no way for anyone to know my affairs except through Him - exalted is He - and His Messenger."³² This statement emphasizes the need for a different methodology to grasp Bamba's personality and ideas, one that transcends traditional frameworks and engages directly with his life and teachings.

1.5.3. Literature Review

Over the years, scholars, researchers, and students have diligently delved into Bamba's life, works, and significance. His Sufi teachings have captivated intellectual circles within and beyond Senegal, drawing individuals with diverse backgrounds and interests and bringing their unique perspectives to discussions on his legacy. This research offers a critical examination of the existing literature on Ahmadu Bamba, organizing it into thematic and methodological categories to provide a comprehensive overview. After categorizing the literature into four distinct groups, the research gaps related to each category will be explained.

1.5.3.1. Books Chronicling the History of Ahmadu Bamba, Authored by His Close Companions

This classification includes subsequent literature such as Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr Mbacke's book *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm fī sīrati ash-sheikh al-khadīm*; Muhammad al-Amine Diop ad-Daghānī's *Irwā' an-nadīm fī 'adhbi ḥubb al-Khadīm*³³; and Muhammad 'Abdullah ash-Shinqīṭī's *an-Nafāḥāt al-miskiyya fī as-sīrat al-*

³¹ See ibid, 148-149.

³² Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 287.

³³ Muhammad al-Amīn diope ad-Daghānī, *Irwā' an-nadīm min 'adhbi ḥubb al-khadīm*, ed. a group of researchers (Rabat: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda, 2017).

mbakkiyyah.³⁴ Following Ahmadu Bamba's writings, these works represent indigenous literature on the history of *al-Murīdiyya*, its founder, and his life stations. In terms of intellectual depth, this literature primarily focuses on elucidating aspects of Ahmadu Bamba's personality, spirituality, remarkable history, and notable life events. These works typically commence with Ahmadu Bamba's early stages and extend to his passing in 1927. Despite their significance, the narrative technique employed by the authors introduces a subjective element, and these sources do not address the academic questions covered in this research.

1.5.3.2. Subsequent Literary Works Crafted by the Murīdī Islamic Scholarly Community to Advance the Doctrines of al-Murīdiyya

Within this category, we find literature such as *al-Murīdiyya al-haqīqa wa-l-wāqi ' wa-āfāq al-mustaqlal*³⁵ and the *Dirāsāt ḥawl al-murīdiyya* series.³⁶ These works delve into the Islamic underpinnings of *al-Murīdiyya*, addressing a variety of topics, including “*al-Murīdiyya* and its principles,” “the adherence to the Quran and *Sunna* in Ahmadu Bamba’s teachings and practice,” and “Ahmadu Bamba’s relationship with Sufism.” Additionally, other publications in this category include *al-‘Umda fī naẓariyyat al-khidma; al-Khidma fī fikr ash-sheikh Ahmadu Bamba ka-manhaj li at-tajdīd wa-l-iṣlāḥ*;³⁷ *ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba sabīl as-salām; as-Sheikh Ahamadu al-qā’id ar-rabbānī*;³⁸ and *Min ajli i‘ādati qirā’at al-murīdiyya*. These writings explore significant themes such as “peacemaking” within *al-Murīdiyya*, *al-Murīdiyya*’s doctrine of “*al-khidma*,” and the concept of “leadership” within Ahmadu Bamba’s persona. In this category, we also find the book *La vision économique du mouridisme dans l’histoire de la pensée économique*.³⁹ Within this work, the author examines the underpinnings of contemporary economic theory and its correlations with concepts such as accumulation, wealth, and morality, aiming to elucidate its links

³⁴ Muhammad ‘Abdullah al-‘Alawi, *an-Nafāḥāt al-miskiyya fī al-sīrati al-mbakkiyya*, ed. Mohammed Bamba Drame- Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb Thiaw (Rabat: Dār al-Amān, 2019).

³⁵ Muhammad al-Murtada Mbacke, *al-Murīdiyya al-haqīqa wa-l-wāqi ' wa-āfāq al-mustaqlal* (Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2011).

³⁶ Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn, *Dirāsāt ḥawl al-murīdiyya* (Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2010).

³⁷ Khadim Sylla, *al Khidma fī fikr ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba ka-manhaj li at-tajdīd wa-l-iṣlāḥ* (Cairo: Timbuktu Editions, 2022).

³⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke Muntaqā, *ash-Sheikh Ahamadu al-qā’id ar-rabbānī* (Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2019).

³⁹ Khadim Bamba Diagne, *La vision économique du al-murīdiyya dans l’histoire de la pensée économique* (Dakar: L’Harmattan, 2020).

with the economic doctrine of Mouridism. The book *Shubuhāt wa akhṭā’ ḥawl al-murīdiyya wa mu’assisiḥā: ‘ard wa munāqasha*⁴⁰ focuses on discussing the doubts raised by some about *al-Murīdiyya* and its founder. The book provides responses based on reliable sources within the *Murīdī* Sufi tradition. However, while these works cover many crucial aspects, they do not delve into Ahmadu Bamba’s sources and references to the extent undertaken in this study.

1.5.3.3. Publications Authored by Western Scholars or by Senegalese in Western Languages, Addressing Various Aspects of *al-Murīdiyya*

The scholarly examination of *al-Murīdiyya* has been a subject of interest for Western academia. This section synthesizes and analyzes some of the publications authored by Western or Senegalese scholars in Western languages to address various facets of *al-Murīdiyya*.

Abdou Diouf’s work, *Murīdiyya: a revivalist sufi order in senegal*,⁴¹ provides a comprehensive exploration of Ahmadu Bamba’s life. The author covered various aspects such as Bamba’s early years, encounters with French colonization, and expatriation. Diouf emphasizes the Islamic foundation and authenticity of *al-Muridiya* Sufi Order, underlining the significance of the Quran and Sunna. The examination extends to *al-Murīdiyya*’s theological, jurisprudential, and Sufi practices, offering insights into the order’s current status and its potential in education, society, and politics.

In *Fighting the greater jihād*,⁴² Cheikh Anta Babou critically examines the formation of Murid’s identity around Ahmadu Bamba and its ongoing evolution among contemporary adherents. Babou argues for reevaluating the historical narratives surrounding African Muslim institutions, highlighting the spiritual motivations that transcend political dynamics. Through an exploration of genealogy, knowledge

⁴⁰ Dā’iratu Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn, *Shubuhāt wa akhṭā’ ḥawl al-murīdiyya wa mu’assisiḥā: ‘ard wa munāqasha* (1st Edition, 2022).

⁴¹ ‘Abdou Diouf, *Murīdiyya: a revivalist sufi order in Senegal* (Master’s thesis, Ibn Haldun University-Turkey, 2021).

⁴² Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the greater jihād: Amadou Bamba the founder of Murīdiyya in Senegal* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

transmission, and spiritual authority, Babou illustrates the profound influence of Murid's identity on colonial policies.

Sana Camara's *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba: selected poems*⁴³ presents a curated collection of Ahmadu Bamba's poems, offering a window into his spiritual devotion and poetic expression within the Sufi literary tradition. By annotating Bamba's verses, Camara showcases his poetry's imaginative energy and unifying purpose, which primarily extols the virtues of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad.

Fallou Ngom's *Muslims beyond the arab world: the odyssey of 'ajamī and the Murīdiyya*⁴⁴ delves into the intersection of the 'Ajamī script and the rise of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order in Senegal. Ngom explores how the Murīds effectively utilized written and recited materials, including lesser-known 'Ajamī texts, for mass communication and community cohesion. By challenging prevailing representations, Ngom reveals the resilience and growth of *al-Murīdiyya*, driven by virtues such as self-esteem, self-reliance, and nonviolence.

Cheikh Seye's *Jihād, peace, and nonviolence in Mouridism (1883-1927)*⁴⁵ offers a nuanced analysis of the concept of "Jihād" within *al-Murīdiyya*, particularly during French colonial rule. Seye highlights Ahmadu Bamba's advocacy for non-violent methods in pursuing spiritual, educational, and social objectives, challenging common perceptions of Islam as inherently associated with religious violence.

Allen F. Roberts' *A Saint in the city: sufi arts of urban Senegal*⁴⁶ explores the visual culture of *al-Murīdiyya* in Senegal, emphasizing Ahmadu Bamba's teachings of pacifism, dignity, and self-reliance. By examining urban expressions such as street art, murals, and clothing, Roberts challenges stereotypes about Islam while highlighting the transformative power of Murid culture.

⁴³ Sana Camara, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba: selected poems, islamic literatures: texts and studies* (Boston: Brill, 2017).

⁴⁴ Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the arab world: the odyssey of 'ajamī and the murīdiyya, religion, culture, and history* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ Cheikh Seye, *Jihād, peace, and non-violence in Mouridism (1883-1927)* (Master's thesis, Arizona State University, 2013).

⁴⁶ Allen F Roberts et al, *A Saint in the city: Sufi arts of urban Senegal* (Los Angeles, Calif: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2003).

*Vie et enseignement du Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba*⁴⁷ by Didier Hamoneau and Serigne Ahmadu Dramé underscores the timeless lessons from Ahmadu Bamba’s life and writings. The text emphasizes the enduring relevance of Prophet Muhammad’s lifestyle and advocates for nonviolence as intrinsic to Islam’s essence, countering interpretations that reduce religion to temporal or political tools.

John Glover’s *Sufism and jihad in modern Senegal: the murid order*⁴⁸ investigates the development of an “alternative modernity” within *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi Order during the colonial era. Glover uses oral and written sources to illustrate how the Murids actively shaped their conception of modernity, blending Islamic reform with European colonization to adapt to historical changes.

Finally, Rüdiger Seesemann and Muhammad Muṣṭafá Ān’s *Ahmadu Bamba Und die Entstehung der murīdīya: analyse religiöser und historischer hintergründe*⁴⁹ delves into the emergence of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi Order, focusing on Ahmadu Bamba’s life and teachings within religious and historical contexts. Through their analysis, Seesemann and Ān provide insights into Bamba’s contributions and the foundations of *al-Murīdiyya Order*.

This body of literature substantially contributes to the broader academic conversation surrounding *al-Murīdiyya* and its diverse impact on Senegalese society, encompassing historical and contemporary contexts. Despite this, there is a noticeable gap in the comprehensive examination of Ahmadu Bamba’s writings and the sources and figures that influenced him. Consequently, this study addresses this scholarly void by thoroughly investigating Ahmadu Bamba’s sources in his works on Sufism. That serves as an initial endeavor to uncover the intellectual foundations that shaped Ahmadu Bamba’s contributions to different fields.

⁴⁷ Didier Hamoneau- Serigne Ahmadou Dramé, *Vie et enseignement du cheikh Ahmadu Bamba: maître fondateur de la voie “Mouride”* (Beirut: Dār al-Burāq, 1998).

⁴⁸ John Glover, *Sufism and jihad in modern senegal: the Murid order* (University of Rochester Press, 1969).

⁴⁹ Rüdiger Seesemann-Muhammad Muṣṭafá Ān, *Ahmadu Bamba Und Die Entstehung Der Murīdīya: Analyse Religiöser Und Historischer Hintergründe; Untersuchung Seines Lebens Und Seiner Lehre Anhand Des Biographischen Werkes Von Muhammad Al-Muṣṭafá Ān*. Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Bd. 166. (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1993).

1.6. The Structure of the Study

This study consists of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The Introduction is the first chapter, it outlines the research problem, objectives, significance, and methodology while reviewing existing scholarship and methodologies scholars used to study Ahmadu Bamba's life and Sufi thought. Chapter two provides the historical and cultural background essential for understanding the rise of Bamba's reformist movement. It covers the spread of Islam in West Africa, the establishment of Sufi orders in Senegal, and the influence of colonialism, creating a foundation for Bamba's unique spiritual vision. Chapter three focuses on a detailed exploration of Bamba's life, discussing his lineage, education, moral qualities, and spiritual journey and examining his foundational works across areas such as Sufism, jurisprudence, and theology. This chapter also explores his encounters with colonial authorities, including his exiles and restricted residence, which were pivotal in shaping his leadership and influence. Chapter four investigates the intellectual figures and Sufi traditions that influenced Bamba's thought, focusing on prominent scholars and mystics whose ideas informed his teachings, thus contextualizing his contributions within the broader Sufi heritage. It also focuses on the Sufi sources Bamba engaged with, providing insight into his theological and philosophical perspectives. Finally, chapter five, the Conclusion, synthesizes the findings of each chapter, it emphasizes Ahmadu Bamba's significance within Senegalese Islam and the global Sufi tradition.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ISLAM AND SUFISM IN SENEGAL

2.1. Islam in Senegal

The Republic of Senegal is an African country located on the northern coast of the westernmost part of the continent. It is between latitudes 16.14.12.18 degrees north and longitudes 17.32.11.21 degrees west of the Greenwich line. Senegal shares its borders with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania to the north, the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and the Republic of Guinea-Conakry to the south, the Republic of Mali to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. Internally, Senegal is surrounded by the borders of The Gambia, except for the short coastline of The Gambia on the Atlantic Ocean to the north, east, and south. The geographical location of Senegal makes it a key gateway to the African continent, serving as a bridge between Europe, the Americas, and the East.⁵⁰

Historically, it has been established that Islam entered Africa through three main routes: from Medina to Damascus, then across North Africa to ancient Ghana; from Medina to Egypt and the eastern Sudan via the Nile; and from Medina to Somalia through the Bab al-Mandab.⁵¹ According to Senegalese scholar ‘Āmir Šāmb, Islam reached West Africa in the first century of the *Hijra*, following ‘Uqba ibn Nāfi’s conquests in North Africa. After his death in 683 CE, Arabs and Berbers continued spreading Islam through trade and missionary efforts, establishing connections with

⁵⁰ Abdul Karim Sarr, *at-Tārīkh as-siyāsī lil Islām fī as-Senegal* (Dakar: SIPS, 2015), 19.

⁵¹ Abdu-r-Rahman Mbacke Muhammad, *Wāqi‘ al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya fī as-senegal* (Master ‘s thesis, Umm al-Qurā University, 2010), 33.

West African societies.⁵² Muslim traders, carrying various goods, built trust with local populations, facilitating Islam's gradual acceptance.⁵³

Therefore, Islam gradually and peacefully spread throughout West Africa. However, the massive Islamic expansion in the area occurred in the fifth century of the *Hijrī* calendar (11th century CE), during the era of Almoravids⁵⁴ (*al-Murābiṭūn*), when they waged *jihād* against non-Muslims in several locations.⁵⁵ This characteristic feature of Islam's arrival in the region makes it challenging for historians and writers to pinpoint a reliable date for the arrival of Islam in West Africa. The absence of military campaigns, the association with the fall of a kingdom, or the defeat of anti-Muslim forces in a specific event complicates the dating of this historical event, as stated by 'Abdu-l-Qādir Sylla.⁵⁶

2.1.1. The Entry of Islam into Senegal

Before the arrival of Islam in Senegal, the region was not devoid of religious practices. Early historians, geographers, and Arab travelers documented diverse local worship traditions, where some Senegalese (or the *Thieddos*⁵⁷) venerated trees, stones, the living, and the deceased through ritualistic ceremonies involving sacrifices.⁵⁸ They believed in supernatural entities called Bangol, who supposedly responded through natural manifestations. Fire and celestial bodies, especially the sun, also held spiritual significance. Magic and divination played a crucial role in social life, influencing decisions on marriage, war, health, and governance.⁵⁹ Senegalese society was

⁵² 'Āmir Ṣāmb, *al-'Adab as-Seneghālī al-'arabī* (Algeria: ash-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', 1978), 1/18.

⁵³ Mbacke Muhammad, *Wāqi' al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya fī as-Senegal*, 34.

⁵⁴ The Almoravid dynasty was an imperial Berber Muslim dynasty centered in the territory of present-day Morocco. It established an empire in the 11th century that stretched over the western *Maghreb* and *al-Andalus*, starting in 1050 CE and lasting until it fell to the Almohads in 1147 CE. (Amira K Bennison, *The almoravid and almohad empires*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 34.

⁵⁶ 'Abdu-l-Qādir Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-senegal ma 'ālim al-hādir wa āfāq al-mustaqbāl* (Qatar: Silsilat Kitāb al-'Umma, 1985), 13.

⁵⁷ "Thieddo" means wickedness, brutality, meanness, roughness, and disbelief. This group was widespread in various parts of Senegal, forming militias and the prevailing authorities. They were known for engaging in acts of theft and plundering. (See Papa Samba Diop, *Glossaire du roman Sénégalaïs* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010), 752.)

⁵⁸ 'Abdullah Isa, *Mujmal tārīkh as-Senegal min al-qarn 11 ilā nihāyat al-qarn 19* (Somalia: Markaz al-Kitāb lil-Buhūth wad-Dirāsāt, 2020), 88.

⁵⁹ See Sarr, *at-Tārīkh as-siyāsī lil Islām fī as-Senegal*, 32; *Ibid*, 91-93.

structured into distinct social classes, including nobility, free citizens, artisans, and enslaved people, with rigid roles that influenced social interactions. Though these class divisions have evolved over time, they remain a reality in some conservative rural areas.⁶⁰

Islam, as mentioned earlier, reached the West African region in the first century of the Hijrī calendar through traders and scholars. However, it did not widely spread until the days of the Almoravids. Their contribution to the spread of this monotheistic faith was noteworthy, particularly in the era of 'Abdullah ibn Yasīn (d.451/1059), who founded his military camp at the mouth of the Senegal River to serve as a base for his expedition. The call (*da'wa*) of Ibn Yasīn went through various stages, beginning with a peaceful approach emphasizing wisdom and sound advice. It then progressed to the stage of *jihād*, aiming to remove obstacles to the religion for those desiring to embrace it.⁶¹ Wār Jabi Ndiaye, who died in 1041 CE, is usually regarded as the first Senegalese prince to convert to Islam.⁶² Additionally, it is reported that his son Labi, who inherited the kingdom following his father's passing, was crucial in the Almoravids' victory against the Berbers in 1056 CE.⁶³

2.1.2. The Colonialism and the Islamic Movements in Senegal

The relationship between Islam and French colonialism in Senegal went through several stages marked by disruption, turmoil, rise, and fall. Upon the arrival of colonialism in Senegal, there was no organized resistance except from the Islamic force. From the Islamic perspective, colonialism was a major obstacle to the spread of Islam in Senegal. The colonial system, in its hostility towards Islam, utilized the *Thieddos* to subdue Muslims, aiming to undermine and marginalize them.⁶⁴ French writers, such as Deschamps, openly acknowledged the actions of military leaders like Archinard and Mangin, who led campaigns against figures like Ahmadu Omar Tall (d.1897) and Imām Samori (d.1900). This hostility extended to doubting the strength

⁶⁰ Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 30.

⁶¹ Mbacke Muhammad, *Wāqi' al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya fī as-Senegal*, 41.

⁶² Lucie Gallistel Colvin, *Historical Dictionary of Senegal* (Scare Crow Press Inc, 1981), 18.

⁶³ Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 60.

⁶⁴ See Mbacke Muhammad, *Wāqi' al-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya fī as-Senegal*, 101-102.

and depth of the Islamic faith among African Muslims, claiming that this religion conflicted with the nature of Africans.⁶⁵

Colonialists alleged that Islam was incompatible with the African psyche and asserted that Africans could not embrace it. Some went further to claim that most of Africa's ills were due to Islam. Eugène Mage argued that most of Africa's miseries originated from Islam, and therefore, it should not be encouraged under any circumstances, even if it appears attractive. According to him, encouraging Islam is a crime of complicity.⁶⁶

The initial phases of Islam's contact with colonialism in Senegal were marked by extreme violence and animosity. The colonialists believed that Islam was an enemy that needed to be eradicated to clear the way for their dominance in the region. The colonialist Gourélish emphasized that almost all their enemies were Muslims. Failing to eradicate Islam, colonialists shifted their strategy to containment, using various means at their disposal.⁶⁷

Islamic movements in the 18th and 19th centuries, led by Muslim scholars and leaders, arose to challenge paganism and colonialism, striving to preserve Islam in Senegal. These movements evolved through two stages: the phase of military confrontation (*Jihād*) and the phase of peaceful advocacy:

- I. Military Confrontation Phase:** This phase spanned from the 17th century to the mid-19th century when jihadist movements opposed foreign presence in the region under the leadership of Islamic scholars. Notable movements include those of Sheikh Sulayman Bal (d.1775), Imām 'Abdul Qadir Kan (d.1806), Sheikh 'Omar al-Fūtyyu Tall (d.1864) in the *Fūta* region, Sheikh Fodi Kaba Dumbia (d.1901), Sheikh Alfa Molo Balde (d.1881), and his son Sheikh Musa Molo (d.1931) in the Casamance region, Imām Maba Jakhu Ba (d.1867) in the *Sālum* region, and Imām Ali Ndong in the *Sālum* Islands.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 84-85.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 85.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 86.

⁶⁸ Sarr, *at-Tārīkh as-siyāsī lil Islām fī as-Senegal*, 81.

II. Peaceful Call Phase: This phase began in the 19th century and continued until the mid-20th century. This phase marked a shift from military confrontation to a focus on education and culture as tools for promoting Islam. This strategic shift was influenced by an evaluation of the outcomes of the military phase and an understanding of the colonial administration's policies, which became stricter against those who insisted on living according to the traditional Islamic way. This new strategy aimed to safeguard Islam by carefully evaluating the changing times and places.⁶⁹ Noteworthy figures who embraced this approach include Sheikh 'Abdullah Niass (d.1922), Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke (d.1927), Sheikh al-Hajj Malik Sy (d.1922), Seydinā Limāmu Lay (d.1909), Sheikh Bou Kounta (d.1914, Sheikh Ibrāhīm Niass (d.1975).

2.2. Sufism in Senegal

In the following paragraphs, the research will examine the state of Sufism in Senegal prior to the emergence of Ahmadu Bamba and provide an introductory overview of the circumstances leading to Ahmadu Bamba's reformist movement, known as *al-Murīdiyya*.

2.2.1. The Emergence of Sufism in Senegal

As previously mentioned, some Sufis actively participated in resisting colonialism, contributing significantly to Senegal's independence and the preservation of its Muslim identity. Islamic Sufism has been present in Senegal since the 11th century CE, during the era of the *Murābiṭūn*, who formally introduced Islam to the region. Their way of life was marked by asceticism, austerity, and self-purification.⁷⁰

Sufi life in Senegal flourished with the arrival of Sufi orders from North African, including the *Qādiriyya*, *Tijjāniyya*, and *Shādhiliyya*. Islam in Senegal is primarily Sufi, and many Senegalese believe in the importance of affiliating with a Sufi order. It is often thought that one's faith is incomplete without a connection to a Sufi sheikh for

⁶⁹ Ibid, 98.

⁷⁰ Sāmb, *al-'Adab as-Seneghālī al-'Arabī*, 20.

guidance and spiritual growth. This belief aligns with the Sufi saying, “Whoever does not have a sheikh, the devil is his sheikh.”⁷¹

The researcher ‘Abdu-l-Qādir Sylla, in his book *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal (The Muslims in Senegal)*, demonstrates that Sufi orders emerged on the sides of the great Sahara during the passage of Sheikh Muhammad ibn ‘Abdu-l-Karīm al-Maghīlī (d.909/1504) through Mauritania on his way to Nigeria in the fifteenth century. During this journey, he transmitted the *Qādiriyya* order to some notable figures of the *Kunta* tribe in Mauritania, and from there, it spread to the West African region.⁷²

2.2.2. The Sufi Orders in Senegal

The importance of Sufi orders in Senegal increased from the beginning of the 19th century, reaching its peak at the start of the 20th century. Several factors contributed to the rise of Sufi orders. One of the key factors was the decline of the *Thieddo* system, which represented the ruling aristocracy in Senegal. Members of this system were collaborators with French colonialism, leading the Senegalese to turn to Sufi orders and rally around them. Additionally, the cultivation of peanuts played a significant role in the rise of Sufi leaders. The Sufi sheikhs embraced peanut farming, becoming economic powerhouses. This, coupled with the dismantling of traditional society and the development of transportation, facilitated the movement of farmers, who were now engaged in peanut cultivation, from village to village.⁷³ Some of the most famous Sufi orders present in Senegal before and during the emergence of Ahmadu Bamba’s *al-Murīdiyya* order included:

2.2.2.1. Al-Qādiriyya Sufi Order

This Sufi order is attributed to Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d.1166 CE). The order reached Fes in Morocco through the descendants of two of Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir’s grandchildren, Ibrāhīm (d.1196 CE) and ‘Abdu-l-‘Azīz (d.1205 CE). They had settled

⁷¹ See Mahmūd Shākir, *as-Senegal*, 58; Isa, *Mujmal tārīkh as-Senegal*, 129; Muhammad Mukhtār Jey, “*Lamḥa tārīkhīya ‘an at-taṣawwuf al-Islāmī fī afriqiyā: As-Senegal namūdhajan*,” Agent Press Essada, <https://n9.cl/c2p7w> (accessed February 3, 2024).

⁷² Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 129.

⁷³ Ibid, 130-132.

in Andalusia before their descendants left the region and sought refuge in Morocco.⁷⁴ Most researchers believe the order entered West Africa in the 15th century through Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Abdu al-Karīm al-Maghīlī.⁷⁵ However, In Senegal, the *Qādiriyya* Sufi order did not witness widespread dissemination until the last three centuries, primarily due to the activities of Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntyyu (d.1811) and Sheikh Muhammad al-Fāḍil bin Māmīn (d.1869), along with their followers. Both Sheikh Sīdī al-Kabīr bin al-Mukhtār bin al-Hiba (d.1868) and Sheikh Muhammad al-Fāḍil gained widespread fame, becoming the spiritual leaders for many Sudanese individuals who spread their teachings among their communities.⁷⁶

The *Qādiriyya* Centers in Senegal include:

I. The *Ndiāsān* Center: The residence of the Kunta family, with the mausoleum of Sheikh Bou Kounta, who passed away in 1914.

II. Maka Kolibantan: The residence of the Gabi Gasama family.

III. *Dār as-Salām* Center: Founded by Sheikh Mahfouz ibn Taleb (d.1917), a descendant of Sheikh Muhammad al-Fāḍil.

These centres and their branches were crucial in spreading the *Qādiriyya* order in Senegal.⁷⁷

The *Qādiriyya* followers in Senegal remain divided between two leaderships: the *Kuntiyya* and *Fāḍiliyya*. While the former holds the advantage of being a national institution, the latter operates through the activities of sheikhs affiliated with the lodge of Sheikh Muhammad al-Fāḍil and representatives of the general Caliph residing in Mauritania. Additionally, the *Fāḍiliyya* is active through *Qādiriyya* associations, particularly in the city of Thiese, where a union of local *Qādiriyya* associations was established.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Khadīm Mbācke, *at-Taṣawwuf wa-t-turuq as-sūfiyya fī as-Senegal* (Rabat: Ma'had ad-Dirāsāt al-Afrīqiyya, 2002), 36.

⁷⁵ Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 133.

⁷⁶ Khadīm Mbācke, *at-Taṣawwuf*, 38-39.

⁷⁷ Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 133-134.

⁷⁸ Khadīm Mbācke, *at-Turuq as-sūfiyya fī as-Senegal: bunayātuhā al-ijtimā'iyya wa āthāruhā as-siyāsiyya* (a Rapport of Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2018), 3.

2.2.2.2. Ash-Shādhiliyya Sufi Order

The *Shādhiliyya* Sufi Order is attributed to its founder, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī bin ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abdu-l-Jabbār bin Tamīm ash-Shādhilī (d.1258). This order was the second Sufi order to enter the country. It did not spread widely in Africa, particularly in Senegal, as other Sufi orders like *Qādiriyya* and *Tijjāniyya* did. Nevertheless, the order’s teachings spread to parts of Africa, especially Sudan. The *Shādhiliyya* Order reached Mauritania and then infiltrated Senegal. Some scholars in Senegal embraced it, notably Sheikh Mor Guallāy Jāw. Ahmadu Bamba also adopted this order for a while, and several of his poetry cited Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī. This suggests that the *Shādhiliyya* Order existed on Senegalese territory, albeit in a small capacity.⁷⁹

2.2.2.3. At-Tijjāniyya Sufi Order

This Sufi order emerged in the Western Islamic world in the 18th century CE, founded by Sheikh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Mukhtār bin Salem at-Tijjānī (d.1815). He was born in the village of ‘Ain Māqdī in Algeria in the year 1727.⁸⁰ Historical sources suggest that the *Tijjāniyya* Sufi order entered Senegal through Mauritania, especially under the guidance of the Mauritanian Sheikh Muhammad al-Ḥāfiẓ bin al-Mukhtār. He directly embraced the *Tijjāniyya* order from its founder. The widespread expansion of the *Tijjāniyya* order in West Africa, particularly in Senegal, is attributed to the efforts of El-Ḥājj ‘Omar al-Fūtiyyu Tall (d.1864). He took the *Tijjāniyya* order from Sheikh Mawlūd Fall and later from Sheikh ‘Abdul Karim in Fouta Jallon. In 1827, El-Ḥājj ‘Omar went to perform Ḥajj and met Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghāli there, from whom he received the *Tijjāniyya* order once again and became the Caliph of Sheikh Ahmad at-Tijjānī in the west African region.⁸¹

After he came back from the Ḥijāz, El-Ḥājj ‘Omar sought to spread the *Tijjāniyya* order in Africa. With his efforts, the order took root in Senegal, establishing several Sufi centers (*zāwiyās*) nationwide. Notable *zāwiyās* include:

⁷⁹ Jey, *Lamḥa tārīkhīyya ‘an at-tasawwuf al-Islāmī fī afriqiyā*.

⁸⁰ Khadīm Mbācke, *at-Turuq as-sūfiyya fī as-Senegal*, 3.

⁸¹ See Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 136.

- I. The zāwiya of El-Hājj ‘Omar al-Fūtiyyu:** Located in Dakar, led by the descendants of El-Hājj ‘Omar, including El- Hājj Sa‘īd Nūru Tall (d.1979).
- II. The zāwiya of Tivaouane:** Founded by Sīdī El-Hājj Mālik bin ‘Uthmān Sy, who passed away in 1922, it is one of the largest *Tijjāniyya* centres in the country.
- III. The zāwiya of Kawlakh:** Established by Sheikh ‘Abdullah Niass, who passed away in 1922, and continued by his sons, including El-Hājj Muhammad Khalifa Niass (d.1959) and Sheikh Ibrāhīm Niass (d.1975).
- IV. The zāwiya of Thianaba:** Followers of Ahmad Sheikh, known as at-Tijjānī, who passed away in 1870 during the Battle of *Sambasājō*.
- V. The zāwiya of Madīnatū Gonāss.⁸²**

2.2.2.4. Al-Lāyeeniyya Sufi Order

“*Lāyeen*” distorts the word “*ilāhiyyīn*,” attributed to Allah. It is specifically associated with the followers of Sheikh Libās Thiaw (d.1909), also known as Seydinā Limāmu Lāy, meaning the divinely appointed *imām*. The *imām* was born in the village of Yoff, west of Dakar. When he reached the age of forty, he claimed to be the *Mahdī* and declared that he was tasked with calling people to Allah. Some of his neighbours accepted his proclamation with approval, and others joined him, leading to suspicion from the colonial administration, alleging that the *imām* was preparing soldiers for *jihād*.⁸³

The *imām* claimed to be a prophet sent by Allah to the black race and an embodiment of the Prophet Muhammad. He asserted that the faith of a Muslim remains incomplete unless they accept his statements. He told his wives, “I inform you that your familiar companion, Limāmu, has changed because Allah did to him what He wanted, charging me with inviting people to Him for their guidance.”⁸⁴

He issued his call on the 1st of *Sha‘bān* 1301 AH (May 24, 1884), marking the significant annual celebration of the *Lāyeeniyya* order. In his sermons, he emphasized

⁸² Ibid, 137-138.

⁸³ Khadīm Mbäcke, *at-Turuq as-sūfiyya fi as-Senegal*, 5-6.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 6.

the necessity of abandoning types of entertainment contrary to Islam, urging people towards asceticism, piety, and respect for rights and duties. He advocated consuming only what is earned through *halal* means and using *halal* resources, opposing practices contrary to *Sharī'a*, especially after funeral gatherings (*ma'tam*). However, he held opinions that were rejected by most Senegalese.⁸⁵ His followers, including both men and women, are characterized by engaging in collective remembrance of Allah wearing white clothing.

It is noteworthy to mention that each Sufi order has an internal system that unites its members, and the order's strength or weakness is determined by this system. If well-structured, it produces solid social cohesion and brotherly solidarity, granting the order longevity and influence in various aspects of the country. The system often forms a hierarchy, with the Caliph at the top, referred to in Senegal as the "general caliph," followed by deputies or sheikhs, and then the followers. The Caliph is the deputy of the order's founder and the supreme authority in its affairs, and he is expected to be a knowledgeable, active, pious, and ascetic figure. In most cases, the Caliph seeks the counsel of a select group of dignitaries who form his advisory council. These individuals usually possess noble virtues, making them acceptable to their followers.⁸⁶

2.2.3. The Sufi Orders' Functions in the Senegalese Society

The role of religious leaders extended beyond worship and religious activities; they actively engaged in the country's politics, acting as a barrier to anything that could threaten the well-being of Muslims. Feeling the weight of this responsibility, they engaged in discussions and consultations whenever issues arose among the Muslims. This was done to find solutions that aligned with both religion and society. In this way, they successfully protected the country and preserved its Muslim identity despite numerous attempts by colonial powers to either Christianize it or divert it from Islam.⁸⁷

The Sufi orders actively participated in the country's economic development through agricultural production, which forms the foundation of Senegal's economy.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See Sylla, *al-Muslimūna fī as-Senegal*, 139-140; Khadīm Mbacke, *at-Turuq as-sūfiyya fī as-Senegal*, 6.

⁸⁷ See Sarr, *at-Tārīkh as-siyāsī lil Islām fī as-Senegal*, 116-118.

Agriculture is the broader field of activity for the leaders of Sufi orders. For over a century, they have established agricultural villages where their disciples gather and are employed in cultivating vast fields of cashew nuts and various grains in exchange for their education. The significance of these fields and their production volume depends on the status of the *sheikh*.⁸⁸

Religious seasons also contribute to commerce, attracting urban traders who bring goods in high demand in rural areas, such as agricultural machinery, food products, utensils, fabrics, and clothing. This helps spare rural inhabitants the trouble of travelling to major cities for these goods. In return, rural residents bring their products, including wild fruits, oils, dairy products, medicinal plants, and other scarce items, to sell in urban areas at higher prices.⁸⁹

The economic and social influence of Sufi orders grants them significant political importance. Traditional political authorities have recognized this reality and sought to form alliances with the Sufi orders to harness their influence for their own purposes. Some local kings reached out to the sheikhs, seeking assistance in reclaiming their thrones in exchange for them defending Islam if their requests were fulfilled. Colonial authorities also recognized the political gains achievable through manipulating Sufi orders and adopted the principle of “divide and conquer” to reach their goals. They exploited the existing competition among the followers of different Sufi orders, encouraging rivalries and alliances, ultimately creating alliances between specific orders to counteract others.⁹⁰ In the final section of this chapter, we will explore how the condition of Senegalese society and Sufi orders, in particular, deteriorated to the extent that it paved the way for the emergence of a new reformist movement.

2.3. The Historical Setting of the Emergence of Ahmad Bamba’s Reformist Movement

The region witnessed significant transformations in the 18th century, influenced by several factors:

⁸⁸ Khadîm Mbacke, *at-Turuq aṣ-ṣūfiyya fī as-Senegal*, 8.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 9.

- I.** Intense civil conflicts began in the 16th century, leading to the fragmentation of the Djolof Kingdom, which once covered almost all the regions currently encompassed by Senegal, into independent and conflicting emirates such as Walo, Kadior, Baol, Sin, and Saloum.
- II.** *Jihād* campaigns led by Muslim scholars against pagan rulers and occupiers resulted in defeats against these rulers' alliance and the powerful French forces.
- III.** European traders and colonizers gradually transitioned from intervention to direct and full occupation of the region.

These factors, among others, were behind profound changes in traditional Senegalese society, deeply affecting its political, social, economic, and religious life in the 19th century.⁹¹

In other words, the region's situation deteriorated after the colonial invasion. The French researcher Jean Copans referred to this period in Senegal's history as the "radical transformation" phase, as it witnessed numerous developments due to the French invasion.⁹² Reactions to French colonization ranged from collaboration to resistance, with resistance being more widespread in the region. The majority, who remained faithful to Islam, resisted colonialism under the banner of Islamic *Jihād*. Religious figures, such as Sheikh El-Hājj 'Omar Tall (1854- 1861 in Futa, north of Senegal), Maba Diakhou Bâ (1861-1867 in Saloum), Mamadou Lamine Dramé (1885-1887 in Upper Senegal), and others, turned into political and military leaders, encouraging revolts against French forces.⁹³

Therefore, in this period filled with political changes and confrontations between Islamic leaders and French forces, *al-Murīdiyya* Order emerged as a peaceful model of Senegalese Islam. It distinguished itself from other Sufi orders, such as the *Tijjāniyya*, which initially adopted the idea of holy *jihād* against French colonization. However, *al-Murīdiyya* transformed the concept of *jihād* into a peaceful endeavour

⁹¹ Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn, *ash-Sheikh Ahmādu Bamba Mbācke 'abdullāh awa khadīmu rasūlīhī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2022), 11.

⁹² Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide la confrérie mouride et les paysannes du Sénégal* (Paris: Le sycomore, 1980), 77.

⁹³ 'Ā'isha Bū Madyan, "The Sufi brotherhoods's position to French colonialism in Senegal: The Mouride 'model,'" *Āfāq 'Ilmiyya* 12, 20, (2020): 110.

unrelated to armed conflict.⁹⁴ The Senegalese researcher Mamadou Diouf believes that *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order represents a new image of the Wolof society angered by colonial military campaigns, power struggles, and the slave trade prevalent in the region, followed by a series of epidemics and diseases.⁹⁵ Therefore, all social classes, including the oppressed slaves who suffered from the tyranny of the aristocratic classes and the aristocrats and nobles who realized the failure of the military approach with the French forces, joined Ahmadu Bamba.⁹⁶

In terms of religious life, during this period, the spread of Sufi orders in Senegal was accompanied by the presence of sincere preachers, as well as a group of individuals affiliated with religious scholars who engaged in deceptive practices. These individuals pretended to be pious and ascetic while seeking to unlawfully acquire people's wealth. Meanwhile, the Church made considerable efforts to convert the local population to Christianity.⁹⁷ At the same time, ignorance, witchcraft, and sorcery were widespread in Senegalese society. Many scholars and religious leaders worked for the benefit of kings and foreigners who used them for purposes contrary to Islamic teachings, such as practising sorcery and unjust judiciary. Religion itself became distorted, with certain traditions being practiced during events such as weddings, circumcisions, and funerals.⁹⁸

Ahmadu Bamba offered a critique of the religious leaders of his time, stating that:

It has become evident that most of the sheikhs in this era are traps (*fukhūkh*) (...). Some of them aspire to leadership without any modesty or reservation. They fail to distinguish between obligatory and recommended acts, instead drawing people into contentious matters. They lay claim to perfection and sainthood, inundating others with countless narratives. Should you praise anyone other than themselves in their presence, envy and a desire for status consume them. They take delight whenever someone else's faults are mentioned (...). Some of them frequently mention Allah with their tongues, yet their hearts are tainted and corrupt. They exhibit asceticism but intend to accumulate wealth, so caution is advised (...). Some abstain from gazing upon women, donning a façade of piety. They resemble the most devout scholars, projecting humility

⁹⁴ Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide*, 77-78.

⁹⁵ Mamadou Diop, "The Senegalese Murid trade diaspora and the making of a vernacular cosmopolitanism, translated by Steven Rondall" (Public culture, Fall, Volume 12, Number 3, 2000), 682.

⁹⁶ Momar Coumba Diop, *Confrérie mouride organisation politique et mode d'implantations urbaine* (Thèse de doctorat de 3e cycle, UER de psychologie et sciences sociales, Université Lyon 2, 1980), 39.

⁹⁷ Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn, *ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbâcke*, 16.

⁹⁸ Bû Madyan, "The sufi brotherhoods' position to French colonialism in Senegal," 111.

and fairness. However, were it not for the scrutiny of others, they would readily engage in adultery and corruption.⁹⁹

Thus, in this historical context marked by the dissolution of traditional Wolof society, characterized by instability, insecurity, famine, conflicts, and a weakening of religious adherence, and amidst attempts by the occupier to impose dominance along with their culture and religion, Ahmadu Bamba emerged and declared his reformist call.¹⁰⁰ He established his reformist Sufi order, which the Senegalese scholar Muhammad al-Bashīr described as “great upheaval in renewing religion and the emergence of a magnificent reformist path, unparalleled in its scope, causing astonishment in hearts and shaking the foundations of authorities.”¹⁰¹



⁹⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, ed. Rawḍu-r-Rayāḥīn (Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-jadīda, 2017), 177.

¹⁰⁰ Rawdu-r-Rayāḥīn, *ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 68.

CHAPTER III

AHMADU BAMBA MBACKE: HIS LIFE AND SCHOLARLY WORKS

Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke¹⁰² is the founder of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order in Senegal. This Islamic Sufi order emphasizes faith, Islam, and spiritual excellence (*ihsān*). It urges followers to devote submission to Allah, strip away worldly distractions, and seek Allah's pleasure after pledging allegiance to a perfect guide (*ash-Sheikh al-Kāmil*).¹⁰³ Ahmadu Bamba was born into a religious and scholarly environment in the region of Bawol in central-western Senegal. He grew up immersed in Quranic education and substantial knowledge of *Shari'a* sciences and the Arabic language under his family's guidance. His thirst for knowledge led him to travel to numerous places across the country to seek wisdom and experiences from scholars. Over time, he accumulated vast knowledge and demonstrated exceptional proficiency and virtue, earning a reputation as an individual highly regarded for his expertise and moral character.¹⁰⁴

3.1. His Name, Lineage, and Birth

Ahmadu Bamba's complete name is Ahmad or Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ḥabībullāh. He is renowned by various nicknames in Senegal, such as *Serigne Touba* (the *Sheikh* of Tūbā), *Borom Touba* (the owner of Tūbā), *Seugn Bu Mak Bi* (the greatest *Sheikh*), and *Khadīm ar-rasūl* (the Prophet's Servant).¹⁰⁵ He was born in 1854¹⁰⁶ in

¹⁰² Main sources of the biography of Ahmad Bamba include Muhammad 'Abdullah al-'Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyya fī al-sīratī al-mbakkiyya*, ed. Mohammed Bamba Drame- Abū Madyan Shu'ayb Thiaw (Rabat: Dār al-Amān, 2019); Muhammad al-Bashīr Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm fī sīratī al-sheikh al-khadīm*; Muhammad al-Amīn diop al-Daghānī, *Irwā'u-n-nadīm min 'adhbi ḥubbi al-Khadīm*, ed. The *Khadmīyya* Association for Researchers and Scholars (Rabat: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda, 2017); Rawḍu al-Rayāḥīn, *ashl-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba 'abdullah awa khadīmu rasūlihī*.

¹⁰³ Muhammad al-Murtada Mbacke, *al-Murīdiyya al-haqīqa wa-l-wāqi' wa āfāq al-mustaqbāl* (Rabat: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif al-Jadīda, 2011), 97.

¹⁰⁴ Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ See 'Abdou Diouf, *Murīdiyya: a revivalist Sufi order in Senegal*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Some reports have said that he was born in 1853, while others suggest 1855, 1856, and 1857. See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 19.

Mbacké Bawol, a city built by his great-grandfather Muhammad al-Khayr in 1781. Ahmadu Bamba was descended from a distinguished family for their piety, knowledge, nobility, and righteousness. His father, Muhammad (Momar Anta Sali), is the son of Ḥabībullāh (Mām Bālla) bin Muhammad al-Khayr (Mām Māram) ibn Ḥabībullāh ibn Muhammad al-Khayr (*al-Kabīr*) ibn ‘Uthmān. The latter, believed to come from the Fūta Tooro region in eastern Senegal, is the first member of the family to speak the Wolof language. The Mbacke family lived in a town called (‘Abdalla) until ‘Uthmān moved from there to the Jolof region around 1000/1591. They settled in a town called (Ngīneen) and then moved to the village of (Mbacke Dodi), where they stayed for over a hundred years, establishing a mosque and other places of worship.¹⁰⁷

Later, this family moved to the village of (Mbacke Sānyankā), where Muhammad al-Khayr (Mām Māram), the second grandfather of Ahmadu Bamba, was born around the year 1700. He was a prominent figure, with numerous scholars and religious leaders in Senegal tracing their lineage back to him.¹⁰⁸ He established an educational institution with various branches, spreading Islam throughout Senegal, particularly the Sufi Sunni tradition. During the time of Ahmadu Bamba’s grandfather, Ḥabībullāh, he served as the head of the Mbacke family. He was a scholar who upheld his father’s mission of disseminating knowledge and religion.¹⁰⁹

As for Ahmadu Bamba’s father, Sheikh Muhammad, well-known as Momar Anta Sali, he was a noble scholar, recognized by Muslims as an *imām*, and admired by princes and kings for his wisdom, knowledge, sincerity, and sound judgment.¹¹⁰ He acquired knowledge from his father, Ḥabībullāh, and other scholars of his time, then took on teaching responsibility. He established a school that attracted students from all directions, numerous scholars had graduated under his guidance. He served as a respected judge and an advisor to Prince Latjor Joob (d.1886).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 23.

¹⁰⁹ See Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, “*Généalogie, éducation, et baraka (grâce divine) dans la famille Mbacke: une exploration de quelques sources de l’autorité spirituelle d’Amadu Bamba*” Verdier Afrique & Histoire 1, vol. 7 (2009: 20).

¹¹⁰ Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 47.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Ahmadu Bamba's mother is Sokhna Maryam Bousso (Mām Jāra), renowned as *Jāratu-l-lāh* (the Almighty's neighbor) for her piety and devoted worship.¹¹² Mām Jāra, the daughter of Muhammad ibn Muhammad, traces her lineage back to al-Hasan ibn 'Alī. She was born in 1833 in Bousbè, in the Jolof region, another account suggests she was born in Mbacke Baoul. Mām Jāra learned the Quran from her mother, Sokhna 'Ā'isha Wālo Mbacke (d.1884), until she mastered it in memorization and recitation. By age ten, she had transcribed the Quran in her own handwriting. She also studied the science of *Tafsīr* under her uncle known as Tafsīr¹¹³ Mbacke Ndumbe, and gained expertise in various sciences, becoming a skilled scholar. At the age of nineteen, she became a teacher, like her mother, while embarking on the path of Sufism.¹¹⁴

3.2. His Education

Ahmadu Bamba was raised under the guidance of several scholars. He studied the Quran with his uncle, Sheikh Muhammad Bousso (d.1895), and his maternal uncle, Sheikh Tafsīr Mbacke Ndumbe. Under his father's instruction, Sheikh Muhammad ibn Habībullāh, he memorized the Quran and mastered recitation and Quranic recitation rules (*Tajwīd*).¹¹⁵

After memorizing the Quran, he studied the Islamic and Arabic sciences. He joined a group of scholars in his country, particularly his relatives, who had a long-standing reputation in knowledge. Among them was his father, who was his primary teacher. His father's cousin, Sheikh Samba Tukloor Ka, was also one of his teachers. Additionally, he gained valuable knowledge from the expertise of the literary figure al-Qādī Majakhate Kala (d.1902), one of Senegal's scholars and renowned linguists. Ahmadu Bamba visited him, presenting his poetry for evaluation and correction, while also gaining insights into the nuances of language. He also sought knowledge from Sheikh Muhammad ibn Muhammad ad-Daymānī (d.1906), a scholar from Mauritania

¹¹² Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 10.

¹¹³ His nickname.

¹¹⁴ See 'Ubayd Rahmān Lo, *as-sayyida jāratu-l-lāhi: Maryam Bousse* (Touba: al-Maktaba al-Murīdiyya, 2008), 4-5.

¹¹⁵ See *Hayātu ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke* (a biographical Booklet published by *al-Rābi'a al-Khadīmiyya lil Bāhithīn*, 2019), 4.

who frequently visited the region. He taught Ahmadu Bamba the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence, logic, and rhetoric.¹¹⁶

Ahmadu Bamba dedicated his entire time to pursuing knowledge, extensively memorizing the *mutūn* (classical Islamic texts) from various Islamic disciplines. By the time he reached his twenties, he had already acquired remarkable proficiency in nearly all the diverse Islamic sciences taught in the region.¹¹⁷ He was meticulous in collecting and acquiring books, showing a particular interest in copying and purchasing them. As a result, he amassed numerous volumes, abundant scrolls, and unique manuscripts that were not found elsewhere. He dedicated himself to reading, memorizing, and studying these materials.¹¹⁸

When his father carefully examined him and recognized the depth of his knowledge and the excellence of his character, he entrusted him with the role of a teacher in his school, which attracted students from all over the country. Consequently, most students flocked to him and benefited from his knowledge.¹¹⁹ The father also taught some of Ahmadu Bamba's books in his school; instead of teaching the *kalām* book *Umm al-Barāhīn* by as-Sanūsī, he taught his son's book *Mawāhib al-Quddūs*. Similarly, instead of *Bidāyat al-Hidāya* by al-Ghazzālī, he taught *Mulayyin aṣ-Sudūr*.¹²⁰ Bamba was eloquent in expression, possessed a charming demeanor, and was known for his ability to solve complex problems and mysteries.¹²¹

Ahmadu Bamba adhered to the doctrine of *Ahl as-Sunna wa-l-Jamā'a* (the followers of Sunna) and frequently clarified his theological affiliation with the *Ash'arī* school, particularly the *as-Sanūsī*'s (d.895/1489) school.¹²² In this regard, he stated that:

I openly affirm that, I consider Allah as my Creator, deserves all sorts of praise; Islam as my religion and guiding light; the Prophet as my messenger; the Holy Quran and the *Ka'bah* (the holy mosque in Mecca) as a guide, which I will never abandon, and the esteemed scholar *as-Sanūsī*'s doctrines as the basis of my belief concerning the rights of our All-Merciful Creator.¹²³

¹¹⁶ See al-Daghānī, *Irwā'u-n-nadīm*, 55-56.

¹¹⁷ Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 10.

¹¹⁸ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 29.

¹¹⁹ See Ibid, 57; al-'Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyya*, 64.

¹²⁰ ad-Daghānī, *Irwā'u-n-nadīm*, 76-77.

¹²¹ Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 15.

¹²² Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 35.

¹²³ al-Kokkiyyu, *al-'Umda*, 66.

Ahmadu Bamba's adoption of as-Sanūsī's school of belief reflects his commitment to a Sunni, Sharia-based Sufism that avoids speculative theology. As-Sanūsī's balanced approach, which harmonized mystical insight with rational thought while staying within Ash‘ari orthodoxy,¹²⁴ aligned with Bamba's effort to revive practical Sufism rooted in the Quran and Sunna. This allowed Bamba to embrace a structured theological framework that reinforced spiritual discipline without engaging in abstract philosophical interpretations.

Regarding jurisprudential affiliation (*fiqh*), Bamba followed the “*Mālikī* School.” Additionally, he urged his disciples to stay committed to the *Mālikī* School, stating: “You are all strongly encouraged to adopt the school of Mālik; indeed, it is an enlightened and purified school.”¹²⁵

By the time he reached his thirties, Ahmadu Bamba had risen to prominence due to the books he had authored, which were highly regarded within Islamic circles. Moreover, his spiritually appealing character became renowned throughout the region. With his dedication to Allah and the continuous production of Islamic literature, people began to see him as an individual who could assist the community in resolving numerous challenges.¹²⁶

3.2.1. His Involvement in the Sufi Path

When discussing the beginnings of Ahmad Bamba's journey in Sufism, it is essential to highlight the influence of his parents during the early stages of his life. While we have provided a brief overview of their lives, this section will focus on the most significant aspects of their influence on Ahmad Bamba's personality throughout his childhood and youth.

Mām Jāra Bousso played a pivotal role in shaping the upbringing of her son, Ahmadu Bamba, immersing him in Islamic Sufi teachings. Despite his young age at the time,

¹²⁴ See A. Bonabi, "At-Taṣawwuf al-‘Irṣānī as-Sunnī ‘Inda Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf as-Sanūsī (d. 895 AH/1489 CE)," *Majallat ‘Uṣūr al-Jadīda* 1, no. 2 (July 10, 2011): 323–338.

¹²⁵ Ahmad Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at as-ṣughrā*, ed. The Khadīyya Association for Researchers and Scholars (Rabat: Dār al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2018), 90.

¹²⁶ Galaye Ndiaye, “*al-Murīdiyya and its founder: a shortened historical study*,” in *Dirāsāt hawla al-Murīdiyya* (Rabat: Maṭba‘at al Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2010), 10-12.

she encouraged him to engage in worship and emulate righteous men. Her guidance acted as the spark that ignited the flame of love for worship and reverence for the saints in the heart of young Ahmadu Bamba. Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr depicts the close bond between Ahmadu Bamba and his mother, Maryam Bousso. She instilled her righteousness, devotion, and commitment to religious duties in him, shaping his character and values. Bamba, even at a young age, absorbed his mother's teachings and stories of righteous men, trying to follow their behavior. Despite not fully understanding, he would imitate their habits, such as praying at night, demonstrating his early commitment to religious practices.¹²⁷

Ahmadu Bamba, in turn, held his mother in the highest regard and affection. As a display of this reverence, he refused to sit on his mother's bed after being weaned. Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr recounts this remarkable aspect of Ahmadu Bamba's childhood:

His nanny told me that nothing typical of children, like crying or playing, would distract him, even when he extremely hungry. He would not pass through places of disobedience or gatherings of frivolity without reacting vehemently, showing intense emotion that worried her until he moved away from those paths to others. This behavior became well known. After being weaned, he avoided lying on his mother's bed and, unless compelled, would remain in prayer around the house's prayer area.¹²⁸

This story highlights the significant responsibility carried by Ahmadu Bamba's mother to raise a child like him. It demanded a deep understanding of his exceptional character and the skill to nurture his confidence, especially considering that she was only twenty-one years old when Ahmadu Bamba was born. Mām Jāra fulfilled this role with utmost competence, to the extent that her son Ahmadu Bamba himself marveled at her ability to keep secrets, saying:

I have not seen anyone who can keep a secret better than her; because from the moment I was born under her care until I grew up, she never saw anything extraordinary from me that she went and told people about; she witnessed many wonders and marvels and did not disclose them, and if it were not for her perfection, she would have disclosed them proudly.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ See Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 96-97.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 97-98.

¹²⁹ Lo, *as-Sayyida jāratu lāhi: Maryam Bousso*, 9.

Ahmadu Bamba's acknowledgment of his mother's pivotal role in his upbringing and contribution to his success stands as a profound testament to her influence. Despite Mām Jāra's early passing in 1886 at the age of thirty-three in the city of "Prokhaan" in the region of Kaolak, her influence on her son endured far beyond her lifetime. This is exemplified by an impactful incident from 1895 when Ahmadu Bamba faced a distressing night in Dakar en route to Gabon. Confined to a stifling, dark room by a French commander, he found solace in prayer and Quranic recitation. During this trial, he recounted a comforting vision of visitation from his mother, Mām Jāra, who offered encouragement and patience. She reminded him of the sacred covenant he made with Allah on the day of his birth, which she witnessed, urging him to fulfill his divine duty of worship and service to the Prophet Muhammad.¹³⁰

The influence of Ahmadu Bamba's father on his development was multifaceted. He served as an Islamic studies teacher and spiritual guide in Sufism. The first indication of his father's influence on him is seen in Bamba's adoption of the *Qādiriyya* order as his first spiritual path, a tradition he inherited from his father, Sheikh Muhammad. His father remained his sole Sheikh until his passing in 1883.¹³¹ Ahmadu Bamba revered his Sheikh, viewing him not only as a father figure but also as a spiritual mentor, which was evident in his interactions with him and in some of the books he authored during this period. In these books, he often began with phrases like *Qāla ibn shaykhihī* (his Sheikh's son said) as seen in the introduction of his book *Masālik al-jinān*, or *Muhammad ibn shaykhihī Muhammad* (Muhammad, son of his Sheikh, Muhammad) as at the beginning of his book *Jadhbāt aṣ-Ṣaghār*. He also comprised a long poem venerating him, acknowledging his gratitude to him, as he said:

O you, the source of judgments. O *Ghawth*, the guide of the lost, O you, the honored one, the standard-bearer of this generation. Today, I will praise you with praise that spreads, with gratitude, satisfaction, and reverence. As a reward for what you bestowed upon me of honor, with knowledge, manners, glory, and preference. May Allah reward you in this world and the Hereafter, a reward that pleases the eye in every hope. You are the generation's leader, guiding them with true knowledge, guiding every perplexed one.¹³²

Ahmadu Bamba exerted great effort to please his Sheikh, dedicating everything he owned to him. He once expressed, "I exerted myself in dedicating to him [his Sheikh],

¹³⁰ See *ibid*, 8-9.

¹³¹ See Mbàcke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 130.

¹³² Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 82-83.

never possessing anything that I could claim for myself, be it little or much.”¹³³ Sheikh Muhammad al-Amīn ad-Daghānī recounted that Ahmadu Bamba once told him of his keenness to please his Sheikh to obtain the blessings of his knowledge. He was always eager to serve him, aiming to fulfill his duties towards his father and Sheikh. He would collect money earned from writing for others and give it all to his Sheikh, regardless of the amount.¹³⁴

Sheikh Muhammad ibn Ḥabībulلāh loved his son with unparalleled affection. Therefore, he could not bear to be separated from him for even a moment as the signs of his son’s brilliance began to emerge and spread. For this reason, he asked his son to stay in their homeland to seek knowledge. Ahmadu Bamba responded to this request without hesitation and remained in his homeland to pursue knowledge until he reached his goals. Ahmadu Bamba reflects, “And indeed, it was as he said – may Allah reward him with goodness. Thus, his habit was always to advise me to focus on seeking knowledge and not to be preoccupied with anything other than Allah. He kept me separate from other children, relatives, or strangers.”¹³⁵

The father was meticulous in protecting and caring for his son. Sometimes, he would be strict with him. Ahmadu Bamba only fully understood the hidden love behind this strictness after an event that made him realize his position in his father’s eyes. Ahmadu Bamba recounts an event where Sheikh Ibrāhīm al-Fūtī al-Maqāmī (one of his father’s Sheikhs) visited their home as a guest. When it was time for al-Maqāmī to leave, Ahmadu Bamba’s father and others accompanied him to see him off. However, Ahmadu Bamba’s father requested a private conversation with the guest before departing. As they stood beside the house, Ahmadu Bamba overheard his father expressing his deep affection and hopes for him, asking al-Maqāmī to pray for his son’s safety, success, and righteousness. The guest prayed fervently for Ahmadu Bamba’s well-being and future. This encounter made Ahmadu Bamba realize that his father’s protective actions were out of genuine concern for his welfare and spiritual growth.¹³⁶

¹³³ Sheikh Muhammad al-Amīn Diope ad-Daghānī, *An-Nubdha al-mubāraka*, a manuscript in my collection, fol. 6.

¹³⁴ Ibid, fol. 10.

¹³⁵ Ibid, fol. 7.

¹³⁶ See ad-Daghānī, *an-Nubdha al-mubāraka*, 6.

3.3. His Moral Characteristics

Ahmadu Bamba was known for his self-confidence, self-sufficiency, seriousness, positivity, and ability to inspire and influence others. These qualities earned him the respect and admiration of scholars, princes, and the public.¹³⁷ His father entrusted him with responsibilities driven by his personality, integrity, religious devotion, knowledge, and upright conduct.¹³⁸ He became distinguished in religious sciences and possessed extensive knowledge in intellectual disciplines. He was adorned with noble virtues characterized by generosity, open-mindedness, patience, courage, and a solid commitment to goodness. His morality transcended worldly matters, firmly rooted in sincere religious devotion.¹³⁹ Additionally, he exhibited piety and asceticism, refraining from indulging in worldly luxuries and remaining unaffected by either praise or criticism.¹⁴⁰

Ahmadu Bamba, as 'Abdu Diouf stated, from a young age, displayed extraordinary devotion to the Almighty and His messenger, and dedicated himself to worshipping Allah in accordance with the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad. He was diligent and consistent in his actions. He never sought honor or prestige from anyone but regarded true dignity as coming solely from Allah.¹⁴¹ He once expressed, "Seeking assistance from anyone other than Allah is, to me, nothing but a complete illusion."¹⁴²

Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr described Ahmadu Bamba's deeds and conduct as a reflection of nine spiritual stations (*Maqāmāt*) through which Bamba ascended.¹⁴³ In interpreting this spiritual claim, Mustapha Diope al-Kokkiyyu said:

Then his *tawba* (repentance) is from the *Mahabba* (love) that he has for Almighty, his *Sabr* (patience), *Riḍā* (satisfaction to Allah), his *Shukr* (gratitude to Allah) is in his *Tawakkul* (trust). As for his *Rajā'* (reliance on Allah), *khawf* (fear of Allah), and *Zuhd* (asceticism), will naturally be in his *al-huḍūr al-muṭlaq* (an absolute and consistent presence with the magnitude of Allah).¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 35.

¹³⁸ Mbäcke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 39.

¹³⁹ al-Daghānī, *Irwā' u-n-nadīm*, 52.

¹⁴⁰ Mbäcke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 39.

¹⁴¹ See Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 12.

¹⁴² Ahmadu Bamba Mbäcke, "Yāzal bushārātī" in *al-Muntqā min qasā'idi 'Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', 2024), 385.

¹⁴³ ar-Rawdu-r-Rayāhīn, *Min wasāyā ash-Sheikh al-Khadīm Ahmadu Bamba Mbäcke* (Rabat: Maṭba 'at al-Ma'ārif al-jadīda, 2018), 199.

¹⁴⁴ al-Kokkiyyu, *al-'Umda*, 150.

Ahmadu Bamba's sincerity of repentance reached such a depth that he felt uneasy in the presence of political rulers. This discomfort led him to a firm decision to distance himself from his father, who served as a judge for Prince Lat Dior, if his father remained involved with them and their circles.¹⁴⁵

Numerous aspects of Ahmadu Bamba's life vividly demonstrated the depth of his asceticism. Regarding this, he expressed:

Dunyā (the world) has approached me, and I sold it [abandoned it]. By doing so, I freed myself from its constraints. Later, it returned, but I did not incline towards it as it is a house of darkness. It approached again, finding that I had directed myself to Allah, who continued to bless me. Whatever benefit I derive from *dunyā* is merely a *zād* (essential provision) on the journey to paradise after the *Jihād* and the mission I must fulfill in my lifetime.¹⁴⁶

Ahmadu Bamba exemplified trust, contentment, and reliance on Allah. Despite the numerous challenges he faced as a spiritual guide, he never considered relying on anything other than Allah.¹⁴⁷ In his words:

People advised me to seek gifts from the doors of princes that would bring me lasting pleasure. I replied, 'My Creator is sufficient for me, and I am content with Him.' I neither fear nor need anyone else because He blesses and protects me. How can I rely on people who have no assistance, even for themselves, resembling needy individuals without a solution?¹⁴⁸

He further emphasized his unwavering reliance on Allah, stating, "I intend never to extend my hand to anyone except You, Allah. If You give, I become thankful; if not, I remain satisfied and patient."¹⁴⁹

Despite hosting numerous visitors for various purposes, Bamba maintained an organized daily schedule. His routine included reciting the Quran, engaging in *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), performing *Nawāfi* (supererogatory prayers), writing, and reading, all punctually and without interruption. Throughout his life, he devoted most of his time to worship, instructing the youth, and educating adults. Scholars and

¹⁴⁵ Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān, 2022), 430.

¹⁴⁷ Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 17.

¹⁴⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, "Qālū liya irkan li abwāb al salāṭīn" in *al-Muntqā min qasā’idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī‘, 2024), 366.

¹⁴⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, "Wasīlat ar-rubūh" in *al-Muntqā min qasā’idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī‘, 2024), 5.

sheikhs benefited from his guidance in self-purification (*Tazkiya*) and spiritual elevation (*Tarqiya*).¹⁵⁰

3.4. Ahmadu Bamba's Spiritual Journey in the Sufi Path

Between 1301/1883 and 1343/1924, Ahmadu Bamba underwent significant spiritual evolution, encapsulating the essence of his spiritual journey. To briefly outline these pivotal moments, we will follow the systematic breakdown the scholar Mustapha Diope al-Kokkiyyu offered.¹⁵¹

I. In 1301/1883, Ahmadu Bamba received *idhn* (permission) directly from the Prophet,¹⁵² signaling a revival in guiding people toward a decisive reenactment. Gathering seekers of Islamic knowledge, he declared, “Those here merely for learning may leave, but those aligned with my purpose should follow my path.” He emphatically proclaimed, “I renew only with the authenticated religion brought by the Prophet.”¹⁵³

II. By 1311/1893, Ahmadu Bamba sought to renew religious commitments, departing from traditional Sufism towards a new doctrine known as *al-khidma*. Thereby, he identified himself as “a servant of Allah and a servant of His Prophet.” In this context, He said: “From this year till the day I will return to Allah, I am a servant of Allah and a *khadīm* (servant) of his glorified Prophet.”¹⁵⁴

III. In 1313/1895, a complete break from conservative norms marked a radical renewal, severing spiritual ties with previous Sufi orders and sheikhs while maintaining genuine brotherhood. His devotion centered on the Prophet as his paramount spiritual source.

IV. The significant stance **in 1322/1903** involved Ahmadu Bamba receiving a unique Sufi litany (*wird*), fulfilling his spiritual aspirations. He said: “Oh! You Allah,

¹⁵⁰ al-‘Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyya*, 113.

¹⁵¹ See al-Kokkiyyu, *al-‘Umda*, 39-40; ‘Abdu Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 19-20.

¹⁵² The Sheikh saw the Prophet wakefully (physical contact), as he confirms in many of his writings.

¹⁵³ al-Daghānī, *Irwā’ u-n-nadīm*, 51.

¹⁵⁴ al-Kokkiyyu, *al-‘Umda*, 39-40.

you have completed my Sufi ambitions by giving me what [the Sufi masters] at-Tijjāni and al-Jīlānī and ash-Shādhilī surpassed others”.¹⁵⁵

V. In 1324/1905, despite being prevented by the French colonizers from performing *Hajj*, Ahmadu Bamba referred to it as “the year my Heart and Pen performed *Hajj*,” commemorating both the outward and inward spiritual blessings he experienced. He said, “In the 1324 H, the year my Heart and Pen performed *Hajj*, the almighty has given me apparent and hidden spiritual blessings”.¹⁵⁶ Part of the reason why the French authorities prevented him was that they experienced some examples of African Sufi jihadists in the region, such as El-Ḥājj ‘Omar al-Fūtiyyu Tall, those that they thought were influenced by the Arabic countries that they visited and had contact with some Muslim jihadists scholars.¹⁵⁷

VI. From 1343/1924 until his passing in 1346/1927, he attained the esteemed Sufi honor of *al-Jiwāriyya* (spiritual neighborhood with Allah), experiencing a deep spiritual connection with Allah, uncovering the veils between him and the divine level. He asserted, “in 1343H, Allah bestowed upon me the rank of *al-Jiwāriyya*.¹⁵⁸

To discuss these stages, we can say that Ahmadu Bamba was born and raised in a Sufi environment, with significant influence from his parents in his early years. However, other factors contributed to shaping his Sufi personality. According to Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr, Ahmadu Bamba dedicated himself to collecting books and reading extensively, amassing numerous volumes on jurisprudence, hagiographies, and Sufism from the beginning of his journey. He also met many individuals during his travels, as he was motivated to seek out books, meet scholars, and visit the places of Sufi masters.¹⁵⁹ Ahmadu Bamba also received the *wird* of the *Shādhiliyya* and practiced it for eight years. Subsequently, he took the *Tijjāniyya* *wird* from one of its sheikhs and adhered to it for the same period or even longer.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ See *ibid*, 40.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 39-40.

¹⁵⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbäcke, *Dīwān al-fuyūḍāt ar-rabbāniyya*, ed. ‘Abdu-l-Qādir Mbäcke Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 50.

¹⁵⁹ Mbäcke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 174-175.

¹⁶⁰ al-Daghānī, *Irwā’u-n-nadīm*, 76-77.

Thus, Ahmadu Bamba fully committed himself to the Sufi path, and practised these three *wirds*. After a period of time, people gathered around him due to the qualities they saw in him, which resembled the esteemed Sufi masters. As a result, his followers and disciples increased, especially after he began to renew the Sufi path within the country. He never ceased praying, reciting the Quran, writing, and praising the Prophet Muhammad, only pausing when fulfilling the needs of the supplicants and offering advice and guidance.¹⁶¹ He remained steadfast in this manner until the vision of the Prophet directly bequeathed the three litanies to him without the mediation of any Sufi masters. This was evident in his answers to the French general governor's inquiry, where he stated:

The poet (Ahmadu Bamba himself) first took the *Qādiriyya* order, the *Shādhiliyya* order, and the *Tijāniyya* order, respectively. Regarding the *Qādiriyya* *wird*, he practiced it for a long time, seeking permission (*idhn*) from everyone he considered an accomplished spiritual guide (*muqaddam*) until he received it from multiple individuals. Then, he became certain that none of those for whom he sought permission were *muqaddam*. Therefore, I (Ahmadu Bamba) beseeched Allah to grant me a path without confusion or hesitation. After I was expatriated to Gabon, the trustworthy master (the angel Gabriel), peace be upon him, appeared to me and took everything I had acquired from others until nothing remained. Then, he gave me back the *Qādiriyya* *wird* through the messenger of Allah (Muhammad)- peace be upon him.¹⁶²

The year 1893 marks a significant turning point in Bamba's personal and spiritual development, which is reflected in various aspects of his life: his personality, his writings, his public statements, and even the methods he employed in educating his followers. The main reason for this development lies in the cognitive rupture that occurred in that year. when he declared his abandonment of all Sufi sheikhs and *wirds* and confined himself to Prophet Muhammad as his only spiritual guide, along with the Quran as his *wird*. Here are some of his statements during this period which highlight this fact:

Today, I pledge allegiance to the chosen Messenger, to do service (*khidma*) for him, and I ask Allah for fidelity. I pledge to Allah to take the Book [Quran] in service to the chosen one [Muhammad], the gate of truth. The most deserving of all creatures of my service, in prose and verse, is the Messenger of Mercy [Muhammad].¹⁶³

He also said: "It has become clear to everyone with reason, that my means [Sheikh] is the Messenger [Muhammad]."¹⁶⁴ "His [Allah's] noble book has become my *wird*, and

¹⁶¹ Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 248.

¹⁶² al-Daghānī, *Irwā'u-n-nadīm*, 166-167.

¹⁶³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Futūh al-mukarram*, ed. 'Abdu-l-Qādir Mbacke Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 10.

¹⁶⁴ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Manāhil as-ṣāfiyya*, a manuscript in my collection.

has expelled my adversaries.”¹⁶⁵ “The book of my Lord has become my intimate friend, after the Prophet [Muhammad] became my leader.”¹⁶⁶

These citations indicate that from this point forward, Ahmadu Bamba would be exclusively influenced by Prophet Muhammad, with no other figure exerting any impact on him. Moreover, all his writings and actions would be directed towards serving Prophet Muhammad. This *khidma* (service), in Ahmadu Bamba’s ideology, takes various forms: reviving Prophet Muhammad’s Sunnah, spreading his call, praising him, sending blessings upon him, showing compassion to his nation, and delivering benefits to them wherever they may be.¹⁶⁷

Upon pledging allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad and abandoning all other means, Ahmadu Bamba sought to attain a lofty status that no one before him from among the saints had reached, which is the title of “‘Abdullāh wa Khadīm ar-Rasūl,” meaning to be a pure servant of Allah and the most devoted servant to his Messenger Muhammad. Therefore, the early years of this stage were characterized by his utmost effort to achieve this rank.¹⁶⁸ In addition to what was mentioned earlier about his various forms of service to the Prophet Muhammad, he divided the year into two parts: six months during which he wrote poems praising the Prophet Muhammad and six other months during which he wrote poems sending blessings upon him. He said: “[I dedicated] Six months of prayers, praising six months, [that] come to him (Prophet Muhammad) completely...”.¹⁶⁹ He also said: “To him [Prophet Muhammad], I have offered prayers from [the month] *Rajab* until the end of the year.”¹⁷⁰

Ultimately, he believed that he had fulfilled his objective and reached a unique level of devotion and service to the Prophet, which he regarded as unmatched by anyone before him and unattainable by anyone after him, as evidenced by his following statements: “Whoever thinks he will ever satisfy him [Prophet Muhammad] with a

¹⁶⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, *Dīwān al-Qurāniyya*, ed. ‘Abdu-l-Qādir Mbàcké Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 285.

¹⁶⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, *Futūh al-mukarram*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ See Khadim Sylla, *al-Khidma fī fikr Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 71.

¹⁶⁸ See *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, “Mawāhib an-Nāfi” in *al-Muntqā min qasā’idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī, 2024), 250.

¹⁷⁰ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, “Muhammaadun lā yazāl muhammadā,” in *Dīwān al-fuyūdāt ar-rabāniyya*, ed. ‘Abdu-l-Qādir Mbàcké Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 81.

service like my service, I have denied his assumption that I am the servant who served him in a way other servants could not do.”¹⁷¹ “O my Lord, you granted me what has kept me away from impurities, then I have become a servant of the Chosen One [Prophet Muhammad] like Anas [the companion Anas ibn Mālik].”¹⁷² “The Holy One (Allah) has cleared me of all impurities, and in the presence of the best of creation [Prophet Muhammad] I have surpassed Anas.”¹⁷³ “The Dominion of the Most High, the Eternal [Allah] has made me the most devoted servant to the one who has lasting virtue [meaning the Prophet Muhammad], and [Allah] has protected me in my service.”¹⁷⁴

These statements reflect a significant transformation in the personality of Ahmadu Bamba. Before, he used to seek nearness to Allah through the saints and righteous scholars, and he would approach Allah through their *wirds*, aspiring to reach their ranks. In this stage, however, he declares that he has reached a status none of those saints had ever attained. It is as if he traversed that long distance between him and those saints in a matter of moments. As he stated in one of his poems: “I traversed the path of the people (of Sufism) while praising him [Prophet Muhammad].”¹⁷⁵ Therefore, Ahmadu Bamba’s personality in this period is that of a deeply rooted Sufi figure in sainthood, constantly in contact with the Prophet Muhammad, possessing many perfections that surpass those of other saints. Among these perfections, which he often mentions in his writings as a way of thanking Allah, are being recognized among the honored companions of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet’s pride in his service before the other Prophets, the distinction of his writings as the most beloved to Allah and His Messenger after the Quran and Hadith, and his attainment of the status of *al-Jiwāriya*, signifying his closeness to and nearness to Allah, the Almighty.¹⁷⁶ These stations were never claimed by anyone before Ahmed Bamba.

¹⁷¹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, “Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm” in *al-Muntqā min qasā’idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’, 2024), 48.

¹⁷² Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Wa yakhlūq mālā ta’lamūn*, in *Dīwān al-fuyūdāt ar-rabāniyya*, ed. ‘Abdu-l-Qādir Mbacke Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 266.

¹⁷³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, “*Hasbūnā Allah wa ni ‘mal wakīl*” in *Dīwān al-Qurāniyya*, ed. ‘Abdu-l-Qādir Mbacke Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 80.

¹⁷⁴ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, “Muhammadiya-l-ḥabīb” in *al-Muntqā min qasā’idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’, 2024), 89.

¹⁷⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, “*Midādī*” in *al-Muntqā min qasā’idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’, 2024), 323.

¹⁷⁶ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 190-199.

3.5. His Reformist Movement (Emergence of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi Order)

As previously noted, Ahmadu Bamba demonstrated remarkable teaching and writing skills during his father's life, earning his admiration to the point that he eventually entrusted him with overseeing a significant portion of the school's administration and teaching. After his father's passing, he continued this role for a year. Then, in the early days of 1301/1883, he summoned the students and said: "Let whoever has accompanied us for only learning (mere learning of knowledge) go where they wish and seek what suits them. And whoever desires what we desire, let them hasten in our path and abide by our command." This declaration caused much controversy among those deciding whether to stay or depart. Eventually, a select few remained and became the initial core of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order.¹⁷⁷

The first to respond to Ahmadu Bamba's proposition was Sheikh Ādama Geuye (d.1897),¹⁷⁸ succeeded by notable figures such as Sheikh Ibrāhīm Mbacke (d.1943), Sheikh Dāru Ḥasan Ndiaye (d.1924), Sheikh Ibrāhīm Sarr Ndiagne (d.1917), Sheikh 'Abdu Rahman Lo (d.1943), Sheikh Mbacke Bousso (d.1945), Sheikh Ibrāhīm Fall (d.1930), among others.¹⁷⁹ Under the guidance of the Sheikh, they transitioned from mere teaching to *Tarbiya* (Sufi education). According to Ahmadu Bamba, the Prophet Muhammad instructed him: "Raise your companions through high determination (*al-himma*), not only teaching." Embracing this directive, he pushed them to exert themselves through rigorous exercises, fasting, frequent remembrance of Allah, strict observance of purity, and seclusion from people, particularly women.¹⁸⁰

From these events emerged the Sufi order known as *al-Murīdiyya*, one of the largest Sufi orders in Senegal, with a significant influence and followers. It is an independent order, not a branch of the *Qādiriyya* or any other Sufi order.¹⁸¹ Like other Sufi orders, it has its *wird* (litany), which is believed to be taken from Allah through His Messenger. Ahmadu Bamba says: "...and as for the *wird* which I have made for my

¹⁷⁷ al-Daghānī, *Irwā 'u-n-nadīm*, 75.

¹⁷⁸ Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 50.

¹⁷⁹ See Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 21-22.

¹⁸⁰ Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 63.

¹⁸¹ ar-Rābiṭa, *Hayātu ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke*, 18-19.

disciples, it is taken from Allah, the Blessed, and Exalted, through His Messenger, Allah's prayers and peace be upon him.”¹⁸²

3.5.1. Principles of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi Order

Al-Murīdiyya was founded on principles and teachings derived from the writings and teaching of Ahmadu Bamba. He focused on correcting his followers' beliefs, worship practices, and morals by emphasizing monotheism, jurisprudence, and Sufism. The order also emphasized the purification of souls and hearts through *jihād an-nafs*, service (*khidma*), and work while observing proper etiquette. All of this should be done under a spiritual guide who leads the disciple to the straight path and points areas of weakness.¹⁸³ Thus, we can mention the main principles of *al-Murīdiyya* as follows:¹⁸⁴

- I. *al-’Ilm*** (knowledge) is highly emphasized, with Ahmadu Bamba actively rewriting and organizing classical books on creed, jurisprudence, Sufism, ethics, and grammar. This effort aims to facilitate access to knowledge, preserve it, and simplify complex meanings for better comprehension. The commitment to disseminating knowledge extends beyond writing to teaching and practical application in Sufi education.
- II. *al-’Ibāda*** (worship) is another fundamental principle Ahmadu Bamba encouraged Murids (his followers) to adhere to worship diligently, emphasizing the importance of avoiding prohibitions. He underscores the significance of prayer, stating that one who prioritizes prayer benefits both spiritually and materially.
- III. *al-’Amal*** (work) in *al-Murīdiyya* holds a deeper philosophical meaning, transcending material gain. It serves as a primary means for earning halal sustenance, a condition for accepting acts of worship, and promotes self-reliance, independence, and freedom in decision-making.
- IV. *al-Khidma*** (voluntary service) or providing benefits to Muslims seeking the pleasure of Allah, is a commendable trait in *al-Murīdiyya*. Ahmadu Bamba exemplified a life of service to the Prophet Muhammad, earning him the title (Servant of the Messenger of Allah).

¹⁸² al-Daghānī, *Irwā ’u-n-nadīm*, 173.

¹⁸³ Sām Bousso ‘Abdu-r-Rahmān, “Question and answer about *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order,” Sām Bousso ‘Abdu-r-Rahmān’s blog, <http://samebousso.blogspot.com> (accessed May 9, 2021).

¹⁸⁴ See Rawdū al-Rayāhīn, *Dirāsāt hawla al-murīdiyya* (Rabat: Maṭba’ atu al-Ma’ārif al-Jadīda, 2010), 61-116.

V. *al-Mubāya ‘a* (pledge of allegiance) is a fundamental commitment that Murids undertake towards the Sheikh, pledging obedience to his orders and avoiding prohibitions. Ahmadu Bamba considers it essential for progress on the path of Sufism.

VI. *al-Adab* (ethics) holds a high position, with disciplined behavior becoming a distinguishing mark of *al-Murīdiyya* followers. The respect towards the Sheikh and mutual respect among followers have become entrenched traditions passed down through generations.

The principles of *al-Murīdiyya* illustrate how Ahmadu Bamba utilized *practical Sufism* to respond to his era's specific spiritual, social, and political needs. By prioritizing “knowledge” through writing, teaching, and simplifying classical texts, he provided his followers with tools to sustain Islamic learning amidst the disruptions of colonial rule. The emphasis on “worship” and “work” encouraged a balance between spiritual devotion and earning lawful sustenance, fostering independence and ethical conduct. The principle of “service” cultivated a spirit of communal responsibility and dedication, while “ethics” reinforced disciplined behavior and mutual respect. The “pledge of allegiance” established a framework for spiritual guidance and accountability, helping followers maintain focus on their Sufi path. These interconnected principles reflect Bamba’s pragmatic approach to addressing his community’s challenges under colonial pressures.

3.6. Ahmadu Bamba and the Preceding Sufi Heritage

Ahmadu Bamba employed *Baghdādī* Sufism to address existential issues facing a society oppressed by two dominant forces: the aristocratic power and the French colonial power.¹⁸⁵ However, Ahmadu Bamba engaged with *Baghdādī* Sufism critically, extracting its essence and aligning it with the Quran and Sunna. He emphasized grounding Sufi discussions in these foundational texts, which is evident in his *fatwās* and correspondences. Bamba carefully chose reliable references in Sunni Sufism, avoiding the inclusion of questionable or incorrect opinions attributed to specific Sufi figures. His approach prioritized purity and authenticity in Sufi teachings,

¹⁸⁵ See Gallay Ndiaye, *al-Jadal al-‘aqīm*, 40.

which influenced his writings and teachings, which will be elaborated on later in this study.¹⁸⁶

Ahmadu Bamba followed a unique methodology in dealing with these sources and references, which can be outlined as follows:

I. Representing the most essential purposes of serious scientific research, such as:

- a. Collecting scattered pearls of wisdom within the pages of Sufi books and compiling them into a single classification, similar to his work *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*.
- b. Many students overlook the importance of abbreviating lengthy books due to their difficulty and complexity, resulting in a lack of understanding of their subject matter. Commenting on the references he used when composing his book *Masālik al-jinān* he said: “But their books were lengthy, which most of this generation neglected.”¹⁸⁷
- c. Explaining complex issues in Sufism and reorganizing them creatively to simplify and clarify concepts.
- d. Discovering new insights and correcting errors made by some individuals due to shortcomings in understanding language and context or deviating from the truth. In *Masālik al-jinān* he said:

Some claim to seek closeness to Allah, abandoning worship until they perish, leading them astray due to misunderstanding, defiling their minds, and lacking knowledge. This is because they interpreted the term ‘certainty’ at the end of Surah al-Hijr, – meaning Allah’s statement, ‘And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty’ – to mean attaining certainty, when, in fact, it means death.¹⁸⁸

The editors of *Masālik al-jinān* highlight that Ahmadu Bamba’s contribution to the book went beyond mere versification of Muhammad al-Yadālī’s *al-Khātimā*; instead, he presented it within the context of his personal Sufi perspective, integrating his educational methodology for social reform and religious renewal.

¹⁸⁶ See Ahmad Mokhtar Lo, “Manhaj Sheikh Ahmadu bamba fī tahdhīb al-fikr as-ṣūfī wa tanqiyatih,” The African Scholars Journal of Islamic Studies 4 (2021): 382.

¹⁸⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 59.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 177.

The book, therefore, serves as a summary of the distinctive *Murīdī* Sufi thought shaped by Ahmadu Bamba's unique contributions.¹⁸⁹

- II. Selecting and categorizing Sufi sources, relying only on the most authentic and reliable ones that align closely with the Sunna. Philosophical Sufi works, such as those by Ibn 'Arabī and al-Hallāj, are excluded due to their controversial nature. Despite the different views among scholars regarding these figures, ranging from seeking excuses to exonerating them, Ahmadu Bamba ignored them and refrained from mentioning them in his writings. He avoided referencing them in his books, and did not rely on their works to determine or formulate his thoughts or take any position indicating agreement or condemnation towards them.¹⁹⁰
- III. Avoiding Sufi Esoteric Discourses (*Shāfahāt*): One common criticism against both classical and contemporary Sufi thought is the proliferation of peculiar behaviors and statements among the general public. These often contradict the principles of *Shārī'a* and the fundamentals of religion, leading their proponents to be accused of straying from the faith and facing condemnation and curses from believers, especially among the *Ahl al-Hadīth*.¹⁹¹ The phenomenon of "shāfahāt" is attributed by researchers to the prevailing intellectual trend in Sufi thought since the third century of the Hijra. 'Abd ar-Rahmān Badawī states: "We find genuine *shāfahāt* for the first time with Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī (d.261 /875) in the third century of the Hijra, where he employs the original form of this phenomenon, namely speaking in the first-person narrative."¹⁹²

Ahmadu Bamba's writings clearly reflect a deliberate avoidance of relying on Sufi authorities associated with this school, demonstrating caution by adhering strictly to the purified *Shārī'a* and distancing himself from such influences. We do not find any indication of adopting or promoting such *shāfahāt* in his writings. Instead, he opposes them, elucidating a sound approach to dealing with the Sufi heritage based on careful

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹⁹⁰ Ahmad Mokhtar Lo, *Manhaj Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 386-387.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 388.

¹⁹² 'Abdu Rahmān Badawī, *Shāfahāt as-Sūfiyya* (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1987), 1/28.

selection and discernment. In a *fatwa* about some Sufi concepts and terminologies, he responded, saying:

As for your question about apparent annihilation (*al-fanā' az-zāhir*) and inner annihilation (*al-fanā' al-bātin*), apparent annihilation means not stepping out of the circle of the purified *Shari'a*, while inner annihilation is your stillness under the carpet of illuminated *Haqīqa*. (...) In the distinction between *al-Aḥadiyya* and *al-Wāḥidiyya*: *al-Aḥadiyya* is the removal of everything else from the heart besides Him, and *al-Wāḥidiyya* is the removal of the love of inclination towards anything other than Him from the heart. (...) And in the distinction between *al-Maḥw* and *Maḥw al-Maḥw*: *al-Maḥw* is the absence of seeing anything other than the reward of Allah, Blessed and Exalted, and *Maḥw al-Maḥw* is the absence of seeing what emanates from you to your Lord of good deeds.¹⁹³

In this *fatwa*, Ahmadu Bamba did not conventionally interpret these terms as the proponents of *shāṭḥ* understood. Instead, he associated them with precise *Shari'a* meanings devoid of any implication of union (*ittiḥād*) or incarnation (*hulūl*).

It is important to clarify that while Ahmadu Bamba avoided explicitly citing the works and scholars of this school in his Sufi writings, this does not mean he refrained from mentioning them in all his writings. He mentioned some of them in his supplicatory poems, praying to Allah for their sake. This is exemplified in his renowned poem *Khamsatu-r-rijāl*, where he invoked Allah through the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad and five esteemed Sufi figures, including Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī.¹⁹⁴

Thus, Ahmadu Bamba's approach to Sufism was characterized by a careful selection of Sufi heritage, distinguishing between its beneficial and problematic aspects. He sought to root Sufi concepts in their foundational sources in the Quran and *Sunna*, reviving practical Sufism in Senegal while avoiding theoretical or philosophical interpretations. In addition to *Baghdādī* Sufism, he integrated elements from his African heritage that aligned with Islamic *Shari'a*¹⁹⁵ into his teachings, infusing his Sufi thought with an African essence.

¹⁹³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 85.

¹⁹⁴ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān sa 'ādāt al-murīdīn*, ed. *ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya*, (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', 2021), 339-341.

¹⁹⁵ See al-Kokkiyyu, *al-'Umda*, 163; Gallay Ndiaye, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba: Sabīl as-salām*, 10.

3.7. Ahmadu Bamba's Works: Objectives and Methodology

Al-Murīdiyya order faced numerous challenges at its early stages; amid the most dangerous were widespread ignorance and the prevalence of innovations (*bid'a*) within society. It was crucial for anyone seeking to change this situation to prioritize the dissemination of knowledge. Ahmadu Bamba took the initiative to recompile and organize most Islamic books transmitted among students in creed, jurisprudence, Sufism, ethics, grammar, and more. This effort aimed to facilitate access to these resources, preserve them for the students, and simplify their occasionally intricate meanings for better comprehension.¹⁹⁶ The literature Ahmadu Bamba left in diverse spheres can generally be categorized into scholarly works, poems for different purposes, letters in different Islamic themes, commandments (*waṣāyā*), and religious advice (*naṣīḥa*).

3.7.1. Sufism

A significant portion of Ahmadu Bamba's literature falls under Sufism. In this field, he authored books like:

- I. *Masālik al-jinān fī jam'i mā farraqahū ad-daymān*: is a Sufi work consisting of 1553 verses. It includes the book *Khātimatu at-Taṣawwuf* by the Mauritanian Scholar Sheikh Muhammed ibn Mukhtār al-Yaddālī. Despite being one of the earliest compositions of Ahmadu Bamba, its subtlety cannot be underestimated, as it unveils the essence of Sufism, its principles, and its various branches. The work comprises an introduction and three chapters. It has been published with annotations by *Dā'irat Rawd ar-Rayāḥīn* in 2014.
- II. *Huqqa-l-bukā'u 'alā sādāt amwāt*: a poem covers the Sufi ethics, the characteristics of the Sheikh (spiritual guide) and the murīd (disciple), as well as the principles and pillars of Sufism. This poem is part of the compilation *Dīwān al-'ulūm ad-dīniyya*,¹⁹⁷ which was published by the *Khadīmiyya* Association for Researchers in 2019.

¹⁹⁶ See Rawḍu, *Dirāsāt ḥawla al-murīdiyya*, 61.

¹⁹⁷ A book contains of twenty-six texts authored by Ahmadu Bamba on creed, jurisprudence, mysticism, and grammar. It was published by the *Khadīmiyya* Association for Researchers and Scholars in the year 2019.

III. *Nahj qaḍā’ al-hāj fīmā min al-adab ilayhi al-murīd yaḥtāj*: a valuable poem on manners and ethics. It consists of 245 verses and was originally a book on ethics written by the scholar Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ḥājī ash-Shinqīṭī. The poem serves as a comprehensive guide addressing the ethical conduct that a *murīd* needs to adopt during his spiritual journey. It was published with annotations by *Dā’irat Fath al-Ghaffār* in Morocco in 2018.

IV. *Munawwir aṣ-ṣudūr ladā al-manāzil wa ‘inda ad-dūr*: A Sufi poem comprising 211 verses. It is an abridged version of his larger poem titled *Mulayyin aṣ-Ṣudūr*, which was a composition of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī’s book *Bidāyat al-Hidāya*. *Dā’irat Fath al-Ghaffār* in Morocco undertook a critical analysis of this poem in 2016.

V. “*Maghāliq an-nīrān wa mafātiḥ al-jinān*” and “*Jālibat al-burūr wa dāfi‘at al-ghurūr*” are two poetic compositions in Sufism. The first contains 187 verses, while the second has 63. Both poems address topics such as knowledge, the etiquette of acquiring it, Sufism, its principles, and more. In 2016, *Dā’irat Fath al-Ghaffār* of Morocco conducted a critical analysis of these works.

VI. *Zādu dhawī at-ta‘allum li rabbihim wa rāḥat al-mu‘allim*: a poetic composition that addresses the manners of seeking knowledge and its prerequisites. This work is included in the compilation *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 2019.

VII. *Silk al-jawāhir fī akhbār as-sarā’ir*: a large volume in which the author discusses the conditions of the worldly life and the importance of detachment from its allurements. The content also covers topics like death, the trials of the grave, and the hereafter, including aspects like paradise and its pleasures. The *Khadīmiyya* Association for Researchers printed this work with critical analysis in 2020.

VIII. *Masālik al-jinān fī khidmat al-muṭahhar al-janān*: a poetic composition in Sufism, and it appears to be a renewal of the earlier mentioned poem, “*Masālik al-jinān*.” It seems that Ahmadu Bamba did not complete this work. Additionally, there is another book titled *Mawāhib al-mannān aw masālik al-jinān*, which is a poetic composition focusing on wisdom and instructions on the Sufi path. These two works are included in the compilation *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 2019.

3.7.2. Islamic Jurisprudence

In the field of *Fiqh*, Ahmadu Bamba's extensive writings cover various areas, particularly the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence related to worship (*al-‘ibādāt*) and include numerous *fatwās*¹⁹⁸ (legal opinions). Some notable works include:

- I. *Al-Jawhar an-naftis fī ‘aqdi nathri al-akhḍarī ar-ra’īs*: It was primarily penned by the Mālikīte jurist ‘Abdu Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Akhḍarī. Ahmadu Bamba revised it, incorporating significant additions in poetic form, and presented it in an accessible manner suitable for beginners. It covers the jurisprudence of worship (*fiqh al-‘ibādāt*), comprising 686 verses. It was published with annotations by *Dā’irat Rawd ar-Rayāḥīn*, 2016, and also by *Dāirat Khidmatu-l-Khadīm* in Egypt, 2019.
- II. *Nahj al-Ḥaqīqa fī hatki sitr al-‘aqīqa*: a poetic composition consisting of 29 verses. In this work, the author succinctly compiles the essential rulings regarding newborns. The poem is adorned with a brief and precise commentary, elucidating some of the intricacies and ambiguities. It is included in the compilation *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 2019.
- III. *Silāḥ ahl al-khawf fī ‘aqd manthūri al-imām al-‘awfī*: a poem in jurisprudence. It is a compilation based on a book by Imām al-‘Awfī. It is included in the compilation *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 2019.
- IV. *Tazawwud aṣ-ṣīghār ilā jinnān-il-lāhi dhī al-anhār* and *Tazawwud aṣ-shubbān ilā ittibā‘ al-malik ad-dayyān* are two poetic compositions focusing on creed, jurisprudence, and Sufism. The first poem comprises 308 verses, while the second comprises 701 verses. Both poems address similar themes, but the first one is concise, while the second one provides more detailed explanations. Both works were critically analyzed by *Dā’irat Fath al-Ghaffār* in Morocco in the year 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Ahmadu Bamba's most important literature in this sphere have been realized by ‘Abdul Qadir Bousso; in a book he entitled *Min fatāwā Ahmadu Bamba Mbācke wa ajwibatuh-u wa nawāziluhu*. It is a collection of Ahmadu Bamba's legal opinions, jurisprudential legal issues, and his answers to such questions. This book was published in Rabat by Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2019)

3.7.3. Doctrine and Creed

Within the sphere of *Kalām* Ahmadu Bamba produced many poems revered within *Muriđī* scholarly circles. All of the following books are included in the compilation *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 2019:

- I. *Mawāhib al-quddūs fī nazmi mā natharahū as-Sanūsī*: in which he versified as-Sanūsī's (d.1490) *Umm al-barāhīn* with substantial additions, in 652 poetic verses. It was also published with annotations by *Dā’irat Rawd ar-Rayāhīn*.
- II. *Fath al-fattāh al-‘Alīm al-Khabīr fī baththi ‘ilmīn yu’addī ilā al-ajr al-kabīr*: another poetic composition in which Ahmadu Bamba focused on summarizing the text *Umm al-barāhīn* by Imām as-Sanūsī. The key distinction between this work and the previous poem is that Ahmadu Bamba limited this composition to the original text. In contrast, the former poem, *Mawāhib al-quddūs*, included additional content not found in the original text. These additions were drawn from reliable doctrinal sources.
- III. *Jadhbāt aṣ-ṣīghār ‘an la ‘ibin li khidmat al-mukhtār*: It was composed during the early stages of Ahmadu Bamba's life. Compared to *Mawāhib al-quddūs*, it is a more minor work comprising 158 verses.
- IV. *Fayd al-Ghanī al-Mughnī fī nazmi mā ‘an as-sulūk yughnī*: is a poetic composition of the doctrinal section of the treatise written by ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d.386/996). This poem was initially edited and published by Cheikhouna Mbache Mourtada Fāđilu.
- V. *Al-Khidmat al-muṭahhara wa-l-arjūzat al-mumahhara*: a poetic composition that discusses various categories of rational judgments and the necessary Divine attributes. The poem elaborates on the obligatory attributes of the Divine, their opposites, and the evidence supporting them. Additionally, it delves into the obligatory attributes of the prophets, their opposites, and the evidence supporting them.

3.7.4. The Sciences of Arabic Language

A scholar's mastery of the fundamental Islamic sciences often depends on their proficiency in the essentials of the Arabic language and its related disciplines. Ahmadu

Bamba referred to the sciences of the Arabic language as ‘ulūm al-ālāt (the tool sciences). Within this field, Ahmadu Bamba authored books such as:

- I. *Sa ‘ādat aṭ-ṭullāb wa rāḥatu ṭālib al-i ‘rāb*: which revived the teachings of the grammarian scholar Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Dawūd’s (d.) work *al-Ajrūmiyya*. He adapted the original text using his accessible approach to cater to beginners’ needs and proficiency levels.
- II. **A commentary** on the poetic work *Nuzhat az-zarīf wa bughyat al-mūla ‘bi aṭ-taṣrīf* by the literary scholar Adbīj ibn ‘Abdullah al-Kumlīlī ash-Shinqītī (d.1853). Ahmadu Bamba provided a detailed commentary, unraveling the poem’s intricacies and elaborating on its overall content.

3.7.5. Collections (*Majmū ‘āt*) Encompassing the Sayings, Letters, and Legal Opinions of Ahmadu Bamba, Covering Mysticism, Jurisprudence, Creed, and *Tafsīr*

Ahmadu Bamba did not author a standalone *Tafsīr* book; instead, his Quranic commentaries are found in collections (*majmū ‘āt*) assembled by some of his disciples. These compilations include *al-Majmū ‘at as-ṣughrā*,¹⁹⁹ *al-Majmū ‘at al-kubrā*,²⁰⁰ *Jawāmi ‘u al-kalim*,²⁰¹ and *Majmū ‘atu Sheikh Mor Penda Lo*.²⁰² Within these compilations, one can find Ahmadu Bamba’s *Fatwās*, responses, advice, and letters to his followers. Most of these writings have been edited and transformed into well-organized books.

3.7.6. Praising and Apostrophizing Poems

A significant part of Ahmadu Bamba’s works consists of praising and apostrophizing poems dedicated to Allah, the Prophet, and seeking blessings from the Almighty.

¹⁹⁹ Ahmad Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū ‘at as-ṣughrā*, ed. the Khadmiyya Association for Researchers and Scholars (Rabat: al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2018).

²⁰⁰ Ahmad Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū ‘at al-Kubrā*, a manuscript in my collection.

²⁰¹ Sheikh Muhammad Sylla aṭ-Tayyibī, *Jawāmi ‘u al-kalim*, ed. Shu‘aib Kebe (Dakar: ad-Dār as-Seneghāliyya li an-Nashr, 2017).

²⁰² Sheikh Mor Penda Lo, *Majmū ‘atun mushatamilatun ‘alā ba ‘di ajwibati wa waṣṭyā wa rasā ‘il li ash-Sheikh al-Khādīm*, ed. the Cultural and Research Committee of Sheikh Mor Penda Lo Foundation. 2023.

Examples include *Muqadamāt al-amdāh fī mazāyā al-miftāh*, *Muqadamāt al-khidma fī aṣ-ṣalāti ‘alā nabiyyi al-rahma*, and *Mafātīḥ al-bishri wa-l-amāni wa-l-janna fī aṣ-ṣalāti wa-l-taslīmi ‘alā muqīmi as-sunna*, among others.²⁰³ Bamba wrote hundreds of such pieces, a substantial portion of which are utilized in this research²⁰⁴. Most of these works remain in manuscript form, many of which are part of my collection.

3.7.7. Ahmadu Bamba’s Writing Objectives and Methodology

A significant portion of Ahmadu Bamba’s works consists of poems in which he versified prose texts on theology, jurisprudence, Sufism, and other subjects. His objectives in versifying those texts include:

I. Teaching his disciples the essential knowledge of theology, jurisprudence, and Sufism:

Sufism: As he mentioned in one of his letters, “I have instructed all those who are connected to me for the sake of Allah, the Exalted, to learn the doctrines of faith, monotheism, the rules of purification (*ahkām at-tahārat*), prayer, fasting, and everything that is obligatory for every accountable person (*mukallaf*). I have committed myself to provide you with compositions that include all of this for the sake of Allah, the Exalted.”²⁰⁵

II. To advance the Islamic faith by promoting the well-being of all Muslims in both this world and the afterlife.

In another letter, he stated, “Let everyone connected to me know that I have turned to Allah with compositions that will benefit Muslim men and women in this world and the hereafter.”²⁰⁶ He also said in the preface to his book *Zād dhawī at-Ta’llum*, “I have written it [the book] to support the religion of Allah, seeking thereby the pleasure of Allah.”²⁰⁷

III. Making the study material more accessible for students:

Since, versification is easier to memorize, understand, recall, and review. In the preface to his book *al-Jawhar an-Nafīs*, explaining why he versified the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Akhḍarī on Mālikī jurisprudence, he said: “So that it may be a gift for anyone who wishes to memorize it from among the youth of this era.”²⁰⁸

²⁰³ See Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 15-16.

²⁰⁴ See The Appendix section

²⁰⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 27.

²⁰⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-sughrā*, 235.

²⁰⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 461.

²⁰⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 219.

IV. Simplifying complex concepts and lengthy previous works: In the preface to his book *Masālik al-jinān*, he explained his reason for writing the book after mentioning that many scholars before him had written on this subject, saying: “However, their books are lengthy, which has made most of this generation disinterested in them.”²⁰⁹

As for his methodology in authorship, the most important characteristics can be summarized as follows:²¹⁰

- I. Introduction with a self-reference:** He starts with a declarative sentence beginning with “qāla” (he said) or “yaqūlu” (he says), then mentions his name, often attributing himself to his father or grandfather, though sometimes he omits this.
- II. Announcing the book’s title:** He states the name he has chosen for the book, then refers to the source he relied on, if applicable, and its author.
- III. Explaining the purpose of his work:** He often mentions the reason for writing the book and why he chose his source, followed by an outline of the book’s contents and its significance.
- IV. Including a preliminary introduction:** He usually adds an introductory section to the original text, providing relevant information or terms necessary for understanding the book.
- V. Elaborating on specific terms:** He expands on certain linguistic terms and religious terminology without straying from the main topic.
- VI. Attributing information to sources:** He usually cites his sources and attributes statements to their authors, often commenting on them to express his views or preferences in case of differing opinions.
- VII. Maintaining a clear and simple scientific style:** He consistently uses an accessible style in both his poetry and prose, with the poetic form often being even clearer. This approach facilitates quick understanding and easy memorization, ensuring that the ideas are conveyed to the reader’s mind clearly and straightforwardly, free from ambiguity, complexity, or tedium.

²⁰⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 59.

²¹⁰ See *ibid*, 29-30.

VIII. Almost all his works begin with prayers upon the Prophet Muhammad after the *basmala* (invocation of Allah's name) and *hamdala* (praise to Allah), and they end with prayers; repeating the prais of the Prophet whenever the Prophet's name is mentioned. This is a general principle for him, applied equally in his educational writings and other activities.

Upon deeply examining the writings of Ahmadu Bamba, one can discern an aspect of his Sufi state. The titles of these works indicate a spiritual depth embedded within Ahmadu Bamba from an early stage.²¹¹ We see him focusing on purifying the hearts in titles such as *Mulayyin aṣ-ṣudūr* and *Jadbat aṣ-ṣighār ‘an la ‘ib li-khidmat al-mukhtār* (Attraction of the children from playing to service of the Chosen One). Other titles clearly refer to the paths to Allah and their objectives, as in *Masālik al-jinān* (The Paths to paradise), along with the provisions and preparations needed for this journey, such as *Tazawwud ash-Shubbān* (the provisions of the youth), *Silāh Ahl al-Khawf* (Arsenal of the people of fear). These are terms, concepts, and compositions indicate that Ahmadu Bamba was not only concerned with abstract knowledge but also longed to reach the presence of Allah and guide others toward it.²¹²

Alongside these meanings revolving within the realm of spiritual elevation and journeying towards the Creator, we find descriptions of the seekers recurring frequently in the titles of his works. For example, the righteous ones in his book *Hisn al-abrār al-hudāt* (The fortress of the righteous guided ones), the guided ones in his poem *Kanz al-muhtadīn* (The treasure of the guided ones). On the other hand, we can perceive in the titles of his works his concern for the worldly and otherworldly happiness of the aspirant. We can glimpse this through his combination of the worldly and the hereafter in *Majma‘ an-nūrāyn fī fawā’id ad-dārāyn* (The confluence of the two lights in the benefits of the two abodes) and in *Matlab al-fawzayn* (The Objectives of the Two Triumphs). Thus, we find that the writings of Ahmadu Bamba carry profound meanings that reveal the spiritual dimension of his life and his methodology.²¹³

²¹¹ Rawdu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 72.

²¹² See Ibid, 73.

²¹³ See Ibid, 73-74.

3.8. His Relationship with the Local and Colonial Authorities

Ahmadu Bamba viewed both foreign and local political authorities as an unjust system of governance marked by oppression of the population, religious ignorance, and a corruption-driven agenda. Therefore, he distanced himself from them, advocating for keeping a safe distance and only engaging within regulated boundaries.²¹⁴ He expressed this stance with the following words: “Stay away from mingling with these people (the authorities), for it is among the ugliest of things. But treating them nicely is recommended, as stated in a Hadith [of the Prophet] firmly established.”²¹⁵ That was why he established his cities like *Dār as-Salām* (1886), *Tūbā* (1888), *Mbacke Bāri* (1995), and others, to provide a suitable environment for his mission far away from these authorities and any distractions.²¹⁶

After completing their spiritual training, the Murids would return to their hometowns, saturated with a unique spirituality that made them attractive with sincere love, Attracting souls and minds and continued Ahmadu Bamba’s mission of educating others. Some of these Murids, along with their followers, faced harassment, persecution, and attacks from princes, ministers, and some religious leaders in their places of residence.²¹⁷

Despite facing hardships, the Murids remained steadfast. They were tried, their properties seized, their homes burned, and their crops and possessions taken as a result of the rulers’ hostility of some Muslims. These hardships only increased their determination and sincere commitment, they made them turn away from the adornments of the world and fully dedicate themselves to the service of the Prophet and their Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba.²¹⁸

The French colonization authorities initially did not seem to have a negative stance towards Ahmadu Bamba. Communications were conducted peacefully and clearly

²¹⁴ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 117.

²¹⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Jawhar an-naftis*, 124.

²¹⁶ See al-Daghānī, *Irwā’ u-n-nadīm*, 90.

²¹⁷ See *ibid*, 41.

²¹⁸ See *Ibid*, 44-43.

until rumors, espionage, and schemes clouded them.²¹⁹ Muhammad al-Bashir mentioned that Sheikh Mbacke Bousso (A Senegalese scholar and a senior disciple of Ahmadu Bamba) informed him that Ahmadu Bamba sent him when he was heading towards Jolof, to consult the governor of Ndar.²²⁰ Sheikh Mbacke recounted:

I went to the governor: he was joyous about the message and consultation. He welcomed me honorably and sent me a large load of fabric as a gift, and the matter continued in this manner until the world became darkened for us with the schemes of the informers and the plots of spies, and the rulers and princes continued to send for investigation and inquiry until things unfolded as they did.²²¹

The colonizers realized that they cannot fully establish control over the country or secure their grip on power unless they eliminated this widely revered Sheikh who was surrounded by love and respect from his increasing number of followers, coming to him from all directions. Consequently, there would be fortified and resilient centers where colonial influence could not penetrate and impose its will. These centers were the gatherings of the disciples, attracting large and growing crowds who admired their leader and strengthened their trust in him. Some citizens, having betrayed their honor to the colonialists and lost their conscience, acted as spies against Ahmadu Bamba, falsely claiming to the colonial governor that he was amassing weapons and recruiting fighters to attack the French.²²² The French occupation feared that Ahmadu Bamba would call his obedient followers to declare *jihād* against them.²²³ Subsequently, they called him to Ndar for a fictitious trial, intending to exile him from the country.

3.8.1. The Exile to Gabon

After receiving numerous complaints, the French colonizers summoned Ahmadu Bamba to Saint-Louis, the capital of Senegal at that time, to address the ongoing accusations. However, Ahmadu Bamba initially delayed responding to the summons for some reasons. When he eventually arrived to answer the call, he insisted that the accuser appear in person to substantiate the allegations against him. However, the Senegalese authorities deliberately misinterpreted his actions during the meeting with

²¹⁹ Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 120.

²²⁰ The Capital of Senegal at that time.

²²¹ Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 79.

²²² Muhammad al-Murtada Mbacke, *al-Murīdiyya al-haqīqa wa-l-wāqi ' wa āfāq al-mustaqbāl*, 65-66.

²²³ al-'Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyā*, 68.

the foreign authorities. They argued that his continuous remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) during the meeting indicated a lack of respect for them. Ahmadu Bamba stayed in Saint-Louis for several weeks before the decision to exile him to Gabon was implemented.²²⁴

One of the noteworthy points to underline in this context is his awareness of the historical and political context, besides his absolute commitment to accomplishing his mission.²²⁵ He said: “The accusation that I do *jihād* is correct [but not the kind of *jihād* you mentioned]. I do have a mission that comprises *jihād* with two significant mechanisms, knowledge and righteousness”.²²⁶

He was exiled to Gabon in 1895, a country where many expatriates, including those expelled by French authorities, did not safely return due to their harsh conditions.²²⁷ During his time there, the commander who had exiled him also found himself in the same place. This commander believed his misfortunes resulted from his wrongful actions against Ahmadu Bamba. Additionally, he cautioned the commander overseeing Ahmadu Bamba’s affairs to refrain from causing him any disturbance.²²⁸

Ahmadu Bamba spent nearly eight years in Gabon, where he encountered significant events and profound mystical experiences and incidents with the authorities, and the local people.²²⁹ Having found the solitude required for worshipping Allah, achieving the spiritual advancements he sought, and composing numerous valuable praises for the Prophet, he eventually returned to Senegal in 1902. Upon his return, his religious activities ascended to a more influential level.²³⁰

²²⁴ al-‘Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyā*, 142-143.

²²⁵ Diouf, *Murīdiyyā*, 23.

²²⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, “*Yā jumlatan*” in *al-Muntqā min qasā’idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’, 2024), 367.

²²⁷ al-‘Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyā*, 104-105.

²²⁸ al-Daghānī, *Irwā’u-n-nadīm*, 150.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

²³⁰ al-‘Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyā*, 71.

3.8.2. The Second Exile to Mauritania

Ahmadu Bamba's return to Senegal was eagerly anticipated by his devoted disciples and religious leaders.²³¹ Upon his arrival from Gabon, the public's adoration for him had reached unprecedented levels, and his followers had multiplied significantly. Due to this surge in popularity, the French government opted to exile him again to Mauritania in 1903.²³²

The French colonizers favored Mauritania because they perceived it as a land with numerous esteemed scholars and revered sheikhs. They believed Ahmadu Bamba would not stand out among other sheikhs in Mauritania, and the local people would not be attracted to him as they were in Senegal. Additionally, some researchers suggest that the assurance given by Sheikh Sīdiya Baba²³³ (d.1924), stating that Ahmadu Bamba would not cause any disturbances as feared, played a role in the decision to send him to Mauritania.²³⁴

However, rather than rejecting his Sufī doctrine, various Islamic groups in Mauritania warmly welcomed him. Furthermore, many Mauritians adhered to his doctrine and used his Sufī litany. Ahmadu Bamba continued his mission of worshipping Allah and benefiting people. Thus, the French authorities likely realized they could not hinder Ahmadu Bamba's mission or deter his disciples from visiting him. Additionally, the favorable testimony from the local administrative representative highlighted Ahmadu Bamba as a non-violent Jihadist who benevolently supported the community during his stay. Furthermore, some of his Murids appealed to the French authorities in Senegal, requesting his return to his homeland, a request that was eventually granted in 1907.²³⁵

²³¹ al-Daghānī, *Irwā 'u-n-nadīm*, 157.

²³² Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 25.

²³³ He was a prominent Mauritanian scholar and a friend of Ahmadu Bamba.

²³⁴ See Rawdu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 247.

²³⁵ Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 26.

3.8.3. The Restrained Residence in Senegal

The regular gathering of large crowds around Ahmadu Bamba alarmed French authorities, who feared a loss of control over his educational activities, which contradicted their objectives. Consequently, they regularly formulated strategies influenced by diverse political considerations to determine the limitations imposed on Ahmadu Bamba's movements.

3.8.3.1. Thiayén Diolof

After four years in Mauritania, Ahmadu Bamba returned to Senegal (Thiayén Diolof). As usual, the French authorities aimed to regulate his actions and keep him isolated from the numerous people seeking to meet him, placing him in a location difficult for Murids to access. Despite the challenging location, Murids continued to travel there in large numbers. Ahmadu Bamba established *Dār ar-Rahmān*, later replaced by *Dār al-Quddūs*. The popularity of educational activities increased and the *Murīdī* community expanded. Due to the distance of the location, authorities could not oversee his educational activities, leading them to change tactics by relocating him to Diourbél in 1912.²³⁶

3.8.3.2. Diourbel

Ahmadu Bamba was relocated from Thiayén Diolof to Diourbel, which, at the time, was considered a more secular location than other provinces. The colonizers believed that placing him and his Murids in a city dominated by worldly pursuits would hinder his spiritual education efforts. Additionally, they anticipated that sharing the exact location with him would make it easier to monitor his activities.²³⁷ In 1912, when the decision to move him to Diourbel was made, Ahmadu Bamba expressed his perspective, stating that:

They demanded my move to Diourbel (in 1912); indeed, if they realized the hidden secret [in my residence there], they would not require [that]. The move [they demanded from me] leads my enemies to death or harm, but differently for my cause; it is more substantiation [from Allah] and an absolute honor.²³⁸

²³⁶ Ibid, 27.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-fuyūdāt ar-rabāniyya*, ed. 'Abdu-l-Qādir Mbacke Sheikh Maymūna (n.p., 2010), 160.

Ahmadu Bamba lived in Diourbel for the last fifteen years of his life, from 1912 to 1927. During this period, he built a grand mosque, commencing its construction in the year 1918, and it was completed after nine years. It became the first mosque in Senegal with this unique architectural design.²³⁹

In 1925, Ahmadu Bamba gathered some of his senior disciples and informed them of his intention to build a central mosque in his city, Touba. His disciples collaborated to fulfill his wish, gathering resources and tools, even after his passing. The construction began on Friday, the 25th of March 1932, under the guidance of his first successor, Sheikh Muhammad al-Mustafa Mbacke (d.1945), and it was completed during the tenure of his second successor, Sheikh Muhammad al-Fāḍil Mbacke (d.1968). The disciples contributed substantial funds and dedicated their efforts beyond description. The mosque was inaugurated on the 7th of June 1963 in a historic ceremony attended by distinguished scholars, government officials, including the President Léopold Sédar Senghor, and members of the diplomatic corps.²⁴⁰

3.9. His Passing

Ahmadu Bamba passed away on the 19th of July 1927, leaving a remarkable life of submission and devotion to Allah.²⁴¹ He enunciated, praying for his mission's success, "Oh Allah! I ask you to bestow upon me a family (followers) that will revive the Prophet Muhammad's path (Islam)."²⁴²

Ahmadu Bamba embraced all Muslims, loving for them what he loved for himself. He believed in the supremacy of belonging to the realm of Islam over any other affiliation. He considered all Muslim brothers and sisters, even if they differed in their theological doctrines, legal schools, and spiritual practices. He stated, "The believers, both men and women, are brothers and sisters to me, and my life is dedicated to goodness."²⁴³ In one of his letters, he emphasized, "note: let it be known to everyone who reviews this document that the writer of this paper forgives anyone who wronged him. He does

²³⁹ *ar-Rābiṭa, Hayātu ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke*, 23.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

²⁴¹ Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 26.

²⁴² Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Qaṣīdatāni li talabi zawjatin sāliḥa*, a manuscript in my collection

²⁴³ *ar-Rābiṭa, Hayātu ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke*, 25.

not invoke harm upon oppressors. He seeks forgiveness for every believer connected to him and wishes for every believer not linked with him what he wishes for those who are.”²⁴⁴

Following the death of Ahmadu Bamba, who had not appointed a caliph, his disciples eventually reached a consensus to organize the succession, leading to the appointment of his sons and grandsons. From 1927 to 2007, the entire Murīdī community rallied behind his sons, namely Sheikh Muhammad al-Moustpha (d.1945), Sheikh Muhammad al-Fādil (d.1968), Sheikh ‘Abdul Aḥad (d.1989), Sheikh ‘Abdul Qādir (d.1990), and Sheikh Ṣāliḥ (d.2007). Following the passing of Sheikh Ṣāliḥ, the era of his grandsons commenced. Sheikh Muhammad al-Amine Bāra served as the Caliph from 2007 to 2010, succeeded by Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār from 2010 to 2018. The current Caliph is Sheikh Muhammad al-Muntqā. These caliphs ensured the order’s prosperity, exerting considerable influence in Senegal. Additionally, they prioritized the completion of Ahmadu Bamba’s unfinished projects.²⁴⁵

3.10. Notable Figures’ Remarkable Testimonials

The notable accounts provided by prominent figures serve as valuable reflections of the significant of individuals like Ahmadu Bamba. Having shared historical events and experiences with him, these individuals offer invaluable insights into his impact. Among the testimonials regarding Ahmadu Bamba and his mission, the researcher will focus on three of the most influential personalities to exemplify the profound descriptions attributed to him.

3.10.1. al-Qādī Madiakhaté Kala (d.1902)

He was a scholar and a close associate of Ahmadu Bamba’s father, who occupies a distinguished position in Senegal’s Islamic intellectual history. Renowned as one of the eminent Sufi teachers, he imparted valuable teachings to Ahmadu Bamba. Through descriptive poems, he eloquently praised Ahmadu Bamba’s eminence and exceptional methods of educating his followers. In one poem, he expressed, “my words are

²⁴⁴ Ahmad Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū ‘at as-sughrā*, 285.

²⁴⁵ See Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 30-33.

dedicated to Ahmadu Bamba, a man who has forsaken all but the Almighty, thus becoming the master of humanity. He emerged as a refuge for the people in times of adversity.” In another verse, he remarked, “Ahmadu Bamba, once a son, now a father; once a student, now a Sheikh.”²⁴⁶

3.10.2. Sheikh El-Hadji Malick Sy (d.1922)

He is an influential figure in Senegal’s religious history and is acknowledged as one of the revivalists of the *Tijjāniyya* Order in Senegal. Renowned for his scholarly accomplishments and courageous demeanor, he held a prominent position among Senegal’s significant religious figures. The profound and sincere relationship he shared with Ahmadu Bamba was widely acknowledged.²⁴⁷ Sheikh El-Hadji Malick Sy expressing his admiration for Ahmadu Bamba’s righteousness, asserted, “each of us, the sheikhs, has repented for a sin or mistake committed before, except Ahmadu Bamba, whose childhood was as righteous as his adulthood.”²⁴⁸

3.10.3. The Commander Antoine Lasselves

Antoine Lasselves was in charge of the mission of finding Ahmadu Bamba’s true persona from 1913 to 1915. After three months of inspection, disturbance, intense auscultation, and a thorough examination, he rejected all charges against Ahmadu Bamba.²⁴⁹ Below is an excerpt from the last report he made about Ahmadu Bamba’s persona:

This Sheikh has an unusual power and human intellect cannot conceive his ability to control emotions. The enormous obedience he has from people is not habitual. Moreover, their profound admiration for him makes them feel like they are blind and deaf. He is as if he has the lustrous light the prophets usually have or the heavenly order that they come with, those uncommon abilities we used to find when one reads their history (of the prophets) and their nations. The only difference between him and those prophets is that those extraordinary capacities his personality comprises are from pure heart, good consideration to people, and good intention to friends and enemies as well; is a reason why many of the previous people who lived with him were jealous regardless of their level in righteousness, acceptance, and virtues that many had for them. The most unjust and ignorant people about human realities are those who accused him of what he was innocent of, such as love for prestige and authority.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 409-410.

²⁴⁷ Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 29.

²⁴⁸ al-Daghānī, *Irwā’ u-n-nadīm*, 265.

²⁴⁹ Diouf, *Murīdiyya*, 30.

²⁵⁰ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 379-383.

CHAPTER IV

AHMADU BAMBA'S SUFI THOUGHT: INFLUENTIAL FIGURES AND SOURCES

In the previous section titled “Ahmadu Bamba and the Preceding Sufi Heritage,” we discussed that Ahmadu Bamba did not wholly embrace *Baghdādī* Sufism; he meticulously selected elements that resonated with the needs of his society across all dimensions. He also intentionally distanced himself from associations with theoretical Sufism, suggesting a purposeful selection process that prioritized practical application. This section delves into the key figures and sources that profoundly influenced Ahmadu Bamba’s Sufi writings throughout his life, focusing on the books he frequently referenced. This analysis is essential for elucidating the fundamental characteristics of Bamba’s Sufi thought. By examining these foundational influences, we gain deeper insight into the development and distinct characteristics of his spiritual and intellectual legacy.

The chapter will begin by discussing the key sheikhs in Bamba’s life, focusing on their role in his spiritual progression until he declared that he had been ordered to pledge allegiance exclusively to Prophet Muhammad. This discussion will highlight the sources Bamba frequently referenced in his Sufi writings. Subsequently, the chapter will delve into his relationships with his former sheikhs and their *wirds* during the period that proceeded. Each stage contains numerous sub-stages, which will be carefully analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Bamba’s spiritual evolution and literary contributions. The approach adopted here is to provide a brief overview of each scholar’s life, followed by a concise discussion of their presence in Ahmadu Bamba’s writings, and concluding with examples of their influence.

4.1. Before Pledging Allegiance to Prophet Muhammad (1854-1893)

This stage is considered one of the most significant phases in Ahmadu Bamba's life. During this period, his Sufi personality was formed, and he proclaimed his call for renewal, while outlining the principles of his Sufi order. Moreover, this stage marked the prolific production of his scholarly legacy, including his most renowned works on Sufism and other fields. Additionally, this period witnessed numerous political and social changes that Ahmadu Bamba interacted with, playing a prominent role in shaping his Sufi thought, as previously discussed. Reflecting on the course of Ahmadu Bamba's life during this stage and the developments that occurred in his Sufi persona, we can divide this period into three sub-stages: the stage of upbringing and the initiation into the Sufi path, the stage of seeking knowledge and authorship, and finally, the Stage of Collecting Sufi *wirds* and searching for sheikhs.

4.1.1. The Stage of Upbringing and Initiation into the Sufi Path

This stage, roughly from Ahmadu Bamba's birth in 1854 to 1866 when he turned twelve, overlaps with the subsequent stage. During this period, his mother, Sokhna Maryam Bousso, had a prominent role, as she had a profound influence on Bamba's education and spiritual life. This subject was examined in Chapter Two of this study, particularly in the context of Bamba's initiation into the Sufi path.

4.1.2. The Stage of Seeking Knowledge and Authorship

This stage extends from Ahmadu Bamba's early pursuit of knowledge until his father's passing in 1881, marked a crucial phase in his scholarly development. This period laid the foundation for his Sufi journey and marked the beginning of his profound engagement with Sufi literature. In the second chapter of this study, we elaborated on Ahmadu Bamba's meticulous study of the works of renowned Sufi scholars, gathering a diverse collection from various Sufi orders and predecessors of the Sufi path. we also highlighted the significant influence of his father, Muhammad ibn Ḥabībullāh, during this period, noting that under his guidance, Bamba engaged in ascetic practices, fasting, and constant remembrance of Allah.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ See Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 130-132.

Besides his parents, Ahmadu Bamba's spiritual journey and intellectual heritage were influenced by prominent figures such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzalī (d.505/1111), 'Abdul-Wahhāb ash-Sha'rānī (d.1565), Ahmad Zarrūq (d.1493), Ibn 'Atā' Allah as-Sakandarī (d.1309), and Mauritanian scholars like Sheikh Sīdī Mukhtār al-Kuntyyu (d.1811) and Muhammad ibn al-Mukhtār ad-Daymānī (d.1753). These scholars played crucial roles in shaping Ahmadu Bamba's understanding of Sufism and contributed significantly to his spiritual development. Their contribution in shaping Bamba's spiritual life and thought will now be examined in detail.

4.1.2.1. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzalī

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzalī (d.505/1111) is considered one of the renewers of the fifth century of the *Hijra*. He represents a symbol of moderate Sunni Sufism, adhering to the Quran and Sunnah while rejecting esoteric and Gnostic views that influenced some Sufis through the impact of philosophy or ancient Eastern religions.²⁵² Al-Ghazzalī had a notable impact on Ahmadu Bamba in his early stages of spiritual development, and this influence continued into the later stages of his life, with al-Ghazzalī consistently present in Bamba's Sufi thought. Some aspects of this influence can be summarized as follows:

I. The first Sufi book acquired by Ahmadu Bamba in his early days was al-Ghazzalī's *Bidāyat al-Hidāya*. He thoroughly read and studied this book, then versified it into poetry in 1875 to facilitate memorization for his students. He named this work *Mulayyin aṣ-ṣūdūrīn aww mudhakkir al-Qubūr*. Later, during his stay in Mauritania in 1906, he abridged and refined it, naming it *Munawwir aṣ-ṣūdūr ladā al-Manāzil wa 'Inda ad-Dūr*. This book was the primary source for Ahmadu Bamba's early involvement in Sufism. Ahmadu Bamba narrates a captivating tale of his first book acquisition, *Bidāyat al-Hidāya*. He recounts seeing it with a Mauritanian in the region of Sālum and negotiating its purchase for a dirham. Wanting to honor his commitment, Ahmadu Bamba took the Mauritanian to collect the price from a well-known merchant who was a disciple of his father. However, upon seeing Ahmadu Bamba's ragged clothing, the merchant reprimanded him and provided a new white garment, urging

²⁵² See Shams ad-Dīn adh-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām an-nubalā'* (Beirut: ar-Risāla foundation, 1985), 322-346.

him to discard the old one. Ahmadu Bamba complied outwardly but secretly retained his old garment. After the encounter, he returned to the Mauritanian, exchanged the new garment for the book, and dedicated himself to studying it diligently.²⁵³

II. In his early life, Ahmadu Bamba extensively engaged with the works of al-Ghazzālī, particularly focusing on *Minhāj al-‘Ābidīn* (The Path of the Worshipers) and *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences).²⁵⁴ This led to his heavy reliance on these works and their author, especially *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn* which served as a primary source for Ahmadu Bamba’s work *Masālik al-jinān*. Additionally, al-Ghazzālī’s *Minhāj al-‘Ābidīn* was also an essential source for some of Ahmadu Bamba’s writings, fatwas, and valuable advice, such as *Fath al-Mannān fī Jawāb ‘Abd ar-Rahmān* and *Silk al-Jawāhir fī Akhbār as-Sara’ir*.

If we delve into the book *Masālik al-jinān*, which is considered Ahmadu Bamba’s largest book in Sufism and represents the essence of his vision in practical Sufism, we see him frequently referring to al-Ghazzālī to the extent that he specifically uses the term “*qāla*” (he said) to refer to al-Ghazzālī, while mentioning other scholars by their names. Ahmadu Bamba mentioned in the introduction of this book: “But when I mention ‘he said’ with the pronoun (he), it refers to the famous al-Ghazzālī. And for others among these people (the Sufi scholars), I explicitly mention their names.”²⁵⁵

Examples of his mention of al-Ghazzālī include his statement in his book *al-Jawhar an-Nafīs*: “The reality of *riyā’* (showing off) according to the wise people, is performing worship intending to seek people’s praise. And *riyā’* according to our Imām al-Ghazzālī, is the abundance of righteous deeds with virtues, so that he may attain in the hearts of people an amazing status in life.”²⁵⁶ And he said, quoting him defining Sufism in his poem *Tazawwud ash-Shubbān*: “The definition of Sufism according to al-Ghazzālī, is stripping our hearts for Allah, with disdain for anything other than Him, out of the heart and body, may Allah guide us.”²⁵⁷ And he said, quoting

²⁵³ See ad-Daghānī, *An-Nubdha al-mubāraka*, 8-9.

²⁵⁴ Serigne Elhadj Mbacke, *Waxtāne Serigne Touba*, a manuscript in Wolof language in my collection, 1/35.

²⁵⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 60.

²⁵⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, ed. ar-Rābiṭa al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī’, 2022), 224.

²⁵⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 577.

him regarding the rulings of Sufism in *Masālik al-jinān*: “As for Sufism, it is an obligatory duty according to al-Ghazzālī, without falsehood.”²⁵⁸

In his book *Silk al-jawāhir*, Ahmadu Bamba extensively relied on the books *al-Minhāj* and *at-Tibr al-masbūk* by al-Ghazzālī. An example of this is his statement in *Silk al-Jawāhir*:

And al-Ghazzālī said in *al-Minhāj*: ‘Know that I asked some of our teachers about the practice of our saints in reciting Surat al-Wāqi‘a during times of hardship. Is it not intended thereby that Allah Almighty would alleviate their hardship and grant them some worldly provision as customary? So how can the desire for worldly enjoyment be legitimate through actions of the Hereafter?’²⁵⁹

Similarly, in the same book, Ahmadu Bamba stated:

And in *at-Tibr al-masbūk* by al-Ghazzālī - may Allah be pleased with him – he states that Moses (peace be upon him) was supplicating to his Lord on the mountain, saying in his supplication: ‘O Lord, show me Your justice and fairness.’ So, Allah said, ‘O Moses, you are a bold and impulsive man who cannot endure patiently.’ Moses replied, ‘O Lord, I am capable of patience with Your help.’²⁶⁰

III. In Ahmadu Bamba’s view, al-Ghazzālī was more than a great Sufi scholar from whom knowledge was acquired; he was deeply revered and considered a spiritual guide in Sufism. This is evident in how Ahmadu Bamba often refers to al-Ghazzālī as “our Sheikh” or “our Imām” in his writings. For example, in *Masālik al-jinān*, he says: “Like our Sheikh, the reformist al-Ghazzālī.” And in the poem *Jālibat al-masarra wa dāfi‘at al-madarra*, he states: “Our Imām, our Sheikh al-Ghazzālī.” Additionally, as a sign of his belief in al-Ghazzālī’s spiritual authority, Bamba includes him as one of the five individuals he invoked to Allah, seeking their intercession. In his famous poem “*Khamsatu ar-rijāl*” (The Five Men), he says:

O our Lord, to You I complain of my state, through the Prophet and the five men: My sheikh and savior ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī,²⁶¹ the possessor of knowledge and gnosis. Then Abū

²⁵⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 108.

²⁵⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 87-88; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Minhāj al-‘ābidīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Muqāṭṭam, 2017), 348.

²⁶⁰ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 55; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *at-Tibr al-masbūk* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1988), 48-49.

²⁶¹ Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d.561 AH), the founder of the *Qādirīyya* Sufi order.

Yazīd al-Bistāmī,²⁶² the venerable saint, the resolute. Then Tayfūr ibn ‘Isā²⁶³ the saint. Then Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī. The fifth is Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī,²⁶⁴ the prominent saint. O our Lord, O our Lord, O our Lord, O our Lord, O our Lord, O our Lord, respond to us. Through Muṣṭafā, the best of creations, Ahmad, bring them to me at my death tomorrow. Save me through their status from disgrace and guide me through them to the right path. And rectify what has become corrupt in my affairs. Their status makes my path easy.²⁶⁵

Therefore, it is evident from the foregoing discussion that al-Ghazzālī significantly influenced Ahmadu Bamba, both as a scholar and as a Sufi. This influence is prominently evident in Ahmadu Bamba’s Sufi writings from the early to the later stages of his life. This influence is manifested in the continuous reference to al-Ghazzālī in his writings and his reliance on his books and concepts in analyzing and interpreting many religious and Sufi issues. Furthermore, the influence is evident in the incorporation of al-Ghazzālī’s ideas and their rejuvenation in a manner that harmonizes with Ahmadu Bamba’s vision, making it effectively responsive to his time and environment.

4.1.2.2. Ahmad Zarrūq

Sheikh Abū al-‘Abbās Ahmad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Isā al-Barnasī (attributed to the Berber tribe of Barānis) al-Fāsī, known as Zarrūq (d.899/1493), was a prominent *faqīh*, a Sufi leader, and a Sheikh of the *Shādhiliyya* order. He authored works in various fields.²⁶⁶ Ahmad Zarrūq is also considered one of the Sufi figures to whom Ahmadu Bamba frequently referred in his writings, particularly in some of his advice to his disciples, as will be seen. Among Zarrūq’s books that Ahmadu Bamba often referred to in some of his compositions and fatwas are: ‘*Uddat al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq* (The Preparation of the Sincere Disciple), *Urjūza: ‘ūyūb an-nafs wa dawā’uha* (The Poem: The Flaws of the Self and Their Remedies), *an-Naṣīha al-Kāfiya* (The Sufficient Advice), *an-Nasā’ih az-zarrūqiyya* (zarrouqian Advice), and *Qawā‘id at-Taṣawwuf* (Principles of Sufism).

²⁶² Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī al-Kabīr, Tayfūr ibn ‘Isā ibn Surooshān (d.261 /875), one of the prominent Sufi masters in *Khurāsān*.

²⁶³ Tayfūr ibn ‘Isā ibn Ādām ibn ‘Isā az-Zāhid. He shares the same name, father’s name, and locality with the previously mentioned figure. (See Abū ‘Abd ar-Rahmān as-Sulamī, *Tabaqāt as-Ṣūfiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 68; ‘Abdu-l-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *ar-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1974), 6.)

²⁶⁴ Ma‘rūf ibn Fayrūz al-Karkhī al-Baghdādī (d.200/815), one of the renowned early ascetics and Sufi masters.

²⁶⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān sa ‘ādāt al-murīdīn*, 339-341.

²⁶⁶ See ‘Umar Riḍā Kahhāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1957), 1/155.

One example of his reference to Zarrūq in his writings is his elucidation of the principles of Sufism in his admonition entitled *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he said:

Take this, O Maḥmūd, if [Allah] the Exalted wills, it will heal a seeker and a desired one from distress. If you inquire about Sufism, to be counted among those who have gnosis. Then Sufism has well-known principles, nine things according to the people of gnosis. The first is adherence to the Quran and the Sunnah of the chosen, the one of correctness. And abandoning desires and innovations (bida'). Likewise, venerating the humble, devout sheikhs. Excusing the faults of all creatures. Perpetuating the wird for the sake of Allah. Among them is the abandonment of all permissions (rukhaṣ) and the abandonment of interpretations, for this is what 'Zarrūq' explicitly stated. He said, 'These are the principles; whoever neglects them is deprived of reaching [Allah].'²⁶⁷

This statement originates from the book '*Uddat al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq*', where Zarrūq quotes Abū al-Qāsim an-Naṣrābādhī saying: "The foundation of Sufism is adherence to the Quran and the Sunnah, abandoning desires and innovations, venerating the sanctities of the sheikhs, excusing the faults of creatures, perpetuating the regular *wirds*, and abandoning permissions and interpretations." Then Zarrūq added: "I say, these are the principles; whoever neglects them is deprived of reaching Allah."²⁶⁸

Another example of his referral to Zarrūq's books is his mention of *al-Waṣīyya al-kāfiya* in the same previous poem, in the context of mentioning some qualities of the seeker:

And it came from them that five qualities lead the seeker to attainment and union. The first is adherence to congregational prayer, for it enriches the follower. And the second is avoidance of stubborn people, in private and in public, and from corrupt individuals. Except for advising them gently (...), Zarrūq mentioned this in '*al-Waṣīyya*.' May he remain content and dignified.²⁶⁹

4.1.2.3. Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī

Jalāl ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Rahmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muhammad al-Khuḍayrī as-Suyūṭī (d.911/1505) was an eminent Sufi²⁷⁰ and Islamic scholar known for his expertise in jurisprudence, Hadith, *Usūl al-Fiqh*, history, and literature. He authored nearly 600 works, including *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Quran*, *al-Alfiya fī muṣṭalaḥ al-hadīth*, and *Tafsīr al-jalālayn*.²⁷¹ In his writings, Ahmadu Bamba frequently references the works of as-

²⁶⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣughra*, 188-189.

²⁶⁸ Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad Zarrūq, '*Uddat al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2006), 37.

²⁶⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣughra*, 196-197.

²⁷⁰ For more information about as-Suyūṭī's Sufi affiliations, See Ferzende İdiz, *İmam Suyuti: Tasavvuf Risaleleri* (Istanbul: Nizamiye Akademi Yayınları, 2017); Éric Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie* (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, Institut français de Damas, 1996), 516.

²⁷¹ See Khayru-ddīn Az-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām* (Beirut: Dār al-Ilm Lilmalāyīn, 2002), 3/301.

Suyūṭī. One notable example is *al-Jāmi‘ aş-Şaghīr min Hadīth al-Bashīr an-Nadhīr*, a Hadīth book by as-Suyūṭī. Ahmadu Bamba cites a Hadīth from this book in his poem *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he states:

We have received from the best of creation – peace, and blessings be upon him, the bestower of gifts - that preoccupation with the faults of creation, hardness of heart due to the rejection of truth, love for the world, and lack of modesty, and injustice - where there is no limit. Five qualities render deeds null, and a sixth for them is prolonged hope. Narrated by Sheikh Jalāl ad-Dīn in ‘al-Jāmi‘ aş-Şaghīr’ with clarification.²⁷²

Bushrā al-ka‘ib fī liqā‘ al-habīb is another book by as-Suyūṭī, in which he discusses the conditions of the intermediate realm (*barzakh*). It is summarized from his larger work, *Sharh aş-ṣudūr bi sharh aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-l-qubūr*. Ahmadu Bamba extensively quoted from this book in his work *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, especially in the second chapter, where he collected Hadīths and reports related to the trials and tribulations of the grave. For example, he states: “as-Suyūṭī said in *Bushrā al-ka‘ib bi liqā‘ al-mawlā al-habīb*: ‘It was narrated from Bilāl ibn Sa‘d that...’”²⁷³ and “In ‘*Bushrā al-ka‘ib*’ also Ibn Abī ad-Dunyā narrated...”²⁷⁴

Ahmadu Bamba also cited verses of as-Suyūṭī in his treatise *Miftāh al-ghuyūb* while discussing the deeds beneficial to a person in the grave, without mentioning the name of the book. Upon investigation, it was found that as-Suyūṭī mentioned these verses in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Here is the text quoted by Ahmadu Bamba:

Indeed, the esteemed Imām as-Suyūṭī – may Allah be pleased with him – compiled several qualities, urged by the Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him – in the form of a report, with his statement – peace and blessings be upon him –: ‘When a person dies, his actions are sealed except for ten qualities.’ He versified them as follows: ‘When the son of Adam dies, no actions continue upon him except for ten: Knowledge that he disseminated, a supplicating offspring, planting palm trees, and ongoing charity, inheriting a Quran, endowing a stream, digging a well, or the provision of water, a house for the traveler, built for refuge, or a place erected for remembrance, Teaching the noble Quran, so grasp these from the narrations with precision.’²⁷⁵

²⁷² Ibid, 192.

²⁷³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 133.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 134.

²⁷⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at al-kubrā*, 578-579.

4.1.2.4. ‘Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha‘rānī

Sheikh Abū al-Mawāhib ‘Abdu-l-Wahhāb ibn Ahmed ibn ‘Alī al-Hanafī, attributed to Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, ash-Sha‘rānī al-Maṣrī (d.973/1565), was one of the most prominent scholars of his time and among the esteemed masters of Sufism. He authored numerous works in various fields.²⁷⁶ ash-Sha‘rānī is considered one of the Sufi figures who had a prominent presence in the writings of Ahmadu Bamba during this stage of his life. It has been established that the latter, at the beginning of his path, extensively studied the books of ash-Sha‘rānī, especially his book *Kashf al-ghumma*.²⁷⁷ Among the books of ash-Sha‘rānī frequently referred to by Ahmed Bamba are *Laṭā’if al-minan*, known as *al-Minan al-kubrā*, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī ma ‘rifat qawā‘id aṣ-ṣūfiyya*, *al-Kawkab ash-shāhiq fī l-farq bayn al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq wa ghayr aṣ-ṣādiq*, *Tanbīh al-mughtarrīn*, and *Mukhtaṣar at-tadhkira fī aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al-ākhira*.

Perhaps the most significant book of Ahmadu Bamba, where the influence of ash-Sha‘rānī’s works is evident, is the poem entitled *Huqqa al-bukā‘u*, in which he extensively refers to several books of the latter. For example, when describing the qualities of “the sincere disciple” in this poem, he says: “Among their qualities is immersion in the knowledge of Sharī‘a alongside the knowledge of truth before the discipline of the self. Because disciplining the self with guiding people before delving into these two sciences is conducive to arrogance and misery.”²⁷⁸ These two verses encapsulate the meaning of ash-Sha‘rānī’s statement in *al-Kawkab ash-shāhiq*: “Among the ethics of sincere disciples is that none of them seeks to enter the path of a group until after immersing himself in the sciences of Sharī‘a until he is allowed to proceed to another matter.”²⁷⁹

In the same poem, Ahmadu Bamba also mentions the pillars of Sainthood (*al-wilāya*): “The pillars of the house of the Sufis are four, on them is founded the structure of *al-wilāya*: Silence and prolonged hunger followed by wakefulness, and isolation, through

²⁷⁶ See Kahhāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn*, 6/218.

²⁷⁷ Elhadj Mbâcke, *Waxtāne Serigne Touba*, a manuscript in Wolof language, 1/35.

²⁷⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbâcke, “*Huqqa al-bukā‘u*” in *al-Muntqā min qasā‘idi ‘Abdullāh wa khadīmi rasūlih*, ed. ar-Rābi‘a al-Khadīmiyya (Rabat: Dār al-Amān li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzī‘, 2024), 370.

²⁷⁹ ‘Abdu-l-‘Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha‘rānī, *al-Kawkab ash-shāhiq fī l-farq bayn al-murīd aṣ-ṣādiq wa ghayr aṣ-ṣādiq* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1991), 33.

the company of sheikhs of indications”²⁸⁰ Here, Ahmadu Bamba rephrases two verses with the same meaning found in ash-Sha‘rānī’s book *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī ma‘rifat qawā‘id as-ṣūfiyya*.²⁸¹ Thus, one can trace the verses of this poem and find many of them referenced in the works of ash-Sha‘rānī.

An example of Ahmadu Bamba mentioning the name of ash-Sha‘rānī in his writings is the statement in his poem *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*:

Indeed, the principles of the Sufi people are seven, all of which our Lord has adorned us with. Holding fast to the Book of Allah and emulating the Messenger of Allah. Eating halal and avoiding sin, the fifth is safeguarding oneself from harm. The sixth is fulfilling rights and repentance from transgression. These are affirmed by our master ash-Sha‘rānī, The knower, the verifier, the divine.²⁸²

Another example of his referral to ash-Sha‘rānī’s books is his statement in the same preceding poem:

The qualities of the sincere disciple, in brief, [are] four, I have organized [them] for fear of delusion. [The first is] sincerity in the love of the Sheikh forever, then obedience to his command wherever it is found. And absolute abandonment of objection [toward his deeds], even inwardly, as they narrated. And alongside it is the submission of choice, due to his good opinion without denial. So, whoever combines these qualities among the disciples will attain certainties. Look for this in the *Laṭā’if* of ash-Sha‘rānī, you will find it [there] like rubies and corals.²⁸³

Another primary reference for this poem, which we did not mention before, is the book *Tā’iyat as-sulūk ilā malik al-mulūk* and its commentary, both authored by the scholar Sīdī Ahmad ‘Arab ash-Sharnūbī, who passed away in 994/1586. Although the book’s name is not explicitly mentioned in the poem, comparing the two works reveals many similarities, sometimes even leading to repeating some verses with minor variations.

4.1.2.5. al-Kuntiyyu and His Son

During this period, the names of al-Kuntiyyu and his son also emerged. They refer to Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu (d.1811) and his son Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalifa al-Kuntiyyu (d.1826). Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār ibn Ahmad ibn Abi Bakr al-

²⁸⁰ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Huqqā al-bukā‘u*, 370.

²⁸¹ ‘Abdu-l-‘Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha‘rānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī ma‘rifat qawā‘id as-ṣūfiyya* (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi‘ al-Kalim, the second edition), 39.

²⁸² Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at as-sughrā*, 189.

²⁸³ Ibid, 192.

Kuntiyyu was considered one of the most prominent scholars of *Shinqīt*, the Sahara, and West Sudan. He was the Sheikh of the *Qādiriyya al-Kuntiyya* Sufi order in his time. He was a knowledgeable, devout, politically influential, wise man and a social reformer.²⁸⁴ His son Sheikh Muhammad, who was nicknamed “*al-khalīfa*” for succeeding his father in the leadership of the *Qādiriyya al-Kuntiyya* Sufi order for fifteen years, was a devout worshipper and a knowledgeable jurist. He authored numerous works in various fields.²⁸⁵

Ahmadu Bamba’s relationship with these two figures was a strong spiritual bond, as they were primarily his spiritual mentors in the *Qādiriyya* order. Ahmadu Bamba received the *Qādiriyya wird* from his father, Sheikh Muhammad, who, in turn, received it from Sheikh Samba Tukloor Ka. Sheikh Samba received it from Sheikh Sīdiya al-Kabīr in Mauritania,²⁸⁶ who was initially a disciple of Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu and later of his son, Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalīfa. This highlights the depth of the relationship between Ahmadu Bamba’s family and the Kunta family.

Ahmadu Bamba frequently relied on the books of these two sheikhs in his writings during this period, especially in his book *Masālik al-jinān*. In the introduction to the book, he stated that one of his references in its composition was *Junnat al-murīd*, a work on Sufism by Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalīfa.²⁸⁷ Additionally, in his poetic composition “*Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*,” he relied on the book of the latter titled *at-Tarā’if wa at-Talā’id fī Karāmāt ash-Sheikhayn al-Wālida wa-l-Wālid*, which is a biography of his parents, enriched with extensive Sufi knowledge. As for Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār, we find his book *al-Kawkab al-waqqād* (a book focusing *wirds* and Sufi masters) present in Ahmadu Bamba’s book *Masālik al-jinān*. Additionally, his book *Naṣīḥat al-batt li jamī‘ī Kunta* (some advice to his people) can be considered a primary reference for Ahmadu Bamba’s *Fath al-mannān fī jawāb ‘Abd ar-Rahmān*.

Examples of al-Kuntiyyu presence in Ahmadu Bamba’s writings are numerous and often mentioned together. Notably, in *Masālik al-jinān*, he states, while discussing

²⁸⁴ See Ahmad ibn al-Amīn ash-Shinqītī, *al-Wasīt fī tarājumi udabā’i shinqīt* (Cairo: ash-Sharika ad-Duwalīyya li at-Tibā’ā, 2002), 361.

²⁸⁵ See Abū Bakr al-Wulātī, *Minah ar-Rabb al-Ghafūr* (Nouakchott: Maktabat al-Qarnayn, 2014).

²⁸⁶ See Mbache, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 233.

²⁸⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbache, *Masālik al-jinān*, 60.

predecessors who wrote about Sufism: “I found Sufis, the chosen ones, have authored in it (Sufism) books that have secrets. Like (...) our Sheikh al-Kuntiyyu the one with the lights, The aid of humanity, the pole of guidance, al-Mukhtār. And our Sheikh al-Khalīfa the supported by the truth from the Lord of the worlds, Muhammad.”²⁸⁸ Similarly, in recounting the dispute regarding the loud reciting of Quran versus secret reciting, he said: “The debate among the noble sheikhs regarding reciting the Quran loudly versus secretly remains ongoing. (...) Some sought a middle ground on this matter, (...) and it was the choice of our Sheikh al-Mukhtār, upon him be the satisfaction of the Creator. So, my brother, refer to *Junnat al-murīd* by our righteous Sheikh al-Khalīfa the wise.”²⁸⁹

Examples of his specific mention of Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu include his words in *Fath al-mannān fī jawāb ‘Abd ar-Rahmān*:

And in ‘Naṣīḥat al-Batt li Jamī‘i Kunta,’ by our great Sheikh, Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār - may Allah be pleased with him and make us among his followers - he said: ‘I advise you to fear Almighty Allah and control your tongues; for indeed, the tongue is the worst of enemies and the truest of friends. If you control it or remember Allah with it, you will be safe.’²⁹⁰

He also mentioned in the book *Masālik al-jinān* in his discussion of the difference between *mu‘jiza* (miracles) and *karāma* (spiritual gifts): “What suffices as a *mu‘jiza* for the Prophet may be permissible as a *karāma* for the Saint. Because he is his inheritor, for the Prophets are the proofs of our Lord to creation. (...) But the ‘iṣma (infallibility) of the Prophets is obligatory, unlike that of the Saints. This is a statement of Sīdī al-Mukhtār in *al-Kawkab al-waqqād*, do not overlook”.²⁹¹ Here he indicates the statement of Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu: “Everything that could be a *mu‘jiza* for the Prophet could also be a *karāma* for the Saint (...) The Prophets are infallible, and the Saints are protected. They share in ‘iṣma, except that the infallibility of the Prophets is obligatory while the immunity of the Saints is permissible.”²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 58.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 85.

²⁹⁰ Rawḍ ar-Rayāḥīn, *Min waṣāyā Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke*, 75-90.

²⁹¹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 82-83.

²⁹² Sheikh Sīdī Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu, *al-Kawkab al-waqqād fī dhikr faḍl al-mashā‘ikhi wa haqā‘iq al-awrād* (Riyadh: King Saud University Library - Manuscripts Department, 7246), 1.

Examples of his specific mention of Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalīfa include his words in “*Dūnaka yā mahmūd*” after discussing the five etiquettes of the Sufis: “These five [etiquettes] confined the Sufi’s etiquettes in a concise form. All of this was mentioned in *at-Tarā’if* by our Sheikh al-Kuntiyyu, the knowledgeable.”²⁹³ He also said in the same book, while discussing the importance of time management for the *murīd*: “The sincere seeker revolves according to the dictates of his time [i.e., the present] and does not covet the time that lies ahead, for that [i.e., the anticipation of the future] prevents rectification of what is present. So, contemplate *Junnat al-murīd* by our esteemed Sheikh al-Kuntiyyu.”²⁹⁴ The text of Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalīfa in *Junnat al-murīd* states:

The true seeker revolves according to the dictates of time, without turning his attention to another time or circumstance for the betterment of what that time or circumstance has given him, for it is incumbent upon him to fulfill the rights of time, to adhere to the proper conduct within it, and not to anticipate another time. For his inclination toward another time prevents him from fulfilling the rights of the first time in which he has been established, and accomplishing what is required of him, contrary to what is expected.²⁹⁵

In the Sufi compilations of Ahmadu Bamba, there are several poetic books in which he versified works authored by previous Sufi scholars. When Ahmadu Bamba rewrites these books in poetic form, he aims to facilitate their memorization for students. He goes beyond mere versification, often condensing the original text, explaining it, or adding further insights. In the following sections, we will mention the Sufi figures who had a notable impact on Bamba’s writings, as they -at least- had one book that was the foundation for one of Bamba’s Sufi compositions.

4.1.2.6. Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Mukhtār al-Yadālī (ad-Daymānī)

He is Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Mukhtār ibn Muhammad ibn Sa‘īd ad-Daymānī al-Yadālī (d.1753), one of the scholars of the Shinqīt region. He was a prominent jurist, well-known for his righteousness. He followed the *Shādhiliyya* Sufi order. He authored numerous books, with some attributing to him up to fifty works.²⁹⁶ His book *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* is considered the main reference that Ahmadu Bamba relied upon in

²⁹³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 195.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 191.

²⁹⁵ Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalīfa al-Kuntiyyu, *Junnat al-murīd dūn al-marīd* (Morocco: Dār Abī Raqrāq, 2012), 2/214.

²⁹⁶ See ash-Shinqītī, *al-Wasīl*, 223.

composing his book *Masālik al-jinān*. *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* is a book on monotheism following the method of the Sufis, the people of spiritual insight and gnosis. Ahmadu Bamba also relied on another book on *Tafsīr* by al-Yadālī entitled *adh-Dhahab al-ibrīz fī tafsīr kitāb Allah al-‘azīz*.

In the introduction of *Masālik al-jinān*, Ahmadu Bamba explains his choice of *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf*: “Their books, (the early Sufis), due to their length, most of this generation abandoned them. Therefore, I chose, seeking help from Allah, to versify the book written by al-Yadālī, as it gathered all that was scattered among the predecessors, and being as the conclusion of Sufism.”²⁹⁷ He also mentions the name of the book and its sources he relied upon: “I named it *Masālik al-jinān fī Jam‘i Mā Farrqah ad-Daymānī* (The Paths of Paradise in Compiling What ad-Daymānī Scattered), as everything he mentioned in the *Khātimat*, I have brought in this book in the form of verses. Then from *adh-Dhahab*, I derived some benefits to complete this work. And perhaps, in it, I may add some more from others for completeness.”²⁹⁸

4.1.2.7. Sheikh Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ḥājī ash-Shinqīṭī (ad-Dalḥājī)

Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ḥājī (d.1836) was among the prominent scholars renowned for his expertise in linguistic jurisprudence and the sciences of the Quran and genealogy. He authored works such as *Tahrīr an-naṣar fī sharḥ asmā’ as-suwar* and *Tuḥfat al-walīd fī aḥkām at-tajwīd*. ad-Dalḥājī died few years before Ahmadu Bamba’s birth. He belonged to the *Idulḥāj* tribe, one of the famous Mauritanian tribes, who collectively pledged allegiance to Ahmadu Bamba and joined his Sufi order.²⁹⁹

ad-Dalḥājī wrote a treatise on ethics and morals, which Ahmadu Bamba versified in 212 verses and named *Nahj qadā’ al-ḥāj fī mā min al-adab ilayhi al-murīd yāḥtāj*. This treatise combined noble character traits and exquisite manners that draw the servant closer to his Lord. It covered topics such as self-discipline, behavior towards others regardless of their status, and conduct with parents. Additionally, it addressed the etiquette of seeking knowledge, such as sincerity, piety, reverence for one’s

²⁹⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 59.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 60.

²⁹⁹ See Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Nahj qadā’ al-ḥāj, fī mā min al-adab ilayhi al-murīd yāḥtāj*, ed. Dā’irat Fatiḥ al-Ghaffār (Rabat: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif al-Jadīda, 2017), 19-20.

teachers, and a diligent approach to learning. Ahmadu Bamba states in the introduction of this book:

Today, I stand ready to respond to some of the devoted murīds who requested a structured guide to refine their manners, which is a necessary task. (...) So, I hastened to fulfill their request, seeking contentment and reward [from Allah]. Its content is the prose of our saint, al-Hājī, and its through. I hope to fulfill the need. (...) I named it *Nahj Qaḍā’ al-Hāj* (The Path to Fulfilling the Need) in harvesting the teachings of our Sheikh, ad-Dalhājī.³⁰⁰

At this stage, alongside the previously mentioned books, there are additional sources that Ahmadu Bamba referenced in his writings. These sources also played a notable role in shaping his Sufi ideas. However, because they are cited less frequently than the earlier works, they will be discussed separately in the next section.

4.1.2.8. Lesser-Cited Sources in Ahmadu Bamba’s Sufi Writings

In this section, I will discuss the infrequently mentioned sources that are explicitly referenced—either by name or by the author’s name—in Ahmadu Bamba’s Sufi writings. The methodology adopted involves providing a brief overview of the author, then mentioning the titles of his book or books referenced in Ahmadu Bamba’s writings and their subjects, and then indicating where reference to this book was made.

It is worth noting that Ahmadu Bamba frequently cites the sayings of early Sufi figures, whose sayings are widely spread in classical Sufi texts, such as *ar-Risāla* by ‘Abdu-l-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d.465 /1072), *al-Luma‘* by Abū Naṣr as-Sarrāj at-Tūsī (d.378 /988), *at-Ta‘arruf* by Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d.380 /990), *Tabaqāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyya* by Abū ‘Abd ar-Rahmān as-Sulamī (d.412 /1021), *Qūt al-Qulūb* by Abū Tālib al-Makkī (d.386 /996), and others. Furthermore, statements of renowned Sufis such as Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d.161 /778), al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ (d.187 /803), Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādh (d.258 /872), are always mentioned in Bamba’s works without specifying the source from which the sayings were derived. Consequently, it is not easy to trace the saying back to a specific source, as they are present in many books.

³⁰⁰ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Nahj qaḍā’ al-hāj*, 25-26.

I. *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*

It is one of the classical Sufi books, authored by Abū Ḥafṣ Shihāb ad-Dīn ‘Umar ibn Muhammad al-Qurashī al-Bakrī as-Suhrawardī (d.632/1234), a *Shāfi‘ī* jurist, commentator, and preacher, among the great Sufis. He was a leading Sufi master in Baghdad and the author of several works including *Nughbat al-bayān fī tafsīr al-quran* and *Jadhb al-qulūb ilā muwaṣalat al-mahbūb*.³⁰¹ Ahmadu Bamba mentioned the name of this book in his poem *Dūnaka yā mahmūd*, where he quoted the words of Yahyā ibn Mu‘ādh from it and versified it, saying: “They say that the noble angels weep for the seeker (*muriid*) if he is gourmand, [they do that] out of mercy for him. find that in the book of *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*.”³⁰²

II. *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn wa-falāh aṭ-ṭālibīn*

It is a poem on advice and etiquette, consisting of 204 verses. It was authored by Sheikh ‘Umar ibn Sa‘īd Tāl al-Fūtiyyu (d.1864), one of the prominent Sufi scholars in Senegal and West Africa and a notable figure in the *Tijjāniyya* order. He led the largest armed *jihād* movement in West Africa against the pagans and the French. He met his demise during fierce battles against his enemies, and it is said that he disappeared under mysterious circumstances on February 12, 1864, in the “Banjagara” cliffs in Mali. He left behind many books, the most famous of which are: *Rimāh hizb ar-rahīm fī nuḥūr hizb ar-rajīm*, *Bayān mā waqa‘a*, and this book in question *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn*.³⁰³

Ahmadu Bamba quoted a verse from this book in his work *al-Jawhar an-naftīs*, where he said, in the context of discussing the etiquette of prayer: “And his (the prayer’s) state should be like the saying of ‘Umar [al-Fūtiyyu], who is adorned with piety and knowledge: ‘And be when you enter the prayer, like a person who is in his death bed.’”³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ See Az-Zarkalī, *al-Ālām*, 5/61-62.

³⁰² Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 191.

³⁰³ See Muhammad al-Muntaqā Ahmad Tāl, *al-Jawāhir wa ad-durar fī sīrat ash-Sheikh al-Hāj ‘Umar* (Tunis: Dār al-Burāq, 2005).

³⁰⁴ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 251.

III. Shudhūr al-adhkār al-māhiya li al-awzār wal-muhayyi'a li ḥuṣūl al-anwār wa-l-asrār

This is a book on *adhkār* (remembrances) and *wirds*, authored by Sheikh Sīdiya ibn al-Mukhtār ibn al-Hīb al-Abīrī al-Mūrītānī (d.1868). He was a prominent Sufi scholar who studied under Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu and his son Muhammad al-Khalīfa. He then established his own scholarly and Sufi circle in his hometown, attracting students from all over the Islamic West (Arab and African regions). He also opposed French colonial attempts to occupy the country. He authored numerous letters addressed to his contemporaries, emirs of his time, tribal leaders, and the French governor of West Africa. Additionally, he wrote treatises on social and ethical guidance, the science of Quranic recitation (*tajwīd*), and commentaries on grammar and other subjects, all of which remain in manuscript form.³⁰⁵

Ahmadu Bamba referred to this book in *Faṭḥ al-mannān fī jawāb 'abd ar-rahmān* while discussing the importance of piety and fearing Allah, stating: “In *Shudhūr al-adhkār* by our Sheikh Sīdiya ibn al-Mukhtār—may Allah be pleased with him and us through him—it is mentioned that the benefits are based on beliefs and that piety is the source of all wisdom and the sum of all goodness and blessings. Whoever seeks knowledge should fear Allah...”³⁰⁶ He also quoted this book multiple times in his book *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir* when discussing the properties of certain verses, surahs, and names, he said: “And in *Shudhūr al-adhkār al-māhiya lil-awzār* by our Sheikh Sīdiya—may Allah have mercy on him and benefit us with his blessings: And among what is used for safety from enemies...”³⁰⁷

IV. Kitāb an-Naṣīḥa

It is a poem on Sufism and noble ethics, consisting of 128 verses. It was authored by Abū al-‘Abbās Ahmad ibn ‘Abdu-l-‘Azīz ibn Rashīd ibn Muhammad al-Hilālī as-Sijilmāsī (d.1775). He was a *Mālikī* jurist known for his piety and asceticism. He wrote a commentary on the *Mukhtaṣar* of Sheikh Khalīl and authored other works in various

³⁰⁵ See ash-Shinqītī, *al-Wasīt*, 240-243.

³⁰⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at al-kubrā*, 24.

³⁰⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 98.

fields. Renowned for his devoutness and renunciation of worldly pleasures, he performed the pilgrimage twice and studied under scholars from the Hijaz and Egypt. He also wrote a book about his travels.³⁰⁸

Ahmadu Bamba mentioned this poem in his book *Masālik al-jinān* while discussing the benefit of knowledge, saying: “In the poem of our Sheikh al-Hilālī—may Allah, the Glorious, be pleased with him—: ‘knowledge [is what] engenders fear of the All-Knowing (Allah); whoever lacks this fear is a reprehensible ignorant.’”³⁰⁹ He also referenced it in his advice treatise *Faṭḥ al-mannān* when talking about eating lawful and unlawful food, stating: “al-Hilālī—may Allah be pleased with him—said: ‘Whatever the tongue reaps, a person will find on the Day of Judgment.’”³¹⁰ In another context of the same book, he quoted: “Ahmad al-Hilālī—may Allah be pleased with him—said in his poem: ‘Every piece of flesh that has grown from unlawful means, the fire [Hell] is more deserving of it, as is established [in a Hadith].’”³¹¹ Additionally, Ahmadu Bamba relied on this book in various parts of his work *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*.

V. *al-Madkhāl ilā tanmiyat al-a‘māl bi tāhsīn an-niyyāt wa at-tanbīh ‘alā ba‘d al-bida‘ wa-l-‘awā‘id:*

This book reveals the flaws and innovations (*al-bida‘*) practiced by people. It was authored by Abū ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-‘Abdarī al-Fāsī al-Mālikī, known as Ibn al-Ḥāj (d.737/1336). He was one of the renowned scholars known for his asceticism and righteousness. Among his many works are *Bulūgh al-qāṣd wa-l-munāfi‘ khawāṣṣ asmā‘ Allah al-husnā*, *Shumūs al-anwār wa kūnūz al-asrār*, and his most famous book, *al-Madkhāl ilā tanmiyat al-a‘māl*.³¹² The name of Ibn al-Ḥāj appears frequently in the jurisprudential, Sufi, and doctrinal writings of Ahmadu Bamba. He relied on him for his fatwa regarding whether it is permissible to pour Zamzam water into a well for blessings, as he states in *al-Majmū‘at as-ṣughra*: “Know

³⁰⁸ az-Zarkalī, *al-A‘lām*, 1/157.

³⁰⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 70.

³¹⁰ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at al-kubrā*, 30.

³¹¹ Ibid, 32.

³¹² See Kāḥhāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn*, 11/284.

that blessing is only by following the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) example. Ibn al-Hāj warned against those innovations introduced there...”³¹³

VI. *at-Tadhkira fī aḥwāl al-mawtā wa umūr al-ākhira:*

It is one of the most renowned books on the conditions of the deceased and matters of the Hereafter. It was authored by Abū ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abū Bakr al-Andalusī al-Qurṭubī (d.671/1272). He was a *Mālikī* jurist and one of the eminent scholars of *Tafsīr*, known for his piety and devoutness. He originally hailed from Cordoba, then journeyed eastward and settled in *Munyat ibn Khasīb* in the north of Asyut, Egypt, where he passed away. Among his notable works are *al-Jāmi‘ li aḥkām al-qur‘an* in twenty volumes, and *al-Asnā fī sharḥ asmā‘ Allah al-husnā*.³¹⁴ Ahmadu Bamba mentioned this book in *Miftāḥ al-ghuyūb*, discussing the form of the “*Sirāt*” (the bridge over Hell), saying: “Regarding its arches, in the *Tadhkira* of Sayyid al-Qurṭubī – may Allah be pleased with him – some scholars stated: None will traverse the *Sirāt* until they are questioned at seven arches. As for the first arch, one will be asked about faith in Allah, the Exalted...”³¹⁵

VII. *Makārim al-akhlāq:*

This book was authored by Amīn ad-Dīn Abū ‘Alī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan aṭ-Ṭabrisī (d.548/1153), an esteemed linguist and interpreter within the *Imāmī* Shia school. He is attributed to Tabaristan. Among his works are *Majma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur‘an wa-l-furqān* and *Jawāmi‘ al-jāmi‘* also in *Tafsīr*.³¹⁶ This book is considered one of the renowned Shia sources dedicated to ethics and morality. Ahmadu Bamba referenced it in one of his responses found in *al-Majmū‘at al-kubrā*, where he said: “And in *Makārim al-akhlāq* by aṭ-Ṭabrisī – may Allah be pleased with him – some wise men advised a man, saying to him: ‘O man, do not approach your wife at the beginning, middle, and end of the month, for insanity, leprosy, and madness hasten towards her and her child...’”³¹⁷

³¹³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 83.

³¹⁴ See az-Zarkalī, *al-A’lām*, 5/322.

³¹⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 583.

³¹⁶ See az-Zarkalī, *al-A’lām*, 5/148.

³¹⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at al-kubrā*, 646.

VIII. *ad-Durr ath-thamīn wa-l-mawrid al-mu ‘īn*

This is a commentary on the book *al-Murshid al-mu ‘īn ‘alā ad-darūrī min ‘ulūm ad-dīn* by the Mālikī jurist ‘Abdu-l-Wāhid ibn ‘Āshir (d.1631). This book was authored by Abū ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad Mayyāra al-Fāsī (d.1070/662). He was a Mālikī jurist from Fez, renowned as a scholar with deep expertise in various sciences, and known for his trustworthiness, piety, and devoutness. Among his works are *Fath al-‘alīm al-khallāq bi-sharḥ lāmiyat az-zuqāq* and *al-Itqān wa-l-iḥkām fī sharḥ tuḥfat al-ḥukkām*.³¹⁸ The book includes an introduction to the *Ash‘arī* credo and a conclusion on the principles of *Junaydī* Sufism. It was mentioned in Ahmadu Bamba’s poem *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he discusses the struggle against the self, saying: “It is established among the scholars that the wise [people] have unanimously agreed, that there is no path to happiness on the Day of Judgment when the terror appears, except by restraining the self from every desire, and from all passions, with great restraint. Look for this in *ad-Durr ath-thamīn* by our Sheikh Mayyāra, the astute scholar.”³¹⁹

IX. *Bahjat an-nufūs*

This book was authored by Abū Muhammad ‘Abdullah ibn Abī Jamra al-Azadī al-Andalusī (d.695/1295), a renowned scholar, interpreter, Hadith specialist, Mālikī jurist, and Sufi. He was known for speaking the truth, commanding good, and avoiding people. Among his works is the abridgment of *Sahīh al-bukhārī* titled *Jam‘ an-nihāya fī bidāyat al-khayr wa ghāyat al-ghāya*.³²⁰ The book *Bahjat an-nufūs* is a commentary on his *Jam‘ an-nihāya*. Ahmadu Bamba mentioned this book in *Masālik al-jinān* when discussing “*at-tafakkur*” (contemplating), stating: “Ibn Abī Jamra, a pillar of religion, May Allah be pleased with him at all times, explicitly stated that *at-tafakkur* in times, Is the best of deeds for the believer.”³²¹

³¹⁸ See az-Zarkalī, *al-A‘lām*, 6/11.

³¹⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 193.

³²⁰ Sirāj ad-Dīn ‘Umar ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-‘Awliyāā* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1994), 439.

³²¹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 94.

X. *Tanbīh al-ghāfiṭīn bi-ahādīth sayyid al-anbiyā' wa-l-mursalīn*

It is a book of sermons, ethics, and spiritual guidance, authored by Abū al-Layth Naṣr ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad as-Samarqandī (d.373/983), the Hanafi jurist, Hadith scholar, and ascetic known as Imām al-Hudā. He is also the author of a Quranic exegesis called *Baḥr al-‘Ulūm* and a book on Islamic mysticism named *Bustān al-‘ārifīn*.³²² Ahmadu Bamba frequently referred to this book in his writings, especially in his advice poem, *Dūnaka yā maḥmūd*, where he stated:

It was mentioned that the fortress against Satan consists of three things, which my statement has bestowed. The first is the mosque, the second is the continuous remembrance of Allah at all times, and the third is the recitation of the Quran with purity and contemplation of its meanings. This was mentioned by Sheikh as-Samarqandī, the prominent and esteemed scholar.³²³

XI. *Rawḍ ar-rayāḥīn fī hikāyāt aṣ-ṣāliḥīn*

This book is a collection of stories and accounts about Sufi saints, their states, and anecdotes. It was written by ‘Afīf ad-Dīn Abū as-Sā‘ādāt, Abū Muhammad ‘Abdullah ibn As‘ad al-Yāfi‘ī ash-Shāfi‘ī (d.768/1366). He was a Sufi poet who authored books on jurisprudence, language, inheritance, and mathematics. His notable works include *ad-Durr an-naẓīm fī khawāṣṣ al-quran al-‘azīm* and *Asnā al-mafākhir fī manāqib ash-Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir*.³²⁴ Ahmadu Bamba relied heavily on this book in a letter of advice to one of his followers, which is fully mentioned in *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*. He frequently cited from it many anecdotes of saints. His method was to mention the story in full and then reference the book by saying: “from *Rawḍ ar-rayāḥīn*,”³²⁵ followed by “and in it also” when introducing additional stories.³²⁶ He also referred to this book in *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, such as in the passage: “It is narrated from al-Yāfi‘ī about some saints who said: ‘I asked Allah to show me the stations of the people in the graves...’”³²⁷

³²² See az-Zarkalī, *al-A‘lām*, 8/27.

³²³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 193.

³²⁴ See Kahāla, *Mu‘jam al-Mu‘allifīn*, 6/34.

³²⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 246.

³²⁶ Ibid, 246-248.

³²⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 183.

XII. *ar-Rawd al-fā'iq fī al-mawā'iz wa ar-raqā'iq*

This book is a work of sermons and guidance, comprising speeches, Hadiths, stories, and the virtues of pious people. It was authored by Sheikh Abū Madyan Shu‘ayb ibn Sa‘d al-Makkī al-Maṣrī (d.810/1408), known as “al-Ḥarīfiṣ.” He was a renowned scholar, ascetic, and Sufi preacher.³²⁸ Ahmadu Bamba extensively relied on this book in a letter of advice to one of his followers, which is fully included in *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*. He often cited many stories of saints from it. An example is his statement: “In *ar-Rawd al-fā'iq* it is mentioned that as-Sarī as-Saqatī—may Allah have mercy on him—passed by a man lying on the ground, drunk, with wine spilling from his mouth, saying: ‘Allah, Allah.’ as-Sarī then raised his gaze to the sky and said...”³²⁹

XIII. *al-Ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣṭn min kalām sayyid al-mursalīn*

This is a book about the supplications and invocations transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad. It was authored by Imām Shams ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Yūsuf ad-Dimashqī ash-Shafī‘ī, known as Ibn al-Jazarī (d.833/1429). He was a prominent Quran reciter and memorizer of Hadith in his time. He was born and raised in Damascus, where he established a school called “*Dār al-Quran*.” He traveled to Egypt several times.³³⁰ Ahmadu Bamba cited this book frequently in his book *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, often referring to Ibn al-Jazarī as “ad-Dimashqī,” as in his statements: “In *al-Ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣṭn* by ad-Dimashqī...”³³¹ and “...as stated by ad-Dimashqī in *al-Ḥiṣn al-ḥaṣṭn*.”³³²

XIV. *Kitāb an-nūrāyn fī iṣlāh ad-dārāyn*

This book discusses ways of refining the souls and enlightening the hearts. Its main purpose is to encourage the journey towards Allah. The book was authored by Jamāl ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahmān ibn ‘Omar, famously known as al-Ḥubayshī (d.780/1378), a *Shāfi‘ī* jurist from Yemen. Among his works are *al-Baraka fī fadl as-*

³²⁸ See Kahhāla, *Mu‘jam al-Mu‘allifīn*, 4/302.

³²⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 249.

³³⁰ See az-Zarkalī, *al-A‘lām*, 7/45.

³³¹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 89.

³³² Ibid, 128.

sa'y wa-l-haraka and *Masā'il aṭ-talāq*.³³³ Ahmadu Bamba mentioned him several times in his book “*Dīwan silk al-jawāhir*.” He is also referred to as “al-Yamanī,” as in the statement: “In *Kitāb an-Nūrāyn* by al-Yamanī...”³³⁴ Additionally, he is called “al-Hubayshī,” as in: “...as mentioned by al-Hubayshī in *Kitāb an-Nūrāyn*.”³³⁵

XV. *al-Waṣiyya*

This is a poetic composition on the virtues of ethics and the beauty of manners. It was authored by Sheikh Ḥammād ibn Allamīn al-Majlisī alsh-Shinqīṭī (d.1840). He was a renowned linguist and genealogist. Proficient in the science of biography and Arab lineage, he also knew various Islamic sciences. He was known for his asceticism and devotion. Among his works is *Rawd an-nihāya fī sharḥ nazm al-ghazawāt*.³³⁶ Ahmadu Bamba quoted verses from this book in his work *Masālik al-jinān* under the chapter on etiquette and virtues, saying: “And the author of *al-Waṣiyya* also said, addressing his son with virtue: ‘Embark on the virtues of ethics, with deeds pure from hypocrisy...’.”³³⁷

XVI. *Shajarat al-yaqīn wa takhlīq nūr sayyid al-mursalīn wa bayān ḥāl al-khalā'iq yawm ad-dīn*

This book, attributed to Imām Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī ibn Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī³³⁸ (d.324/935), is a doctrinal work that addresses issues related to the Day of Judgment. Its attribution to Imām al-Ash‘arī is subject to debate, and it has been printed under various titles and attributed to different authors. Much of the content in the second section of Bamba’s *Dīwan silk al-jawāhir* is taken from this book, including some chapter titles, as

³³³ See az-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, 6/193.

³³⁴ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 165.

³³⁵ Ibid, 128.

³³⁶ See ash-Shinqīṭī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 352.

³³⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, *Masālik al-jinān*, 148.

³³⁸ The founder of the Ash‘arī school of thought. He was one of the diligent theologian *Imāms*. He was born in Basra. He initially followed the Mu’tazilite doctrine and advanced in it, but later recanted and openly opposed them. He passed away in Baghdad. It is said that his authored works reached three hundred books, including *ar-Radd 'alā al-mujassima*, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, and *al-Ibāna 'an usūl ad-diyyānat*. See az-Zarkalī, *al-A'lām*, 4/263.

indicated by his statements: “.... concluded from *Shajarat al-Yaqīn* by al-Ash‘arī,”³³⁹ and “...and in *Shajarat al-Yaqīn* by al-Ash‘arī....”³⁴⁰

XVII. *al-Hikam al-‘Atā’iyya*

One of the works Ahmadu Bamba drew upon in *Masālik al-jinān*, alongside the works of al-Yadālī, al-Ghazzālī, al-Kuntiyyu and his son, is the *al-Hikam al-‘Atā’iyya* by Tāj ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn ‘Atā’ Allah as-Sakandarī (d.709/1309). The latter was a prominent *Mālikī* jurist and a *Shādhilī* Sufi, indeed one of the pillars of the *Shādhiliyya* Sufi order. He was a knowledgeable scholar whose lessons were attended by many people. He left behind many writings, the most famous of which is his book *al-Hikam*, mentioned earlier, which is a small book compiling many Sufi aphorisms.³⁴¹

An example of Ahmadu Bamba’s reference to *al-Hikam* in *Masālik al-jinān* is his saying: “As for the one who rejects the importance of the wird, mocking it out of dislike and disdain, He is ignorant, as stated by the scholar Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah in his text *al-Hikam*.”³⁴² This statement encapsulates the meaning of Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah’s saying: “Only the ignorant belittles the wird.”³⁴³ In another passage from the same book, Ahmadu Bamba says: “Our Sheikh, the knowledgeable one, Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah, said at the beginning of *al-Hikam*, and among the signs of reliance on action is a decrease in hope when committing faults.”³⁴⁴ This is the meaning of Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah’s saying: “Among the signs of reliance on action is a decrease in hope when committing faults.”³⁴⁵

An analysis of the books referenced in Ahmadu Bamba’s writings reveals that they constitute a substantial part of the Sufi heritage that shaped his thought. Notably, none of the works associated with theoretical Sufism are included among these sources, which underscores his deliberate avoidance of that particular school of thought.

³³⁹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān silk al-jawāhir*, 148.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 150.

³⁴¹ See Kahhāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn*, 2/121.

³⁴² Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 83.

³⁴³ Tāj ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn ‘Atā’ Allah as-Sakandarī, *al-Hikam al-‘Atā’iyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Andulus al-Jadīda, 2010), 36.

³⁴⁴ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Masālik al-jinān*, 119.

³⁴⁵ ibn ‘Atā’ Allah, *al-Hikam*, 3.

Furthermore, Ahmadu Bamba's intellectual openness is evident, as he did not hesitate to draw from Shia texts, despite doctrinal differences.

4.1.3. The Stage of Collecting Sufi *Wirds* and Searching for Sheikhs

This stage is what some researchers call “the stage of wandering among the sheikhs,” it extends from the death of his father in 1881 to his direct allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad in 1893. It is considered one of the most crucial stages in the life of Ahmadu Bamba, as he embarked on numerous journeys during this period - some lasting up to nine months - between different regions within Senegal and Mauritania. During these travels, he visited many scholars and saints, both living and deceased, sought permission (*ijāza*) from scholars, and received *wirds* from the sheikhs of the Sufi orders.³⁴⁶ He received the *Shādhiliyya wird*, the *Tijjāniyya wird*, and renewed the *Qādiriyya wird*, to which he belonged.³⁴⁷ Describing this stage, Ahmadu Bamba says in the poem where he recounts his journey on the path of Sufism:

Since I reached the age of reason, I have been a seeker of knowledge of Allah, repentant. I wandered among the scholars and saints with my intention, actions, and words, so that my life's efforts would not go to waste, for the sake of a good reckoning. Until I devoted myself in the year 1311/1893 to serving “the best of creatures” [prophet Muhammad] the Highest.³⁴⁸

He also announced his reformist and renewing call during this period, now known as the “*Murīdiyya* Order.” He began raising his followers in a Sunni Sufi way after receiving permission from the Prophet Muhammad in 1883.³⁴⁹ This period highlights personalities that influenced Ahmadu Bamba’s character and writings significantly, such as the three sheikhs, namely, Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī³⁵⁰ (d.561/1165),

³⁴⁶ See ad-Daghānī, *Irwā ’u-n-nadīm*, 86.

³⁴⁷ See Rawdū, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 107-111.

³⁴⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Bidāyat as-sulūk* (Touba: Maktabat Dār al-Quddūs, 1972), 7.

³⁴⁹ See *ibid*, 38-39.

³⁵⁰ He is Abū Ṣāliḥ ‘Abdu-l-Qādir ibn Mūsā ibn ‘Abdullah al-Jīlānī (d.561/1165), the founder of the *Qādiriyya* Sufi order. He was knowledgeable in numerous fields of study, including Quranic exegesis, Hadith sciences, *Ḥanbali* jurisprudence, jurisprudential differences, principles of fiqh, and Arabic grammar. He recited the Quran in various recitations and issued legal opinions according to the *Shāfi‘ī* and *Ḥanbali* schools of law. See Umar ibn ‘Ali ibn Ahmad ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-‘awliyāā* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1994), 120.

Sheikh Abū al-Hasan ash-Shādhilī³⁵¹ (d.656/1258), and Sheikh Ahmad at-Tijjānī³⁵² (d.1815). We will briefly discuss the relationship of Ahmadu Bamba with them and their presence in his writings, then focus specifically on Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī and his role in Ahmadu Bamba’s spiritual life during this period. We will also extensively discuss the relationship of the Mauritanian Scholar Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba with Ahmadu Bamba and the ongoing debate surrounding it.

4.1.3.1. The Three Sheikhs: al-Jīlānī, ash-Shādhilī, and at-Tijjānī

When examining the writings of Ahmadu Bamba, one can observe a deep respect and love for the Sufi saints (*awliyā’*). He never diminishes the stature of any of them, always honoring and acknowledging all of them. The esteemed position of the *awliyā’* in Ahmadu Bamba’s perspective is evident in his words: “The love of all the *awliyā’* is incumbent, and anyone who opposes the chosen ones is prohibited. [May] upon all the *awliyā’* [be] the contentment of the One [Allah], who made them His mercy in every era.”³⁵³ Furthermore, his son Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr quoted Ahmadu Bamba: “The honor of the *awliyā’*, prophets, and diligent scholars is poisoned; Speaking ill of them is like drinking the poison of venom.”³⁵⁴

Despite Ahmadu Bamba’s profound love and respect for the *awliyā’*, he did not consider them all to be of equal stature. He acknowledged their individual merits and

³⁵¹ Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī ibn ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abdul Jabbār ash-Shādhilī al-Maghribī was a Sufi scholar, and the founder of the *Shādhiliyya* Sufi order. He began his spiritual journey studying under Imām ‘Abd as-Salām ibn Mashīsh in Morocco, who had a profound influence on his scholarly and Sufi life. Later, he traveled to Tunisia and secluded himself for worship on Mount *Zaghwān*, where he deepened his spiritual practices and studied under Abū Sa‘īd al-Bājī. He then journeyed to Egypt and settled in Alexandria, where he attracted followers and disciples, and his Sufi order gained prominence in Egypt. He was renowned as one of the spiritual luminaries of his time. He passed away in the valley of *Himaythara* in the desert of *Aydhāb* while travelling to Mecca in the year 656 AH. See Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqāt al-‘awliyā’*, 458; Salāḥ ad-Dīn as-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi al-wafayāt* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ at-Turāth, 2000), 21/141.

³⁵² Abū al-‘Abbās Ahmad ibn Mahāmad ibn al-Mukhtār at-Tijjānī (d.1815) was born in the village of ‘Ain Mādī (Algeria). He memorized the Quran at the age of seven and delved into the study of various Islamic sciences and literature. He began issuing legal opinions (*fatwas*) at the age of sixteen. He was a *Mālikī* jurist, a Quranic interpreter, a *Hadīth* scholar, and a prominent Sufi. He embarked on spiritual journeys during which he met with numerous saints and righteous individuals from whom he gained knowledge. In the year 1196 AH, the Prophet Muhammad granted him permission to spread the *wird* that was assigned to him, in the village of *Abī Sam‘ūn* in Algeria. He later moved to Fez, which became the main center for the *Tijjāniyya* Sufi order, from where it spread to various regions. See Sīdī ‘Alī Ḥarāzim Barāda, *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī wa bulūgh al-amānī fī fayḍ sīdī Abī al-‘Abbās at-Tijjānī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Mahmūdiyya, 1318 AH), 19-40.

³⁵³ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Jālibat as-Sa‘āda*, a manuscript in my collection.

³⁵⁴ Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 103.

selected three whom he considered his primary spiritual guides in this stage. He used their *wirds* for a long time before receiving his own *wird*. These three were al-Jīlānī, at-Tijjānī, and ash-Shādhilī. Ahmadu Bamba often mentions them together in the same verse or poem when discussing his spiritual guides during this period, as in these verses: “I have accepted the Messenger of Allah- may Allah’s endless prayers and peace be upon him- as a prophet and a messenger. I have accepted his Book and the Ka’ba as a guide and a qibla. I have accepted the *awliyā’* as mentors guiding me to my Lord. With a particular adherence, with perfection, to al-Jīlānī, ash-Shādhilī, and at-Tijjānī.”³⁵⁵ Ahmadu Bamba took pride in having these three as his spiritual guides in Sufism, frequently mentioning that in his writings: “My mentors are our master al-Jīlānī, and ash-Shādhilī along with at-Tijjānī.”³⁵⁶

As for his use of the *wirds* of these three mentors, Sheikh al-‘Alawī in *an-Nafahāt al-Miskiyya* narrated that Ahmadu Bamba initially took the *Qādiriyya* *wird* from al-Hāj Kamara, a disciple of Sheikh Sīdiya al-Kabīr, who authorized him to use it. Later, Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba also authorized him to use and give their *wird*, stating that Bamba was deserving of this responsibility. Bamba then used the *Tijjāniyya* *wird*, although the source of this authorization is unknown. Eventually, he also took the *Shādhiliyya* *wird*, with its source of authorization also unknown. Bamba utilized each *wird* during its respective time, each with its unique counter (*subḥa*).³⁵⁷

Ahmadu Bamba’s use of this three *wirds* and his imparting them to his followers continued even after pledging allegiance to Prophet Muhammad and receiving his specific *wird*. We will see this in detail in the next section. There are numerous examples in his writings where he mentions these three mentors. Given space limitations, we will only provide one example for each of them. Among the examples of his poetry regarding the words of Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir, he says in the context of mentioning the pillars of Sufism:

Our Master, the Imām al-Jīlānī, said- [may he] continue to be pleased and revered-: Indeed, Sufism is built upon eight pillars: The generosity of al-Khalīl (Abraham), the contentment (*riḍā*) of Ishāq (Isaac), the patience of Ayyūb (Job), who surpassed, the allusions of Zakariyyā (Zechariah), such is the solitude of Yaḥyā (John), the wool of Mūsā (Moses), so count it, the

³⁵⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, *Dīwān as-ṣalawāt ‘alā an-nabī al-hāshimī*, a manuscript in my collection.

³⁵⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbàcké, A poem embroidered with the letters of “*Bism Allāh ar-Rahmān ar-Rahīm*”, a manuscript in my collection.

³⁵⁷ See al-‘Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyya*, 64-66.

asceticism of 'Isā (Jesus), and the poverty of our beloved Maḥmūd, blessings, and peace be upon him.³⁵⁸

The origin of this speech is indeed found in the book *Futūh al-Ghayb* by Sheikh 'Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī, in prose form without any variation.³⁵⁹

As for his mention of the words of Sheikh Ahmad at-Tijjānī, an example of that is his statement in the same preceding poem when defining Sufism. He said: "Our Sheikh, *ar-rādiyyu*, at-Tijjānī, who remains among the people like coral, said: Verily, Sufism is obedience to the command of the One whose majesty endures while avoiding all that He has forbidden, outwardly and inwardly, from where He is pleased, exalted is He, not from where you are pleased, so understand with intellect."³⁶⁰ This is at-Tijjānī's statement in *Jawāhir al-Ma 'ānī*: "The reality of Sufism is obedience to the commands and avoidance of prohibitions, both outwardly and inwardly, from where Allah is pleased, not from where you are pleased."³⁶¹

As for the mention of the words of Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī, they are not frequently cited in Ahmadu Bamba's writings, unlike the two preceding sheikhs mentioned. This could be attributed to the scarcity of *Shādhilī*'s books at that time, as the *Shādhiliyya* order did not have a strong presence in Senegal like the other two Sufi orders. However, this would not have prevented Ahmadu Bamba from acquiring books of this order from Mauritania or Mauritanian traders in his country, as he did when purchasing some rare Sufi books. Nevertheless, the presence of some other sheikhs of the *Shādhiliyya* order is very prominent in Ahmadu Bamba's writings, as he relied on the works of al-Yadālī and Ibn 'Aṭā' Allah, as we explained earlier. To illustrate the inclusion of the words of ash-Shādhilī in Ahmadu Bamba's writings, we cite the following statement by the latter in the same preceding poem when discussing the causes of the blindness of insight (*al-baṣīrat*). He said: "The reasons for the blindness of insight are three, all of them are veils. Say: abundance of disobedience, pretense in

³⁵⁸ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū 'at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 190.

³⁵⁹ See Sheikh 'Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Futūh al-ghayb* (Dhaka: Markaz al-I'lām al-'Ālamī, 2014), 126-127.

³⁶⁰ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū 'at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 190.

³⁶¹ Sīdī 'Alī Ḥarāzim Barāda, *Jawāhir al-ma 'ānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 1/286.

obedience, and covetousness for creation. So, look for these in *Rūh al-bayān* after ‘*fahum lā yarji ‘ūn* (but they will not return)’ in the *al-‘awān* (*Sūrat al-Baqara*, 19).³⁶²

This statement includes the words of Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī (d.1725) - the author of the book *Rūh al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurān*- where he said: “And the causes of blindness of insight are three: the sending of the senses in the disobedience of Allah, covetousness for the creation of Allah, and pretense in the obedience of Allah.”³⁶³ In this text, the name of the one who said this statement is not mentioned, but in the book *Īqāz al-himām fī sharḥ al-hikam* the author Ahmad ibn ‘Ajība (d.1809) attributed it to Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī stating: “Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī - may Allah be pleased with him - said: ‘Blindness of insight is in three: the sending of the senses in the disobedience of Allah, covetousness for the creation of Allah, and pretense in the obedience of Allah.’”³⁶⁴ Thus, considering that ash-Shādhilī passed away five centuries before Ḥaqqī’s birth, it strongly suggests that the original statement were from ash-Shādhilī’s tradition.

4.1.3.2. Pledging Allegiance to Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī

Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī occupies a unique position as the most influential figure in the Sufi personality of Ahmadu Bamba. This is due to the fact that he is the founder of the Sufi order to which Ahmadu Bamba’s family belonged, and the latter followed them in this regard. During the early period of his life, however, he pledged allegiance to other sheikhs from different branches of the same order, potentially separated from the founder, al-Jīlānī, by more than seven centuries. Despite the long lineage separating them, al-Jīlānī was regarded as his Sheikh due to his role as the founder of the order. However, as Ahmadu Bamba progressed in the *Qādiriyya* Sufi order and learned from many of its sheikhs, the situation reached a point where he abandoned all intermediaries and directly connected with Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir. This occurred in the early years of 1893 when al-Jīlānī appeared to him in a waking vision and taught him the *wirds* of his order.³⁶⁵ From that moment, the latter became his sole direct Sheikh.

³⁶² Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 191.

³⁶³ See the commentary on the 19th verse in *Sūrat al-Baqara* in the book *Rūh al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurān* by Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2008).

³⁶⁴ Ahmad ibn ‘Ajība, *Īqāz al-himām fī sharḥ al-hikam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2023), 1/108.

³⁶⁵ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 63.

This is explained in a poem he composed in his hometown, Touba, in the same year, praising al-Jīlānī remarkably and declaring his allegiance to him. Here are some verses of that poem:

Ahmad, the extremely needy one from Touba, the Qādirī by *wird*, says: praise be to Allah for making me a servant, to the noble, honored, and generous Pole (*qutb*), our revered Sheikh al-Jīlānī [may he] still hold, in Allah's sight, eternal approval. I thank him [Allah] endlessly for my attachment to the rope of guidance, the rope of the Sheikh [al-Jīlānī] that I will never abandon his *wirds*, as long as my mind perceives. [In the year] 1310 AH, I declare this openly in the month of Rajab in my homeland Touba, without any doubt. (...) O our Sheikh, our refuge, our *qutb*, our everything, today, I pledge allegiance to you, as a servant, do not deprive me of your grace too. (...) O our Lord, for the sake of the *qutb* 'Abdu-l-Qādir, Forgive my minor and major sins!³⁶⁶

It is worth mentioning that this allegiance to al-Jīlānī lasted only a few months. In the same year, 1311/1893, Ahmadu Bamba completely detached himself from intermediaries and made the Prophet Muhammad his only sheikh to whom he turned for guidance and elevation.³⁶⁷ This will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. However, before Ahmadu Bamba pledged allegiance to al-Jīlānī, he had a strong connection with a Sheikh from the *Qādiriyya* order in Mauritania named Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba. There were many exchanges of letters and visits between them, leading researchers to debate whether Sheikh Sīdiya was simply a close friend of Ahmadu Bamba or whether he was indeed his Sheikh through formal allegiance. The following paragraphs shed light on this matter.

4.1.3.3. Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba

He is Sheikh Sīdiya ibn Sheikh Sīdī Muhammad ibn Sheikh Sīdiya al-Kabīr, commonly known as “Bāba Wuld Sheikh Sīdiya.” He was born in 1860 and passed away in 1924. He was a prominent scholar, jurist, Hadith expert, Islamic legal theorist, historian, and poet, deeply rooted in and dedicated to the prophetic tradition. Among his works is *Irshād al-muqallidīn ‘inda ikhtilāf al-mujtahidīn* (Guidance for Followers in case that mujtahid Jurisprudents disagree).³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ See Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 236.

³⁶⁷ See *ibid*, 237-241.

³⁶⁸ See Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba, *Irshād al-muqallidīn ‘inda ikhtilāf al-mujtahidīn*, ed. at-Tayyib ibn ‘Umar al-Jakanī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm, 1997), 68-76.

Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba succeeded his father, Sheikh Sīdī Muhammad, as the *khalīfa* (spiritual successor) after his passing in 1869, while he was only nine years old at that time. Despite his young age, he became the spiritual leader for all those affiliated with their *Qādiriyya* family at that time, including Ahmadu Bamba himself. As we have seen before, Ahmadu Bamba embarked on several journeys after his father's death, particularly between 1881 and 1891. Among these journeys were numerous visits to Mauritania to visit the descendants of Sheikh Sīdiya al-Kabīr. He visited his tomb in *Tindooj* and his grandson Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba in the city of *al-Maymūn*, staying with them for some time, praising them, and acquiring their spiritual practices and the secrets of their teachings. During this period, Ahmadu Bamba also composed a long poem detailing the *Qādiriyya* spiritual lineage from Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba to its conclusion, between 1886 and 1891.³⁶⁹ In this poem, he says:

The poor, Ahmadu Mbacke, said- may Allah forgive and have mercy on him-: Praise be to Allah who has granted us a spiritual lineage through which we are saved in times of fear. (...) [I am] turning to Him in mediation through the masters of grace, those adorned with the noble lineage. (...) Beginning with our Sheikh, [who was] named after his grandfather, the *ghawth* (the aid) of the time, the saint. So, I said, seeking from [Allah] the Most Merciful Guidance and contentment: O Lord, for the sake of my master, the gatherer of virtues, Bāba, Grant me access to every goodness. Then for the sake of my master, his father, the pious Muhammad, guide me and grant me my desires. Then, for the sake of my master, his father, the *ghawth*, Sīdiya [al-Kabīr], be my support in times of difficulty. (...) Then, for the sake of my master, the Imām al-Jīlī, the *ghawth* of humanity, make me superior to my generation³⁷⁰

Depending on this poem and through examining the documents and correspondence exchanged between Ahmadu Bamba and Sheikh Sīdiya³⁷¹ during this period, one sees clearly that the latter was not just a friend or a family Sheikh for the former. Rather, it appears that Ahmadu Bamba had pledged allegiance to Sheikh Sīdiya after his father died in 1881, becoming his disciple who sought guidance in every matter, big or small, for nearly ten years. Among other pieces of evidence that support this claim is this letter sent by Ahmadu Bamba to Sheikh Sīdiya in 1891 when he visited him in the city of Boutilimit:

Let the honorable master know that the humble servant stands in his house in Boutilimit, greeting him with: Peace be upon you. (...) 'Here he is standing at the door, a visitor awaiting your command.' He greets you and says, hoping for acceptance from Allah and then from you: 'Oh

³⁶⁹ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 109.

³⁷⁰ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, "Naẓm as-silsilat al-qādiriyya," in *Karāmatī khaṭṭu yadī* (Touba: Dār an-Nashr al-Islāmī, 2020), 261.

³⁷¹ These letters are available in the library of Sheikh Sīdiya's family in Boutilimit-Mauritania. I have a digitized copy of them, provided to me by the Murīdī scholar Cheikhouna Mbacke 'Abdul Wadoud.

my masters, the ones who enliven the religion, I have come from the far reaches of Sudan. I visit you, longing intensely, hoping that Allah will guide me through meeting you. Every year, I have aimed to shake your hands, physically as well as spiritually, but the devil prevented me. But this year, the Lord has blessed me with visiting you. So, praise be to Allah, as my demons have left.³⁷²

In another letter addressed to Sheikh Sidiya, Bamba said,

We also request from you, O generous ones, a second noble book, similar to the first, in your blessed handwriting, granting us permission to use and distribute the *wird* if you find us worthy. We have been using and distributing it with the permission of some of the disciples, but this was only due to our inability to reach you. Now that we have reached you, we have no need, after Allah and His Messenger, except for you, as we have never had such a need. We have questions that we ask of no one but you, as we suffice ourselves with you and cling to your guidance. Firstly (...) I would like you to clarify for us how you perform the prayers and at what times you pray, whether it is at the beginning, after, middle, or after; because I do not wish to disagree with you on anything, and if I knew the *Sūrātūn* you recite in your prayers, I would only recite them too...³⁷³

The content of these two letters is sufficient to demonstrate that Ahmadu Bamba was a disciple of Sheikh Sidiya and that he followed his commands and refrained from what he prohibited. He also used to distribute the *Qādirī* *wird* to his followers with permission from Sheikh Sidiya. Therefore, his Sufi order during this period can be considered a branch of the *Qādiriyya* order. However, in 1311 AH/1894 CE, he completely dissociated himself from all intermediaries and took the Prophet Muhammad as his mentor. He explicitly stated this in various writings, as we will see in detail in the next section. In this regard, the researcher Sheikh ‘Isā Gueye states: “Sheikh al-Khadīm did not establish his own distinct Sufi order until he received his *wird* from the Prophet, peace be upon him. Otherwise, his previous activities were merely a form of educational renewal within the *Qādiriyya* order.”³⁷⁴

Indeed, the majority of *Murīdī* researchers agree that Sheikh Sidiya played a significant role in the spiritual journey of Ahmadu Bamba and that the latter, in his quest for complete devotion to his master (the Prophet Muhammad), had to pass through these stages represented by following the examples of the preceding spiritual guides, using their litany, and gathering their secrets. Only then would he be ready for the great inheritance of Prophet Muhammad. From this perspective, his allegiance to

³⁷² The correspondence between Sheikh Sidiya and Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba, a manuscript in my possession.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ See Sheikh ‘Isā Gueye, “*The wird in sufi thought - the murid wird as a case study*,” (Research paper published within the proceedings of the Grand Lectures held on the occasion of the commemoration of *Laylat al-Qadr* in Touba, 2017), 66.

Sheikh Sīdiya and subsequently to Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī were just stages in this spiritual journey, which finally culminated in the year 1893, a year Ahmadu Bamba refers to as the “Year of Allegiance,” as we will see later.³⁷⁵

However, some researchers criticize all these claims regarding several stages in Ahmadu Bamba’s spiritual life, arguing that Ahmadu Bamba never devoted himself to anyone other than the Prophet Muhammad throughout his life. They contend that his Sufi path was never a branch of the *Qādiriyya*, casting doubt on all the writings that suggest otherwise. One of the most prominent defenders of this view is the researcher and philosopher Sheikh Muṣṭafā Diope al-Kokkiyyu in his book *al-‘Umda*, where he strongly criticizes what he calls the “Mauritanian thesis.” This thesis supports the claims that Ahmadu Bamba pledged allegiance to Sheikh Sīdiya, Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir, or any other Sheikh before pledging allegiance to Prophet Muhammad. Al-Kokkiyyu has raised several objections to this thesis. The following paragraphs will provide a summary of the main arguments presented by al-Kokkiyyu on this issue:

I. al-Kokkiyyu believes that Ahmadu Bamba was his father’s follower (*muqallid*) when he received the *Qādiriyya wird* from him, as he was his only Sheikh then. This continued until the death of his father in 1881. In that year, there was an epistemic rupture between Ahmadu Bamba, the follower, and Ahmadu Bamba, the independent seeker [*mujtahid*]; he traveled extensively in Senegal and Mauritania to acquire *wirds* from different Sufi orders through their prominent sheikhs, desiring to find the quickest way to reach Allah. After a year and more, specifically in 1883, Allah inspired him to attach himself to the Prophet Muhammad directly, and after that, he declared his renewal call.³⁷⁶ In this regard, Ahmadu Bamba said: “Allah the Almighty inspired the writer of these words to attach himself to the Messenger of Allah - peace and blessings be upon him - in the year 1301/1881, and he engaged in his service - peace and blessings be upon him - until the year 1311/1893, then he left in the year 1313/1895 to the blessed expatriation...”³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ See Khadim Sylla, *al-Khidma fī fikr Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba ka-manhaj li at-tajdīd wa-l-iṣlāh* (Cairo: Timbuktu Editions, 2021), 56-58.

³⁷⁶ See al-Kokkiyyu, *al-‘Umda*, 62.

³⁷⁷ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū‘at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 240.

II. al-Kokkiyyu believes that Ahmadu Bamba had attached himself to the Prophet Muhammad since 1883, and this continued until 1893 when another epistemic rupture occurred. This was the emergence of *al-Murīdiyya* movement with the “philosophy of *al-khidma*” (service) instead of Sufism, although the spirit of Sufism remained ingrained within it.³⁷⁸ This is reflected in Ahmadu Bamba’s statement in a poem he composed in 1893: “Today, I pledge allegiance to the chosen Messenger, through *al-khidma*, and I ask Allah for fulfillment.”³⁷⁹

III. However, what shall we make of the earlier poem, in which Ahmadu Bamba declares his allegiance to al-Jilānī in Touba in early 1893? al-Kokkiyyu responds that this poem cannot be accepted because it contradicts the fact that Ahmadu Bamba had attached himself to the Prophet Muhammad years before this poem was written. It is not reasonable, after this attachment, for him to attach himself to another person. This is evident in a poem where he describes his state after pledging allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad: “The rising sun has made me indifferent to the stars, the sky, and the moon.”³⁸⁰ al-Kokkiyyu questions: “how the Sheikh al-Kabīr [Ahmadu Bamba] could abandon the supreme intermediary [prophet Muhammad] after pledging allegiance and taking the covenant with him to associate himself with someone else.”³⁸¹

IV. Additionally, the poem speaks with the spirit of a beginner seeker who has not yet established himself in Sufism, pledging allegiance to his Sheikh with great humility. This contradicts what we know, as Ahmadu Bamba had declared his call years before this poem and had trained many of his followers, who continued their education under him and established villages for worship, education, and work with his permission. This indicates his mastery and firm footing in Sufism and education. Consequently, al-Kokkiyyu concludes that the poem was either written by Ahmadu Bamba before 1883- during his visit to Touba in Guinea during his journeys to renew the *Qādiriyya* *wird* or was falsely attributed to him.³⁸²

³⁷⁸ See al-Kokkiyyu, *al-‘Umda*, 63.

³⁷⁹ Ahmadu Bamba, *Futūh al-mukarram*, 10.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ al-Kokkiyyu, *al-‘Umda*, 65.

³⁸² See *ibid*, 60-65.

What al-Kokkiyyu has outlined in the study of this poem can also be applied to the correspondence attributed to Ahmadu Bamba and Sheikh Sīdiya. Indeed, during an interview conducted as part of this research, he indicated that these letters require further investigation to confirm their authenticity, expressing doubts about them.³⁸³

As for those who opposed addressing these problematic issues—especially regarding the perceived contradiction between Ahmadu Bamba’s attachment to Prophet Muhammad in 1883 and his later declaration of allegiance to Sheikh Sīdiya and Sheikh al-Jīlānī, they did not go beyond what we previously mentioned: Ahmadu Bamba’s goal was always to establish a connection with Prophet Muhammad from the outset. However, to achieve this, he needed to go through stages, including emulating senior sheikhs and using their *wirds* until he gathered what they had, thereby becoming their complete heir and ready for the ultimate inheritance of Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, there is no contradiction between the two matters at all. Many researchers have discussed and answered this issue, perhaps most notably Khadim Sylla in his book *al-Ishkāliyya* (The Problematic), which provides detailed discussions.³⁸⁴

4.2. From Pledging Allegiance to Prophet Muhammad to His Passing (1893-1927)

In the third chapter of this research, we discuss a key turning point in Ahmadu Bamba’s spiritual journey. In 1893, Bamba experienced a cognitive shift, abandoning all Sufi sheikhs and *wirds*, and instead choosing Prophet Muhammad as his sole spiritual guide, with the Quran as his *wird*. This change is reflected in his personality, writings, statements, and the way he educated his followers, marking a distinct development from his earlier phase.

While this research has already examined the influential figures on Bamba’s early life and writings, it explores now the impact of this rupture on both his relationships with his former sheikhs and the evolution of his writings. The first part of this section will

³⁸³ The majority of *Murīdī* scholars, particularly those on the prominent scientific committee of *al-Murīdiyya*, Rawḍu ar-Rayāḥīn, affirm the authenticity of these letters. They have referenced many of them in their book, *ash-Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba Mbācke ‘Abdullah wa Khadīmu Rasūlihī*, which highlights the significance of these letters.

³⁸⁴ See Khadim Sylla, *al-Ishkāliyya* (Touba: Dār al-Himma, 2024), 75-86.

discuss his changed relationship with his previous sheikhs post-1893, while the second part will examine the manifestations of this rupture in his writings during this period.

4.2.1. Bamba's Relationship with His Previous Sheikhs

To further understand the aspects of this evolution in Bamba's relationship with his previous sheikhs, we will examine a letter he sent to his former mentor, Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba. In the previous discussion, we saw a letter sent by Ahmadu Bamba to the latter, seeking advice and guidance, demonstrating his attachment and obedience to his orders. Sheikh Sīdiya responded to that letter with a comprehensive answer to his questions. Perhaps that response did not reach Ahmadu Bamba on time, as we saw another letter from the latter indicating that it was a response to Sheikh Sīdiya's last letter. In this letter, the difference between Ahmadu Bamba the *Qādīrī*, the disciple of Sheikh Sīdiya, and Ahmadu Bamba, the independent, connected to Prophet Muhammad, and reaching high ranks, becomes clear. He says in this letter:

And let it be known (in the nobility of your knowledge), may Allah Almighty increase your abundance, that I – by the grace and blessings of Allah – have departed from the trials of this world and the hereafter before my return from the sea (meaning the maritime seclusion). So, whoever directs ill intentions towards me, Allah Almighty – the Everlasting, the Living, who never dies – will direct them to him before his intentions reach me, and He will never deflect him from them. Also, let it be known, may Allah Almighty increase your abundance, that since I emerged from the trials mentioned in Surah *al-‘ankabūt*, I hold onto nothing without the permission of the one to whom belongs the sovereignty and dominion [Allah], and without the permission of His servant and messenger [Muhammad] – peace be upon him, his family, his companions, and those whom he entrusted with peace. May Allah Almighty reward you with goodness for your written communication directed to us, and may He treat you in this world and the Hereafter according to what you have advised us, for the sake of the one whom my entirety is in service to, peace and blessings be upon him, his family, and his companions.³⁸⁵

In this text, Ahmadu Bamba addresses Sheikh Sīdiya differently, marked by respect and appreciation, without the profound veneration and magnification seen in previous letters. He does not request anything from Sheikh Sīdiya either. Instead, he focuses on highlighting some of his elevated statuses, such as his deliverance from the trials of this world and the hereafter, Allah's protection of him from all harm, his commitment to acting only with the permission of Allah and His messenger Muhammad, and his dedication of his entirety to the service of Prophet Muhammad alone. This letter appears to serve as his declaration of entering a new phase completely different from

³⁸⁵ The correspondence between Sheikh Sīdiya and Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba, a manuscript in my collection.

the previous one. This rapid transformation in Ahmadu Bamba's state and his relationship with Sheikh Sidiya puzzled some of the latter's disciples to the extent that they asked Ahmadu Bamba, "Who is your Sheikh?" He replied, "The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him." They asked, "why do you mention the family of Sheikh Sidiya and address them with respect, praising them?" He answered:

At that time, I was like a blind person seeking guidance from those who knew and those who did not know. But when [Prophet Muhammad] the guide of the path, the leader of the Islamic group, appeared to me and drew me to him by the care of Allah and him, the significance of other intermediaries fell away from me. At the same time, I continued to maintain the connection with them for the sake of Allah, love for Him, and mutual benefit in Him.³⁸⁶

Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr recounts that during Ahmadu Bamba's exile in Mauritania, he stayed with Sheikh Sidiya's family and often moved with them, leading them to believe Sheikh Sidiya was his mentor. Once, when the family planned to move to graze their livestock, Bamba hesitated to join them. Sheikh Sidiya's messengers pressed him, with one asking if it was proper for a disciple to disobey his Sheikh's order. Bamba responded by writing to Sheikh Sidiya, clarifying that he was not his disciple and that Sheikh Sidiya was not his Sheikh. He explained that he was guided directly by the Prophet Muhammad, who forbade him from following anyone else. After receiving his letter, the family understood and respected his position, and their mutual affection -for the sake of Allah and His Messenger- was restored.³⁸⁷

The relationship between Ahmadu Bamba and Sheikh Sidiya remained strong until the latter died in 1924. Sheikh Sidiya loved and respected Ahmadu Bamba, and he composed many poems praising him and recounting his virtues. Among them is a long poem that begins with the line: "Sheikh Ahmadu is a blessing, which Allah bestowed to all his creatures." In another poem, he said: "His [Ahmadu Bamba's] only flaw is his constant worship of his Lord and the benefit he brings to people day and night."³⁸⁸

As for his relationship with the other Sufi masters mentioned earlier, such as al-Jilānī, ash-Shādhilī, and at-Tijjānī, those whom he considered his sheikhs in the early stages of his life, he used to say: "These sheikhs were his sheikhs at the beginning of his life, but now it cannot be said that he has a sheikh other than the Messenger of Allah - peace

³⁸⁶ ad-Daghānī, *Irwā 'u-n-nadīm*, 88.

³⁸⁷ See Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 249.

³⁸⁸ See Rawḍu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 419-421.

be upon him - and no *wird* other than the Quran.”³⁸⁹ He continued to love and respect them, although the relationship now was not that of a disciple and a Sheikh, but rather that of fellow sheikhs. The following paragraphs highlight the most important points that define this relationship.

I. Obtaining Absolute Permission to Engage in Their Spiritual Practices:

Ahmadu Bamba had relinquished all the *wirds* of Sufi orders when he pledged allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad, with the Quran being his sole *wird*. However, during his exile to Gabon, it is reported that the Angel Gabriel came to him and granted him the three *wirds* with the permission of Prophet Muhammad and the approval of the three sheikhs who were the original custodians of these litany practices.³⁹⁰ In the subsequent years, he is said to have obtained absolute permission from Allah Almighty to engage in these three *wirds* and others, as he declared in this statement:

Let it be known and let all the worlds take heed that Allah, the Blessed, and Exalted, has granted His servant, His beloved, the servant of His Messenger, His intimate friend and beloved - may Allah bless him and his family, companions, and grant them peace - the Qādirī *wirds*, the Shādhilī *wirds*, and the Tijjānī *wirds*, after the Quran, Hadith, and all beneficial knowledge, through the intermediaries of the custodians of these three *wirds* - may Allah be pleased with them - and through the authors upon them be blessings and mercy. He has also permitted him to impart all *wirds* and to teach all compositions, altering their conditions as He wills. Allah is the Guarantor of what we say.³⁹¹

This statement suggests that he held absolute authority over the three mentioned *wirds*, having received them from Allah through their intermediaries. He would not command anyone who had attached himself to him and had taken a *wird* before him to abandon it; rather, he would instruct him to adhere to it with the intention that he had received it from him. If someone attached themselves to him as a murid and did not mention anything, he would instruct them to use his specific *wird*. Hence, we find in *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order those who use the *Qādirī*, *Tijjānī*, or *Shādhilī* *wirds* with permission from Ahmadu Bamba.³⁹² For example, when Sheikh ‘Alī Seck Wanār received the *Tijjānī* *wird* from Ahmadu Bamba, he said to him:

³⁸⁹ al-‘Alawī, *an-Nafahāt al-miskiyya*, 65-66.

³⁹⁰ ad-Daghānī, *Irwā’ u-n-nadīm*, 166-167.

³⁹¹ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū’at as-sughrā*, 163.

³⁹² See Khadim Sylla, *al-Khidma fī fikr Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 62-64.

Whenever someone asks you about the chain of this wird, say to them: ‘The one who wrote these letters (meaning Ahmadu Bamba) received the Tijjānī wird from Sheikh Ahmad ibn Muhammad at-Tijjānī - may Allah be pleased with him - with permission from the Messenger of Allah - peace be upon him - as a form of discipline with him - may Allah be pleased with him.’ So, whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve.’ Peace and mercy of Allah be upon you.³⁹³

II. Inheritance and Obtaining Their Satisfaction: Ahmadu Bamba states in one of his poems that Allah granted him what surpassed what the three sheikhs had. He expressed this while praising them and invoking Allah’s pleasure upon them:

Oh Allah, You gave me what al-Jīlānī had surpassed others, upon him be the pleasure of who made me known [Allah]. You gave me what Abū al-Ḥasan had surpassed others by serving the Prophet, the grandfather of Hasan. You gave me what at-Tijjānī had surpassed others, and you were for me like precious coral. Upon them be pleasure and peace, as they have removed darkness.³⁹⁴

In another poem, he expresses his possession of the approval and satisfaction of these three sheikhs, saying: “His [Prophet Muhammad’s] descendant, al-Jīlānī, is pleased with me, upon him be the pleasure of [Allah] who made me known. His descendant, Abū al-Ḥasan, is pleased with me, upon him be the pleasure that immortalizes goodness. His descendant, at-Tijjānī, is pleased with me, upon him be the pleasure that destroys adversity.”³⁹⁵

III. Praising Them with the Permission of Prophet Muhammad: During this period, he also frequently praised the three sheikhs and extolled them in his poems. One such example is a poem in praise of Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī after he had praised al-Jīlānī and at-Tijjānī in two previous poems. It is noteworthy that during this period, he did nothing except with the permission of Prophet Muhammad, as he explicitly stated. Ahmed Bamba says in the introduction to this poem: “In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. O Allah, bless, grant peace, and bestow blessings upon the one who allowed me to compose verses in praise of one of his family, Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī, just as I praised Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Sheikh Ahmed at-Tijjānī – may Allah be pleased with them all – our master Muhammad, his family, and his companions.” Then, he begins the poem with:

³⁹³ See *ibid*, 64.

³⁹⁴ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Wa Yakhluq mālā ta ‘lamūn*, 266.

³⁹⁵ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 48.

May Allah be pleased with a Sheikh who became the best gatekeeper, Abū al-Hasan, the unique, the exalted in the sight of the Acceptor of Repentance [Allah]. He is the unique one in the sight of Allah, there is no equal to him, with his wird, I received the best rewards. The Chosen One [Prophet Muhammad] blamed me for not mentioning and praising him [ash-Shādhilī] since his wird became my cloak. Upon him be the satisfaction of the Guider [Allah] who guided me through his wird, And I found success with it among the Prophet's beloved ones.³⁹⁶

IV. Maintaining Cordial Relations Between Him and Their Followers: Ahmadu Bamba maintained strong relationships with the followers of these three Sufi masters, loving and venerating them and holding them in high regard. Sheikh Muhammad al-Bashīr notes that representatives of the *Qādiriyya* were often presented with abundant gifts, and the sheikhs of the *Shādhiliyya*, from families like *Hamdī* and *Muttāl*, were honored with various services and offerings. Similarly, the *Tijjāniyya* followers maintained a close connection with Bamba, who honored them with excessive generosity and venerated their sheikhs, including the Alawite sheikhs, who greatly benefited from his support and contributions.³⁹⁷

These relationships strengthened during Ahmadu Bamba's stay in Mauritania between 1903 and 1907. He was surrounded by prominent sheikhs from these three Sufi orders, who visited him and discussed various matters. He arbitrated between them in case of dispute, as happened in the subject of "al-*Ma'iyya*," on which there was much disagreement among Mauritanian scholars at that time; thus, Ahmadu Bamba issued a decisive fatwa regarding it.³⁹⁸ Many of these scholars pledged allegiance to him and became his followers.³⁹⁹ Some who did not pledge allegiance themselves sent their followers to do so.⁴⁰⁰

Ahmadu Bamba also served as a link between the followers of these orders and the three sheikhs. They came to him to renew their spiritual practices. Some of the *Tijjāniyya* sheikhs specifically requested him to convey greetings to the Prophet Muhammad and their Sheikh, Sheikh at-Tijjānī. ad-Daghānī mentioned in *al-Irwā'* that Sheikh Muhammad al-Amīn ibn Baddi informed him that his father once asked Ahmadu Bamba to convey greetings to the Prophet Muhammad and Sheikh Ahmad at-Tijjānī and to inform him of their reply. "When Ahmadu Bamba conveyed their

³⁹⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *al-Majmū'at aṣ-ṣughrā*, 236.

³⁹⁷ See Mbacke, *Minan al-Bāqī al-Qadīm*, 237.

³⁹⁸ Rawdu, *Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba*, 303-306.

³⁹⁹ See *ibid*, 284-295.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 272.

replies to him, he became extremely emotional, continuously shaking his head in astonishment, and he remained in this state until his death.”⁴⁰¹

Furthermore, Ahmadu Bamba acted as a deputy for Sheikh at-Tijjānī in assigning ranks in the *Tijjāniyya* Sufi order. An example of this is what he wrote to Sheikh Ahmed ibn Sheikh Muhammad al-Hāfiẓ at-Tijjānī, in which he stated:

Let it be known to Sheikh Ahmed ibn Sheikh Muhammad al-Hāfiẓ (...) that Sheikh Ahmad at-Tijjānī - may the blessings of Allah be upon him and may he be brought near - appointed him as his representative. So, whoever receives the *Tijjānī wird* from these two sheikhs, the two Ahmads - may Allah's blessings and security be upon them - it is as if they received it from Sheikh Muhammad al-Hāfiẓ - may Allah be pleased with him. And whoever takes it from them and turns to others among all the sheikhs with the intention of abandoning them, he has lost in this world and the hereafter - may Allah protect us from such fate - and whoever takes it from them and dies upon that, he has gained in this world and the hereafter. Let it be known to all who read this letter that it is dictated by Sheikh at-Tijjānī - may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him.⁴⁰²

From all that has been mentioned, it becomes clear that Ahmadu Bamba's personality underwent a remarkable transformation in this second phase of his life. He swiftly transitioned from being a disciple and follower of Sheikh Sīdiya and the three sheikhs to being directly connected to Prophet Muhammad and attaining a high status unparalleled by anyone before or after him, as he declared on many occasions. As for his relationship with the sheikhs, although he was no longer bound to them, he continued to maintain a bond of love and respect with them on one hand and with their followers on the other. He also served as their deputy among their followers. Consequently, during this period, no influence on his personality is observed apart from that of Prophet Muhammad.

4.2.2. The Manifestations of This Rupture in Ahmadu Bamba's Writings during This Period

This stage represents one of the most prolific periods in Ahmadu Bamba's life in terms of writing, resulting in numerous writings. However, most of these writings consist of poems in which he praises Prophet Muhammad, sends blessings upon him, or expresses gratitude to Allah while mentioning some blessings bestowed upon him. Consequently, this stage witnesses a scarcity of scholarly books by Ahmadu Bamba,

⁴⁰¹ ad-Daghānī, *Irwā 'u-n-nadīm*, 180.

⁴⁰² Ibid, 183.

especially in Sufism. Moreover, the Sufi books he authored during this period mostly involved rewrites of his earlier works with some modifications. For example, he rewrote his book *Mulayyin aş-Şudūr*, which was originally an adaptation of al-Ghazzālī's *Bidāyat al-Hidāya* and renamed it *Munawwir aş-Şudūr*. Similarly, he rewrote his book *Masālik al-jinān*, which was originally an adaptation of *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* by al-Yadālī and renamed it *Masālik al-jinān fī Khidmat al-Muṭahhar al-Janān*.

However, regarding Ahmadu Bamba's reliance on the writings of other Sufis, his independence from them, and his style of referencing and quoting, there are similarities and differences between his writings in this period and those in the earlier stage. One point of agreement, for example, is the continued appearance of certain Sufi figures in Ahmadu Bamba's writings, although less frequent than compared to the earlier stage. We see al-Ghazzālī prominently featured, as we previously noted that Ahmadu Bamba's book *Munawwir aş-Şudūr* is a composition of parts of al-Ghazzālī's *Bidāyat al-Hidāya*. Likewise, we see Ahmadu Bamba relying on al-Ghazzālī, Ahmad Zarrūq, and Abū al-Abbas al-Halālī (d.1175 H) in his book *Masālik al-jinān aww Mawāhib al-Mannān*,⁴⁰³ which is his third book with this title.

The points of difference all stem from the significant emergence of his personality during this stage. Readers of his writings during this period encounter the persona of a deeply rooted Sufi scholar, independent in his thoughts and tastes. This contrasts with the previous stage, where he authored his most important Sufi works while still a young seeker of knowledge, synthesizing the works and statements of scholars. One aspect of the emergence of his personality and independence is his reduced reliance on the statements of predecessors and their books in his writings, especially in his responses and fatwas. He provides answers and fatwas directly from his personal experience.

During this period, his thoughts may at times reflect those of other Sufis; however, this may merely be a resemblance, or it could be attributed to the fact that Sufism encompasses a range of expressions and insights that emanate from Allah to the hearts

⁴⁰³ See Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 418-420.

of His saints, each of whom conveys them according to their own spiritual state. Therefore, expressions may converge due to the unity of the source. Evidence of this is seen in the story where Ahmadu Bamba gave an answer to question, then one of the attendees remarked that the response was taken from *al-Hikam* of Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah. Ahmadu Bamba replied, “*Bal innahū min ‘atā’i Allah, ‘wa-mā kāna ‘atā’u rabbika mahzūra*”⁴⁰⁴ (Rather, it is from the gifts of Allah, and the gifts of your Lord are not prohibited). This shows why he rewrote some of his previous works without mentioning the scholars he had previously cited. This suggests that he attained a level of direct reception from Allah and Prophet Muhammad, who are the sources of all knowledge and insights.

Another aspect of this rupture is evident in his refraining from using titles such as “our Sheikh” or “my Sheikh” to refer to scholars, as he did in his previous writings. Rather, in this phase, he is disconnected from anyone as a Sheikh except for Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, when he mentions them, he does so with utmost respect, invoking prayers and mercy upon them. However, as his pledged allegiance solely to Prophet Muhammad prevented him from referring to them as his sheikhs, he refrains from doing so. We have seen glimpses of this when discussing the three sheikhs, but it becomes clearer when comparing two texts from different books: *Masālik al-jinān fī Jam ‘Mā Farrqahū ad-Daymānī*, which he authored in the first phase, and *Masālik al-jinān fī Khidmat al-Muṭahhar al-Janān*, which he authored in the second phase. In the first book, he mentioned the names of some scholars who wrote about Sufism, saying:

I found Sufis, the chosen ones, have authored in it books that have secrets. Like our sheikh, the reformist al-Ghazzālī, and Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah, the one with greatness. And our Sheikh “al-Kuntiyu” the one with the lights, the aid of humanity, the pole of guidance, “al-Mukhtār.” Our Sheikh “al-Khalifa” the supported one by the truth from the Lord of the worlds, “Muhammad.” And our Sheikh the Mufassir, Muhammad, who belongs to the Daymān tribe.⁴⁰⁵

Here, we notice that he described the four as his sheikhs. However, in the second book - which is a reworking of the first - he said in its introduction:

I found Sufis, the chosen ones, have authored in it books that contain virtues .Like the Sheikh, the one with abundant talents, al-Ghazzālī, may the one who brings down revelation be pleased

⁴⁰⁴ Serigne Elhadji Mbacke, *Garabu Touba* (a manuscript in my collection), 2/74.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 58.

with him. And the Sheikh with abundant talents, al-Kuntiyyu, may the hidden bestower be pleased with him. And like “al-Khalīfa,” his supported son [by Allah] Muhammad, who has always been a master. And like the saint, the miracle of the Merciful, Ibn as-Sa‘īd, the accomplished one from the *Daymānī* lineage.⁴⁰⁶

Here, despite being described as “sheikhs,” they are no longer referred to as “his sheikhs” as before. Nonetheless, the verses show the extent of his respect and reverence for them.



⁴⁰⁶ Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke, *Dīwān al-‘ulūm ad-dīniyya*, 407.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to explore the intellectual and spiritual journey of Ahmadu Bamba, focusing on the key phases of his spiritual and intellectual development, his Sufism and approach towards the preceding Sufi literature, and the central influences that shaped his Sufi thought. By examining the sources that influenced his work and by structuring the research around these works, this study has provided a more nuanced understanding of Bamba's contributions to Sufism, particularly within the context of Senegal and West Africa.

The structure of this research reflects a chronological exploration of Bamba's intellectual development, with each chapter addressing key phases in his life and the development of his Sufi thought. In Chapter One, the foundation for the study was laid by examining the gaps in previous scholarship on Bamba. Despite the rich legacy of Bamba's life and teachings, scholarly work on his intellectual influences and the specific sources he engaged with has often been fragmented. Many scholars have recognized Bamba's influential role in West African Islam, but there has been a limited understanding of the precise sources and intellectual currents that shaped his spiritual and theological framework. By addressing this gap, this study provides a clearer picture of how Bamba engaged with classical Islamic scholarship, selected and adapted various sources to fit his spiritual vision, and how his works contributed to the broader landscape of Sufi thought.

This study draws on primary sources, including Bamba's own writings—his poetry, Sufi treatises, and correspondence—as well as secondary works that contextualize his intellectual and spiritual evolution. Through textual analysis and comparative studies, this research highlights Bamba's selective creativity in blending traditional Islamic knowledge with his personal experiences. It also explored how his writings evolved

over time in response to both his internal spiritual journey and the challenges of external socio-political conditions.

Chapter Two examined the historical and religious context in which Bamba's intellectual development unfolded. This chapter explored the broader socio-political and religious environment of 19th-century Senegal, a time of significant change and upheaval. The introduction of Islam into the region, spreading with the Almoravid period, and the later influence of various Sufi orders—including *al-Qādiriyya*, *at-Tijjāniyya*, and *ash-Shādhiliyya*—were crucial in shaping the religious and cultural landscape that Bamba would inherit. This chapter also highlighted the challenges posed by French colonialism and how colonial authorities sought to suppress Islamic movements. Bamba's reformist approach to Sufism emerged in this environment, where colonial forces and local political powers posed significant threats to Islamic religious life.

Bamba's response to these challenges was unique: instead of resorting to violent resistance, the dominant strategy for many anti-colonial movements, he emphasized peaceful spiritual renewal through Sufism. His focus was not on military struggle but on transforming the inner self and reforming society through spiritual practices grounded in Islamic principles. This emphasis on spiritual resilience, rather than physical resistance, set Bamba apart from other Sufi leaders of his time and laid the foundation for his later leadership of *al-Murīdiyya* movement.

Chapter Three clarified how Bamba's intellectual development was profoundly shaped by his education, the scholars he encountered, and the intellectual traditions he absorbed. Bamba was born into a scholarly family, and from a young age, he was immersed in Islamic education. His early education in Quranic studies, jurisprudence, and Sufi ethics formed the intellectual foundation for his later contributions to Islamic thought. Bamba's formation of *al-Murīdiyya* Sufi order represented a transformative moment in Senegalese Sufism. His unique approach to the Sufi path, emphasizing knowledge, worship, work, service, and ethics, established a distinct identity for his followers, setting them apart from other Sufi traditions. Bamba's teachings emphasized practical spirituality, rooted in both Islamic orthodoxy and the integration of local cultural elements, creating a model of Sufism that was both accessible and

spiritually enriching. His literary works, ranging from Sufi ethics and jurisprudence to doctrinal teachings and the Arabic language, reflected his intellectual rigor and commitment to educating his followers. These writings not only addressed the spiritual and practical needs of his disciples but also served as an enduring resource for the spread of his message of faith, discipline, and service.

In Chapter Four, I delved into the influential scholars and sources that shaped Ahmadu Bamba's Sufi thought, emphasizing how his spiritual and intellectual journey was deeply rooted in practical application rather than theoretical Sufism. The chapter details his relationship with key figures through direct mentorship and the study of their works, and traces the phases of his intellectual development before he pledged allegiance to Prophet Muhammad. The period from 1854 to 1893 was a transformative phase in Ahmadu Bamba's life, during which his Sufi identity was shaped, and he began to outline his principles for spiritual renewal. This phase saw Bamba's deep intellectual engagement with Sufism and other disciplines, producing significant works that would later define his scholarly legacy.

Prominent Sufi figures, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, Sheikh Ahmad Zarrūq, Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, ‘Abdu-l-Wahhāb ash-Sha‘rānī shaped Bamba's intellectual formation. These scholars offered him a rich array of spiritual and ethical teachings that he would later synthesize in his Sufi works. In addition to these classical figures, Bamba's intellectual development was further shaped by the Kunta family, a major source of Sufi thought in West Africa. The Kunta family, including figures like Sheikh Sīdī al-Mukhtār al-Kuntiyyu and his son Sheikh Muhammad al-Khalīfa al-Kuntiyyu, provided Bamba with a framework for understanding ethics, piety, and the practical application of Sufi teachings. as seen in his works like *Masālik al-jinān* and *Dūnaka yā mahmūd*. Key influences included some Mauritanian scholars like Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Mukhtār al-Yadālī, whose *Khātimat at-Taṣawwuf* Bamba versified, and Sheikh Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ḥājī ash-Shinqīṭī, whose treatise on manners and ethics became a key reference for Bamba's *Nahj qadā’ al-ḥāj*.

In addition to these primary books, which Bamba cited frequently, he also drew from various less-cited sources to enhance his understanding of piety, knowledge, and spirituality. These works include texts such as *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* by al-Suhrawardī,

al-Hikam al-‘aṭā’iyya by Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah as-Sakandarī, *Rawḍ ar-rayāḥīn* by al-Yāfi‘ī, *Tā’iyat as-Sulūk ilā malik al-mulūk* and its commentary by ash-Sharnūbī, *Tadhkirat al-mustarshidīn* by ‘Omar al-Fūtiyyu, and *Shudhūr al-adhkār* by Sheikh Sīdiya al-Kabīr, among others. Notably, none of the works associated with philosophical Sufism are included among these sources, which underscores his deliberate avoidance of that particular controversial school of thought. Furthermore, Ahmadu Bamba’s openness to knowledge is evident, as he did not hesitate to draw from Shia texts despite doctrinal differences.

This stage of Bamba’s life, marked by his travels and spiritual education, culminated in his founding of *al-Murīdiyya* Order in 1883, during which he sought spiritual guidance from key Sufi figures like Sheikh ‘Abdu-l-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Sheikh Abū al-Hasan ash-Shādhilī, and Sheikh Ahmad at-Tijjānī. Their influence was crucial in shaping Bamba’s teachings and the development of *al-Murīdiyya*.

Bamba had also developed a close relationship with Sheikh Sīdiya Bāba, a prominent Qādirī figure from Mauritania. This relationship suggests that Bamba was likely a disciple of Sheikh Sīdiya rather than simply a friend. However, despite the deep connection with the latter and other sheiks, Bamba’s spiritual journey came to a climax in 1893, when he formally abandoned all intermediaries and devoted himself entirely to serving Prophet Muhammad. This shift is considered a crucial phase in the development of *al-Murīdiyya* order, where Bamba emphasized “*al-khidma*” (service) to the Prophet. This guiding principle would define his spiritual legacy.

Despite his spiritual independence, Bamba continued to honor and praise his former sheikhs and recognized their contributions to Sufism. His poems and writings during this time reflect his unique position as someone who was both deeply connected to the Prophet and still respectful of the legacy of earlier Sufi masters. This balance allowed him to maintain his independent spiritual path while fostering mutual respect with the followers of the other orders.

Bamba’s writings during this period further illustrate his spiritual evolution. He produced fewer scholarly works but engaged heavily in poetry, often praising Prophet Muhammad and expressing gratitude for the divine blessings he received. His later

works were more personal and independent, marked by a reduced reliance on earlier Sufi texts and a greater emphasis on direct spiritual experience. While his writings occasionally echoed the teachings of other Sufi figures, this was less about citing them as authorities and more about reflecting the universal spiritual truths he had received directly from Allah and the Prophet. In his revised versions of earlier texts, Bamba refrained from invoking specific Sufi sheikhs as his direct mentors, further emphasizing his singular devotion to the Prophet Muhammad as his only spiritual guide. This shift underscores the extent to which Bamba's identity and spiritual practice had evolved, setting him apart as a uniquely independent figure in the Sufi tradition.

The primary focus of Bamba's intellectual and spiritual journey was the integration of practical Sufism into everyday life. Different from many other Sufi scholars who emphasized theoretical knowledge or philosophical discourse, Bamba's approach was fundamentally practical. His teachings centered around practical action, particularly in the areas of worship, work, and service. His intellectual contributions were not abstract ideas but were deeply rooted in his lived experience and the lived experience of his followers.

Bamba's emphasis on practical spirituality was evident in his focus on personal discipline, ethical behavior, and social responsibility. He emphasized the importance of serving others and contributing to the community, believing that one could attain closeness to Allah through work and service. His teachings were not confined to the mosque or the study hall but extended into the daily lives of his followers. By focusing on the practical application of Sufi principles, Bamba sought to create a more accessible form of spirituality that could be practiced by ordinary people in their everyday lives.

This focus on practical Sufism was also a response to the challenges of his time, particularly the political and colonial oppression he faced. The colonial context in which Bamba lived, with its social and political disruptions, required a form of Sufism that was flexible and adaptable. Bamba's practical approach to spirituality gave his followers the tools to navigate these challenges, emphasizing inner spiritual strength

over external resistance. His teachings offered a model of resilience, demonstrating how spiritual practices could be used to endure hardship and adversity.

Can Bamba's approach be viewed within the context of Neo-Sufism? Neo-Sufism, as discussed by scholars like Fazlur Rahman, Bernd Radtke, Nehemia Levtzion, and John Voll, emerged as a response to challenges in the 18th and 19th centuries, with Sufi leaders focusing on Sharia, organized brotherhoods, and societal roles.⁴⁰⁷ Despite the problematic nature of the term,⁴⁰⁸ Bamba's thought, as we have outlined in this study, shares many similarities with the general characteristics associated with the term Neo-Sufism. Thus, *al-Muridiyya* order might reflect the trend of neo-Sufi brotherhoods adapting to political and colonial contexts while preserving a devotional core.

This thesis has demonstrated that various scholars and sources shaped Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba's intellectual and spiritual legacy. Still, he could synthesize these influences into a uniquely practical form of Sufism that defined his legacy. Through his deep devotion to Prophet Muhammad and his commitment to serving others, Bamba offered a model of spirituality that was both personally transformative and socially impactful. His ability to adapt traditional Sufi teachings to the unique socio-political challenges of his time is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Sufism. Bamba's life and teachings inspire millions, offering a powerful example of how spirituality can provide the strength to endure adversity and transform society. His legacy remains a vital part of the spiritual and cultural fabric of Senegal and West Africa, and his contributions to Sufi thought offer valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between spirituality, politics, and social change.

Further research into Ahmadu Bamba's understanding of key Sufi terms is essential to gaining a deeper insight into his unique spiritual practices and approach to Sufism. Additionally, a more comprehensive investigation into Bamba's works in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology, and Arabic language studies would contribute to a broader understanding of the intellectual foundations of his teachings beyond the realm

⁴⁰⁷ See John Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 42 (2013): 314-330,

⁴⁰⁸ For the term's main characteristics, see O'Fahey, R. S., and Bernd Radtke. "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered" *Der Islam* 70, no. 1 (1993): 52-87.

of Sufism. Finally, conducting comparative studies between Bamba's Sufi thought and other prominent Sufi traditions in West Africa could provide valuable perspectives on the similarities, differences, and unique contributions of his approach. Such studies would enrich the understanding of Bamba's place within the wider context of Islamic thought in the region and highlight the distinctive elements of his teachings.



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APPENDIX

SAMPLES FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS CITED IN THE THESIS

APPENDIX A

A sample from the correspondence between Sheikh Sidiya and Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba. These letters are available in the library of Sheikh Sidiya's family in Boutilimit-Mauritania. I have a digitized copy of them, provided to me by the *murīdī* scholar Cheikhouna Mbacke 'Abdul Wadoud.

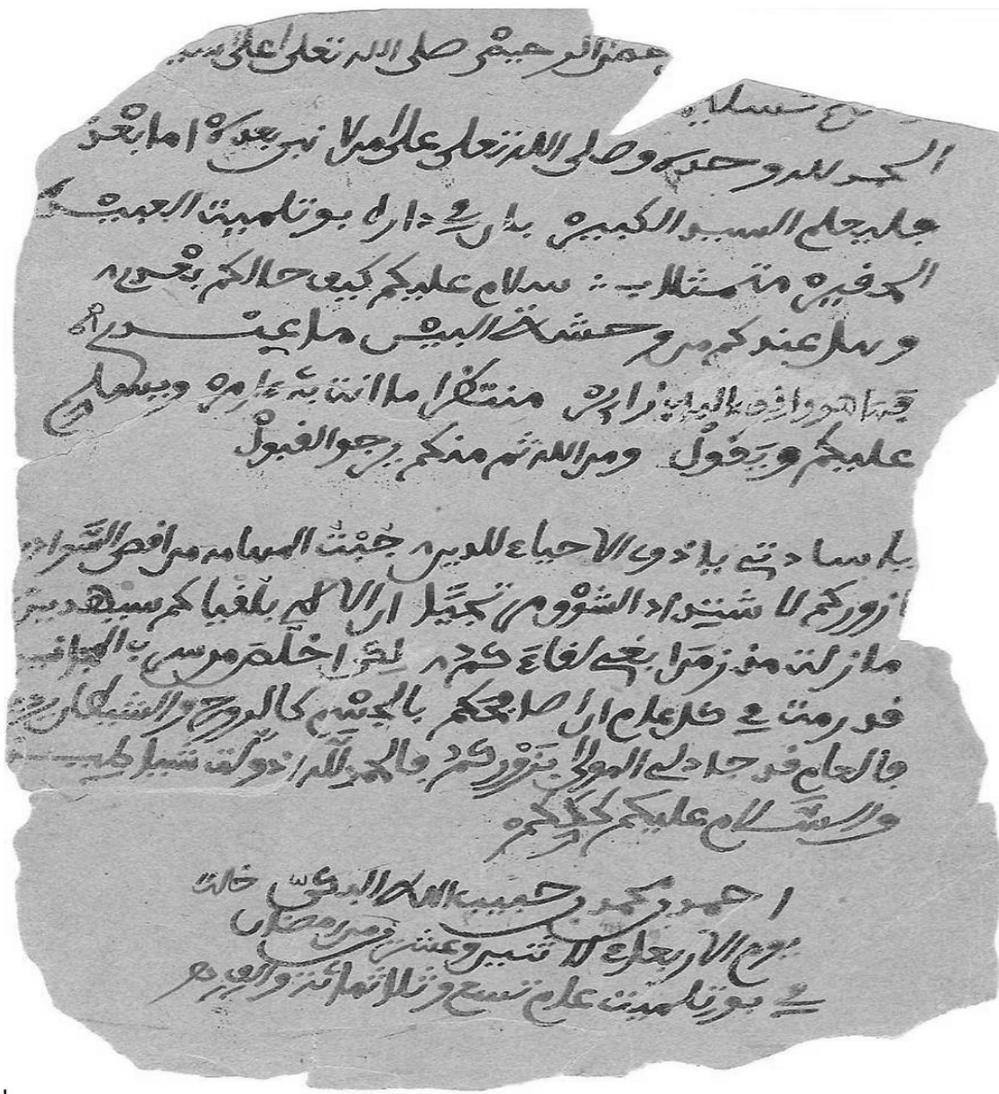


Figure A.1. A Letter of Sheikh Sidiya and Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba

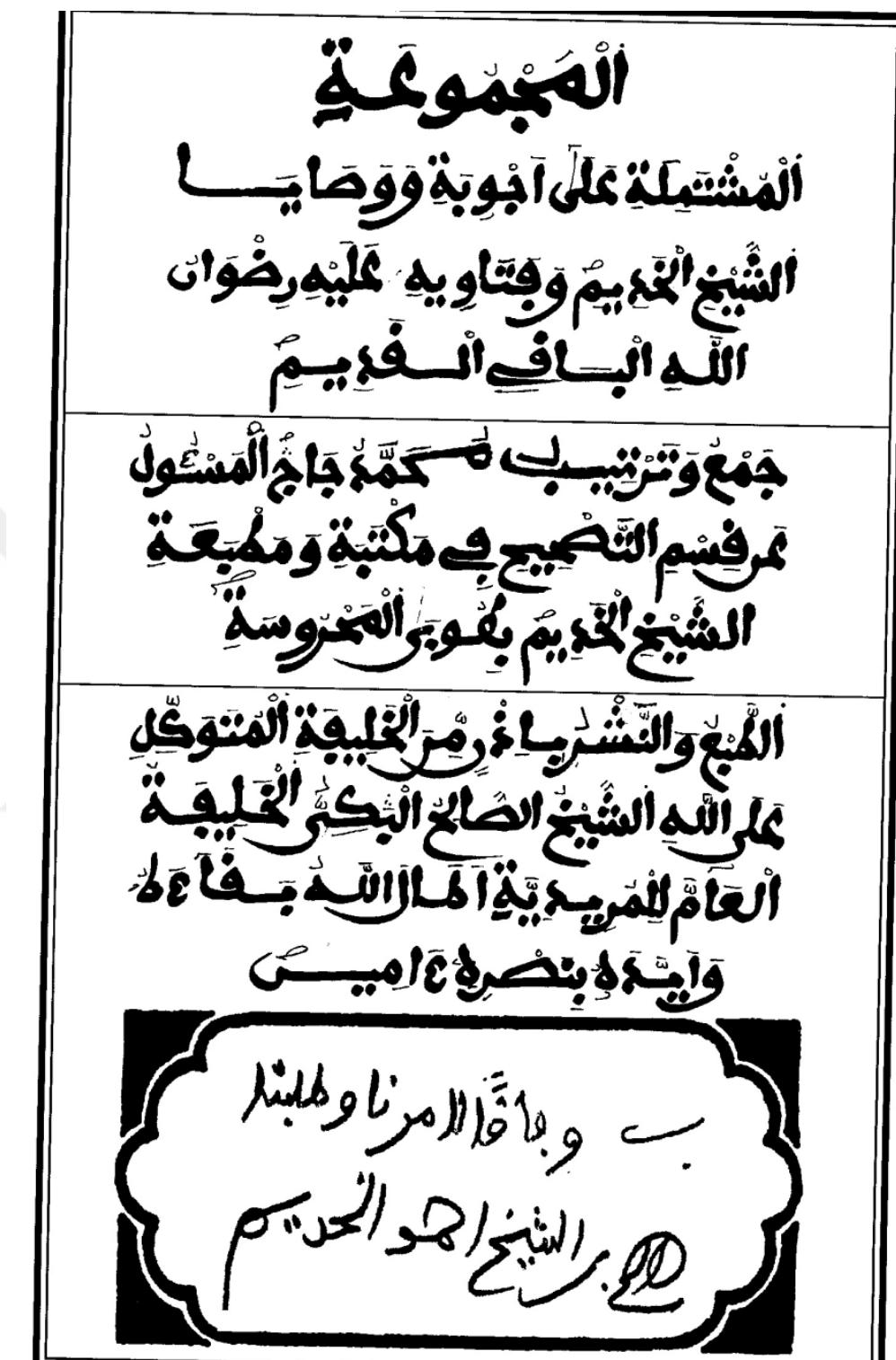


Figure B.1. The Cover Page of Ahmadu Bamba's Book “*al-Majmū 'at al-kubrā*”

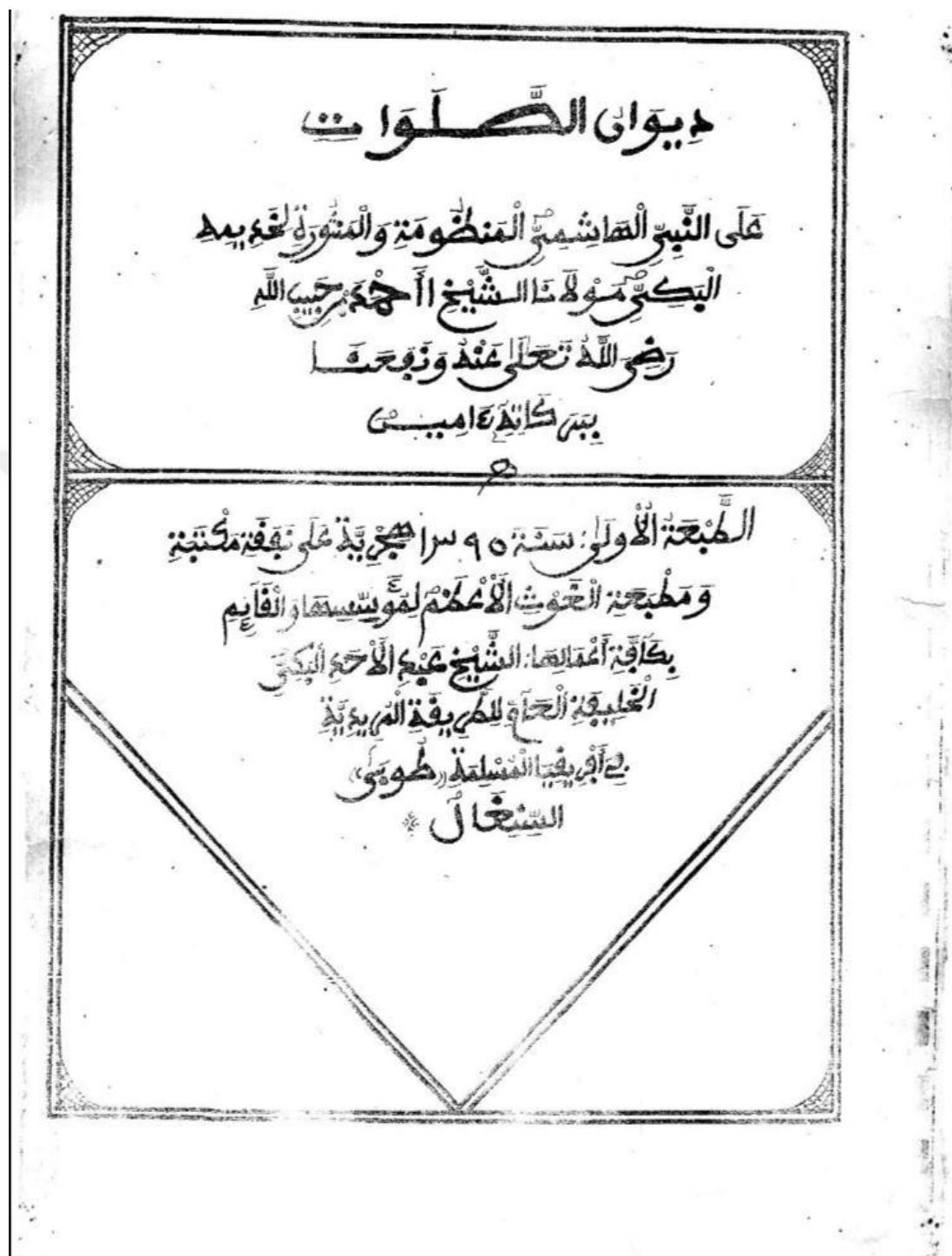


Figure C.1. The Cover Page of Ahmadu Bamba's Book “*Dīwān as-ṣalawāt 'alā an-nabī al- hāshimī*”



Figure D.1. The Cover Page of Ahmadu Bamba’s “*Qaṣīdatāni li ṭalabi zawiyatīn sāliha*”

APPENDIX E



Figure E.1. The First Page of an Ahmadu Bamba’s Poem, Embroidered with the Letters of “bismi-l-lāh ar-rahmān ar-rahīm”

APPENDIX F

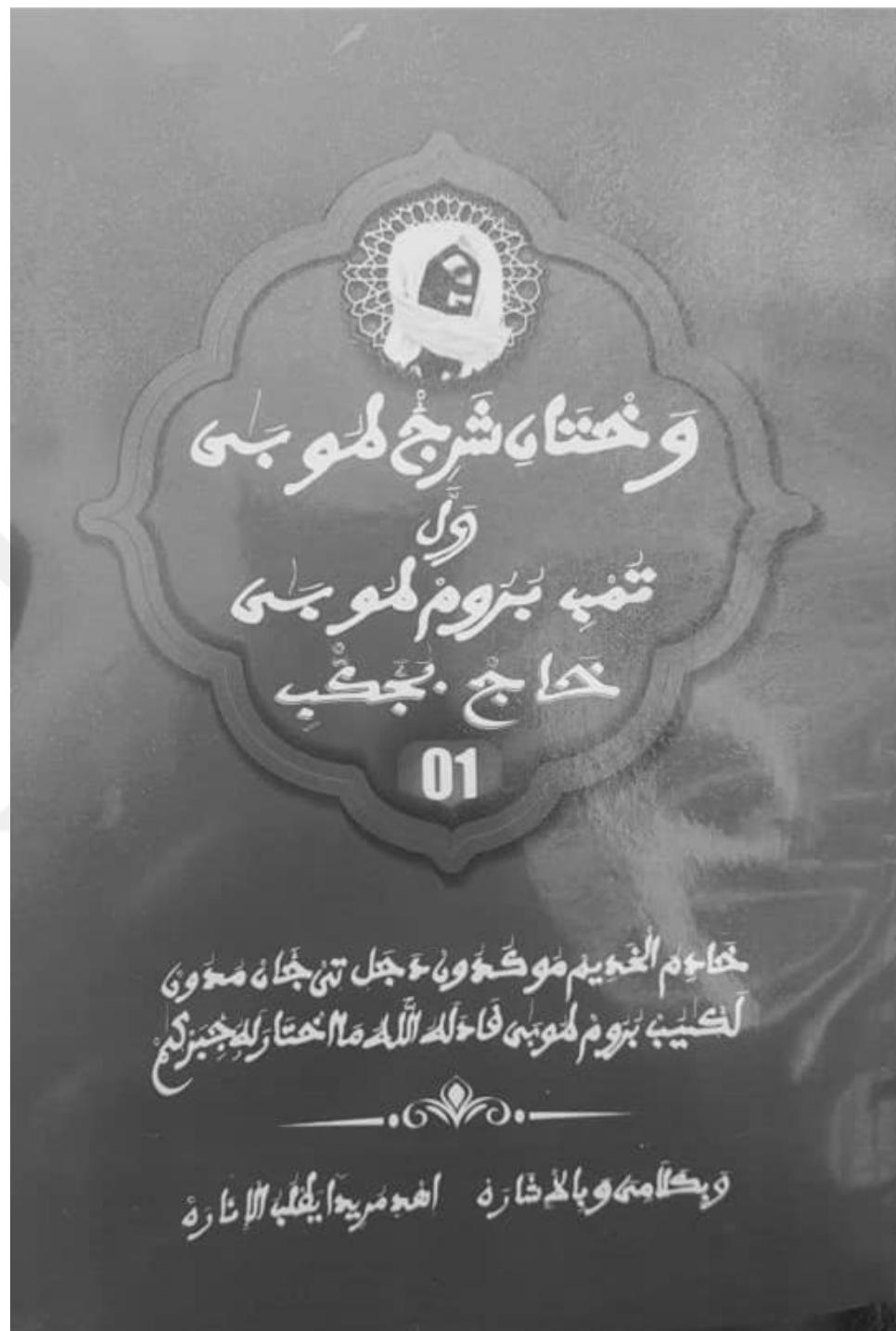


Figure F.1. The Cover Page of Serigne Elhadj Mbacke's Book “*Waxtāne serigne touba*”

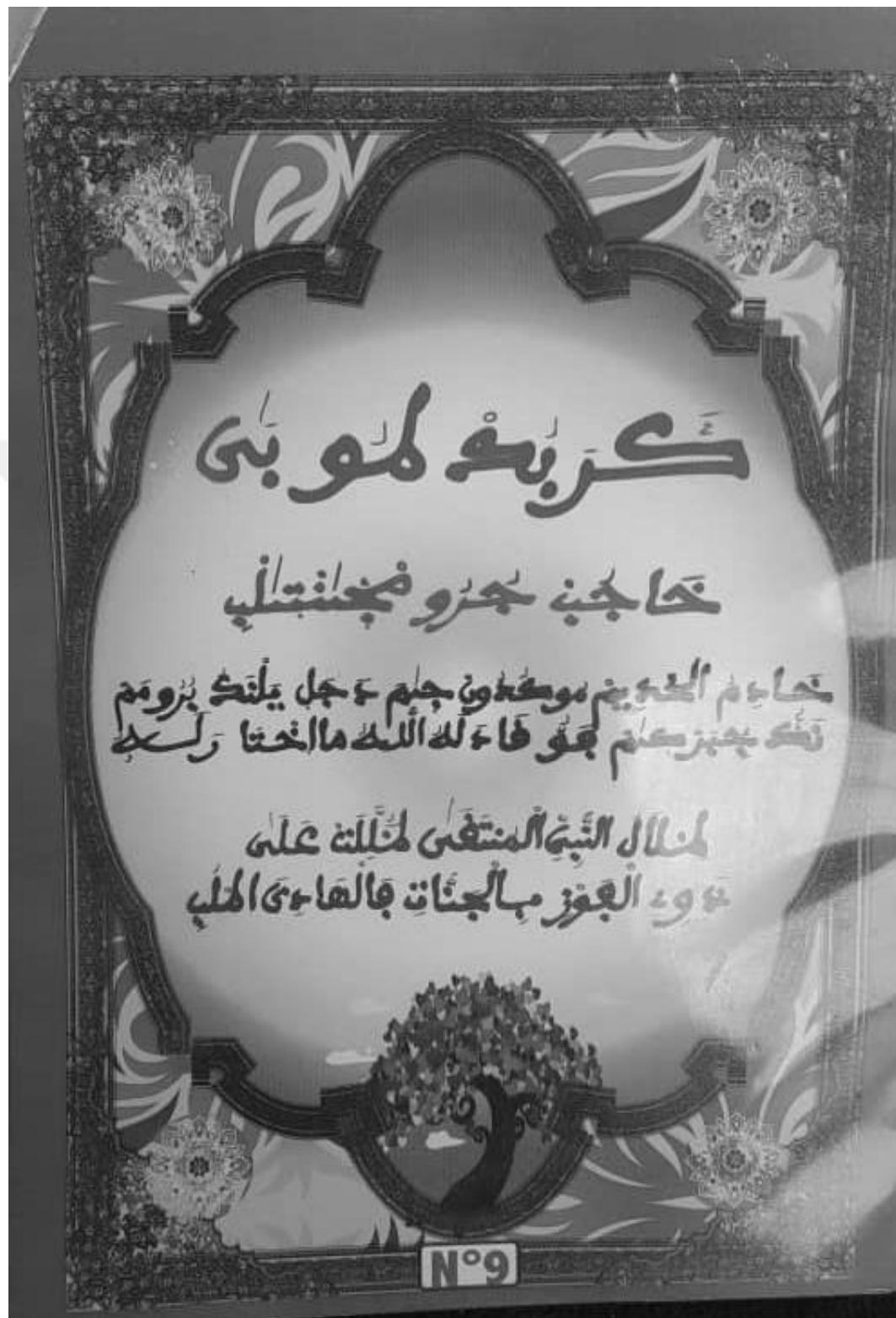


Figure G.1. The Cover Page of Serigne Elhadj Mbacke's Book “Garabu touba”

CURRICULUM VITAE

Full Name:

Khadim Mbacke

Contact Information:

E-mail (1):

E-mail (2):

Education:

2016 – 2020 BA in Education and Islamic Studies, Al Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.

2022 – 2025 MA in Islamic Studies, İbn Haldun Üniversitesi, Türkiye.

Work Experience:

2022 – 2025 Research Assistant, Ibn Haldun University, Turkey.

2023 – 2024 Teaching Assistant, Arabic Language Center, Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey.

2024 – 2025 Customer Service Representative, Teleperformance, Istanbul Turkey.