

## Ken Bugul (Senegal)

### Muridism

*A ouzou billahi mina cheytani rdajimi!*

I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan!

*Bissimilabi Rabmani Rabimi!*

In the name of God the most merciful and compassionate!

As you must imagine, I am not going to talk about Islam as a theologian or religious specialist might. I do not want to isolate Islam from any others religions as if Islam were different from them. The three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are monotheistic religions and they share the same ancestor, Abraham. I would like to talk about Islam specifically in Senegal.

Islam came to Senegal from its northern neighbor countries just as it did to Mali, Niger, and Chad. Likewise within Senegal, northerners were first to be converted to Islam; among them were the Toucouleur and the Peulhs. The Peulhs used to be nomads and they spread all over the Sahel from Senegal to the Far East. The local populations living south of northern Senegal used to be animists or *Ceddo*. This reminds me of the film by the famous Senegalese filmmaker Sembène Ousmane, called *Ceddo*. In those days the kingdoms of different parts of Senegal were animists and they collaborated with the first Muslims without the advancement of Islam.

In the southern part of the country Christian missionaries were spreading Christianity in the Sine and lower to Casamence. It was like the country was divided. The north was Muslim and the south Christian. But the different kingdoms started embracing Islam for strategic purposes, and in the Saloum there were progressively more conversions to Islam, occurring without violence.

Islam started to spread progressively in most parts of the country through strategic alliances and marriages. The Islam from the former Sudan, which included Senegal and Mali, in that period, was a strong adversary of French colonialism in terms of occupation and assimilation. And Faidherbe had to fight against Omar Tall who was defeated in Kayes in the Far East on the river Senegal. Mali, despite a large animist population, particularly within the Dogon people, was in touch with Islam centuries ago from the tradition of Trans-Saharan trade between North Africa and Sub Saharan Africa, for salt, gold and precious wood. Cities like Djenne and Timbuktu were renowned places for education in Islam, and for exchange between the then famous Muslim regions of Spain. The famous pilgrimage of Emperor Kankan Moussa to Saudi Arabia, centuries ago, through Egypt, accompanied by thousands of people and transporting tons of gold which he distributed to the leaders of the places he was crossing, contributed also to the spread of Islam. Islam has been in those countries since long ago. It was an Islam of education, research, and science.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a figure came out in Senegal by the name of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacke, or, Bamba. The colonialists had for strategic purposes many Muslim leaders as allies to stop the resistance of the Ceddo. A play written by a former chairman of the Parliament in Senegal, Amadou Cisse Dia, called *Les Derniers Jours de Lat Dior*

(*The Last Days of Lat Dior*), shows the last battle against the French occupation of Senegal by the colonialists. But Bamba did not accept being a collaborator with the colonialists. He started becoming well known and collecting followers. His meeting with a Prince of Cayor called Ibra Fall, who descending directly from the Royal families of the Cayor, marked an important point in the development of the so called *Muridism*, the *Black Islam*.

Sheikh Ibra Fall, who was a great admirer of Bamba, followed him, and to ease his dedication to God and his prophet Mohamed (Blessings and Peace be upon him), took care of all Bamba's domestic necessities. He took care of Bamba's family's wellbeing so that Bamba could concentrate on God and his prophets by his devotion and his writing of the colossal Sufi poems called *Khassaides*. With Ibra Fall the phenomenon of Baye Fall was born. The day Bamba touched the head of Ibra Fall to thank him for his devotion to his work Ibra Fall never cut his hair again. The Rasta hair is the most recognizable aspect of a Baye Fall. They do not cut their hair and you can find an old Baye Fall to this day with Rasta hair following behind him. That brought Jamaicans like Jimmy Cliff to embrace Muridism because of that phenomenon and the devotion of Muridism's adherents. The devotion in Muridism is expressed by two dictums: *Pray or Work*, or *Pray and Work*. The outcomes is *Peace and Prosperity*—peace by the prayer; prosperity by the work. The two men symbolized Muridism—Bamba the prayer, and Ibra Fall the worker. Both are prayers.

When you are dedicated to prayer, it is work; when you are dedicated to work it is also prayer. Baye Fall's song is 'Dieuf dieul, Dieuf rekka takku' meaning 'your action by working for prosperity is yours and for all; only work has worth'. This explains why this religious attitude is important for the nation's economical dynamic. Bamba's resistance against the French colonialists led to his exile in which he stayed in different many countries, always in resistance, and always devoted to God and his prophet Mahomet. He was exiled in Gabon in the forest of Mayombe for seven years. That exile gave Muridism the popularity it has now in Senegal. And every year the town of Touba, settled by the Sheikh, is one the most visited places in Sub Saharan Africa during the pilgrimage called the "Magal of Touba", which celebrates Bamba's return from exile.

Muridism gives a choice. You can be dedicated to God by prayer and retreat, or you can be dedicated through work. Muridism represents a mental, emotional and economical dynamic. The strongest economical dynamic in Senegal is caused by Muridism. Muridism is also the so-called *black Islam*, as it pertains to our culture, our way of living, and to our traditions reinforced by peace and prosperity. We believe in God but we are ourselves and have an African culture. Islam in Senegal is a religion of peace and tolerance. Senegal is a laic country. Despite that more than 95 percent is Muslim, our first president Leopold Senghor was a catholic. Our second President Abdu Diouf was a Muslim and his wife was a fervent catholic. Our current president is Muslim and his wife is French and catholic. In Senegal most of the families are mixed with Christians, Muslims and Jews.

We have noticed in these last years a little phenomenon called *integrism*—a extremism coming from other parts of the world preaching an Islam we do not know and which we cannot call Islam. That *integrism* does not suit our culture. Our way of dressing is connected with our traditions and our climate. Their behavior is not suitable to our social and cultural life. The role given to women is not suitable with matriarchal societies. And Muridism is there to counter that phenomenon. Senegal is a country of high education in Islam and we know

about Islam in terms of peace, tolerance, open-mindedness, a duty of learning, and knowledge. “One must search for knowledge even if he has to go to China” said Prophet Mohamed (Blessings and Peace be upon him).

What is happening now is a discussion throughout the Islamic world about how barbarian civilizations have affected us. We must avoid that amalgamation—that misunderstanding of Islam, which can lead to undeserved violence against us. Muslims around the world, the most moderate ones who are believers in peace and love, feel they are being mistreated because of the speeches from the world against Islam.

All the religions have had, and have, their derivative sub-groups. When we analyze those derivatives most of the time they have been dictated by an obscurantist. When Hitler, who was from a supposed civilized country, decided to remove from humanity all Jews and homosexuals and the so called non-human beings—meaning the black people—nobody paid attention at the beginning. It was only after he gassed and burned millions of Jews that the world awoke. We should have avoided that horrible genocide. We must avoid today the horrible death of innocent victims of any kind of terrorism—the children, the women, the men, and the environment, wherever they may occur. We must fight all extremism, all terrorism, from the very beginning.

We all know the external and internal reasons for the current state of Islamic societies and how they are perceived; and I am not going to talk about that. In the past people did not talk about Islam in the way they are today, even when Catholic Spain was combative against Muslim and Jewish influence. Now we are facing the fundamentalist and extremist Islamists. The terrorists of today used to be the allies of yesterday. They were given war education, guns, money, security, protection and insidiously a new vision of resistance, which they now misinterpret as Jihad. That also becomes a boomerang. One proverb of Senegal says: *If you feed your donkey you will first be kicked down.*

We must figure out a new policy to better the relationships of all the countries of the world. *Jihad* in its real meaning is not terrorism. For most of the Muslims, particularly in Senegal, Jihad is a self defense against the devil—a self protection against satanic tendencies. Jihad is applied to everyone as a way of controlling their impulses and senses. Nowadays, all the words like *terrorism*, *jihad*, *integrism*, and *fundamentalism* have lost their meanings in a way that is negatively directed against Islam. Every one uses these words according to one’s own vision and each one thinks that he or she is right and acting according to duty. I was in Italy at a conference and someone asked me: “How can you be a Muslim?” The person was shocked. I was shocked much more. We must now, to avoid creating a divided world between civilization and barbarianism, imagine a new vision of a world of peace through understanding, tolerance and justice.

The barbarians of today used to be the civilized of yesterday. The civilized of today used to be the barbarians of yesterday. We must struggle against racism, xenophobia, selfishness, extremism in all ways and in all parts of the world. We must open the box of dialogue and learn about each other in order to build a world of peace based on justice in its real terms—equality, and respect for differences. The former President Senghor of Senegal used to say that a universal civilization must be built on dialogue. A civilized world must be “the meeting of giving and receiving” (“Le rendez vous du donner et du recevoir”). This is our obligation.

We are on the same planet. We are bound to each other. The interconnectedness inevitable among the people of the world, at all levels, must lead us to open the box of dialogue and justice and respect, and close the box of Pandora.

We cannot foresee the consequences this isolation can have for humanity. Nobody should be locked in his own box and unmindful of what is happening elsewhere. The world is now bound to a single destiny. “We are all one or none,” someone has said. I have family members and friends spread across the world. I have my American friends that are black, white, olive—whatever—and I love them. We feel so much concern for whatever happens to America. America is the world in miniature. We do not want America or any other country to have troubles. They will be our troubles.

I am a Muslim and the way we are living our religion in Senegal allows us to be in good acquaintance with the rest of humanity. Islam is the religion which says that to be a Muslim, you must believe in the Torah of Moses (Aleytoul Salam), and in the Evangel of Jesus (Aleytoul Salam). I read my bible and I wish to embrace Judaism. The objective of Islam is to remove the human being from the enterprise of the Devil. Islam is the religion which annihilates the opacity of unfaith, of prevarication, and conducts the human being towards the city of faith, equilibrium, love, a reconciliation with the self—and even better—towards happiness. Islam means submission to God; and God means love and peace.

Some societies adapt their religions according to their traditions, and we must not make the amalgamation. We must know that some practices come from the situations of a people and not from Islam itself. What is happening as a result of the much too widely held perspective of Islam as a religion of obscurantism and barbarianism is inappropriate and incorrect, and disregarding of all the thousand millions of Muslims around the world. They feel hurt and misunderstood. Please let us open the box of dialogue: allow us to proceed in struggling forcefully against terrorism; a terrorism which includes racism, exclusion, xenophobia, injustice, obscurantism, and whatever may be its causes. Let us pray or work towards a world of justice, tolerance and peace.

*Diadiouf Serigne Touba, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba!*  
*Assalamou aleykoum!*