JIHAD FOR PEACE
By Abdoul Aziz Mbacke

Exploring the Philosophy of
SHEIKH AHMADOU BAMBA
The African Muslim Leader of Nonviolence (1853-1927)
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EXPLORING SHEIKH AHMADOU BAMBA’S PHILOSOPHY

By

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www.majalis.org
PUBLISHED BY MAJALIS

(www.majalis.org)
“Beyond the value of Bamba’s life and teachings for specific ethnic groups, he is a reminder of the adaptability and universality of the religion to different cultures and peoples through its inner tradition…

Further study into the contribution Bamba made in the cultural and spiritual revival of his people will demonstrate the significance his universal message and nonviolent struggle has for attaining peace in the world today.”

Michelle R. Kimball
Sheikh Muhammad Mourtada Mbacke, son of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, reading the Qur-ān
Preface

I wish to dedicate this work to the late Sheikh Muhammad Mourtada Mbacke, who never spared any efforts and any pains to spread peacefully the true word of Islam throughout the world, in spite of his old age. This translation is the right outcome of his work. Thank you Goor Yàlla.

I wish also to acknowledge all who contribute in whatever form to the publication of this book. May they all be eternally rewarded thereof by the Almighty Lord.

This book was written in Arabic by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba during his thirties, before he became famous, owing to 33 years of tense relationship with the French colonial authorities. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is an African Muslim Sufi master, born in 1853 in Senegal (West Africa), during French colonization, just after the official abolition of slavery in the colonies. He was born into a renowned Muslim clerical family, the Mbacke, well-known for their deep-rooted attachment to learning and teaching religious knowledge. Islam had then nearly a thousand years of history in Senegal.

Showing precociously gifted inclination towards learning and imitating the noble devout Sufis he heard about, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba started, in his early youth, to write books devoted to the fundamentals of religious knowledge any believer is compelled to know—Islamic Law (Fiqh), Theology (Tawḥīd), Spiritual education (Tarbiyya), Sufism (Tasawwuf) etc. His high concern to preserve and to spread in an easier form true knowledge and the valuable Islamic principles among his people led him to put in verses many of the reference prose books of that time he found too hard-learning for most of his contemporaries.

After his father’s death, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba founded the first Muslim brotherhood ever been founded by a black man in all
Islamic history (the Muridiyya) and settled new forms of teaching he thought more suitable to his disciples and more likely to rekindle their human dignity depreciated by long years of political and intellectual domination. Many from all around the country, from all social classes, came to join the revival movement he initiated through teaching and worshipping God in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH) and with the rules of Sufism. Thanks to his charismatic virtues and to the spiritual lights his disciples were shining, his reputation soon expanded and crowds towards his daaras (schools) fast took larger proportions.

Such a trend aroused a libelous campaign against Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, from some native colonial representatives, and provoked strong mistrust to the French colonial power who suspected him of preparing his disciples to Jihad (holy war). This bias was all the most unfair if we consider the nonviolent philosophy of the Sheikh as well as his concept of Khidma (Rendering Service to the Prophet) which excluded any violence, even against the vilest creature. Indeed the kind of spiritual and intellectual jihad the Sheikh was carrying on was quite different from all what was known by western people about Muslim leaders’ resistance. The Sheikh wrote on this purpose: “I am waging my Jihad through Knowledge and Fearing the Lord”. However, regardless of such kind of concern, the colonial authorities decided to arrest and deport him to Gabon (Central Africa), in September 1895. After eight years of a very trying exile, during which the Sheikh wrote, in loneliness, an impressive number of poems all dedicated to the Lord and His Messenger (PBH), the French decided to let him go back home, in November 1902. But, in fearing his growing charisma over the masses aroused by his success, they exiled him again to Mauritania, afterwards they maintained him in house arrest in Senegal until his death in 1927. However history proved later that colonial strategies of “containment” did not succeed in holding back Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s teachings and work from shaping deeply the thoughts and the culture of his nation and of millions of people all around the world.

Abdoul Aziz Mbacke
Touba, January 2009
Abbreviations used

d. = date of death.

h. = year of the Hijra (the beginning of Islamic Calendar); usual subsequent date put in brackets represents the corresponding year in Christian calendar.

p. = page.


Cf. = compare.

PBH = Peace and Blessings be upon Him (the Prophet).

lit. = literally.

“The Sheikh” and “the Servant of the Prophet” refer to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Transcription of Wolof and Arabic nouns follows sometimes the usual forms better known.
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Disclaimer

When I started this text, it was just with the purpose to write a short introduction in the front of the English translation of the *Ways unto heaven* I had just finished. Some friends who read the manuscript, among who my publishers, suggested me to take advantage of this introduction to present some aspects of Bamba’s teachings to English audience who are not familiar with Sufi philosophy, especially African Sufi masters. I started then to expose the nonviolent philosophy of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and its relevance in the world today. One thing leading to another, I unconsciously get immersed in an immense *Ocean* I hardly imagined the infinite and fertile depths before—Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s thinking. Before I realized it, I had already written almost one hundred pages about highly amazing and unforeseen perspectives of Bamba’s philosophy I had never suspected hitherto, and which would really puzzle many scholars of the Muridiyya who thought they have already got the bulk of its doctrine.

So, this study is just an accident and is not at all willful. I have simply let my boat be dragged along by the current of some ideas of mine and the groundswells of some scholarly material. During this strange trip, I had sometimes very unexpected encounters, I may assure you. Nevertheless, I am far from pretending to put a complete and academic book in your hands. Not yet, at least. And I neither intend, through this reflection, to lay a claim to a PhD. These are just the few corals I happened to found here and there in exploring the depths of an *Ocean*. Well, it’s up to you to see if we can get some pearls out of them.
Bamba di geej

Gu tàbbi geej

Fekk fa geej

Gu ne ko ngiij

Bamba is an Ocean

Who melted into an Ocean

And found therein an Ocean

Who blended with Him

*In the poem Xarnubi*
*By Sheikh Moussa Ka, a Wolof poet.*
Masālik-ul-Jinān is a book about Sufism, written by the African Muslim master, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, who wrote it within 1883 and 1887 (1300-1304 h.), at the beginning of his thirties. This corresponds to the period following his father’s death, when he started expressing openly his profound leaning towards the pattern of the Pious Ancients. “Ways unto heaven” is an exhaustive digest of the highly valuable teachings bequeathed by the old Sufi Masters, which are expounded and explained with a rare genius by the Sheikh in this book entirely versified in Arabic.

However, we have to bear in mind that a Sufi author surpasses an ordinary scholar that is displaying his theoretical knowledge about spiritual questions. Indeed, we may feel through the notable synthetic mind of his verses that the Servant of the Prophet was one who was putting into rigorous practice the principles that are in this book - which was amply demonstrated later by his very existence - and one who have got preciously a keen experience of Sufism (Cf. The Biography of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba - Tome IV, Appendix 1).
Masālik is mainly based on a previous prose work, written by Al-Yadālī, a Mauritanian master, entitled "Khātimatu-t-Tāsawwuf" (The Seal of Sufism), which content is supplemented here by a wide range of writings of other Sufi Masters, admirably summarized by the Sheikh. However, notwithstanding the high significance of reliable and accredited sources in Islamic theology - which commonly compels Muslim writers to fasten to the taqlīd (the opinions of the Ancients) – we must not infer therefrom slavish plagiarism or lazy eclecticism. Because such knowledge as Tasawwuf consists not in mere academic learning or formal quotations, but it has to be individually experienced and lived, so as to be fully understood. This explains most certainly why Sheikh Muhammad Bachir Mbacke (1895-1966), son and biographer of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, was keen to point out in the biography he devoted to his father 2:

“Our Sheikh – may God be Satisfied with him- has revived Sufism inasmuch as he revived Sufi practice and Suluk (commitment in the spiritual path). He composed [in this purpose] Masālik-ul-Jinān (Ways unto Heaven), which is a versification of Al-Yadālī’s Khātimatu-t-Tasawwuf, and he put in that book a great number of rules and recommendations - sometimes summarized, sometimes detailed - so as to let people know that it is a versification of Al-Yadālī’s book, in respect for its noble author. But there is no doubt that [Ways unto heaven] is far richer than Al-Yadali’s original text. Yet, his deference prevented the Sheikh from separating distinctly his personal thoughts from that text [in which case his book would no longer be called a versification of Al-Yadali’s book]...While putting a previous prose book in verse, [the Sheikh] never failed to insert into his writing what was springing out of his vast intelligence and out of his

1 Cf. Annex of the authors (Tome IV, at www.majalis.org/masalik). See also all references of our quotations at this same URL.

2 Entitled Minanu-l-Bāqi-l-Qadim (The Favors of the ETERNAL GOD) in which are gathered highly valuable biographical accounts relating to his father’s life, some he personally witnessed.
heart, that is; renouncing this vile world, loving God and preferring the Future Life.”

Through *Masālik*, we are given a comprehensive idea of the moral and spiritual attitudes enabling man to get round material obstacles and countless worldly temptations which prevent him from getting nearer to the Lord. Thus, it constitutes “a remedy for any such whose heart has been dulled by earthly lusts” (verse 27) and a first-rate viaticum for all who aspire not to yield to the luring mermaids of modern life and to purify their hearts. This is part of the reasons why we felt the necessity to undertake the translation of its 1563 verses in English, so as to allow English-speaking people to get to know the priceless contribution of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba in Islam, in upholding and handing down to present and future generations the very "substance" of the Eternal Message. And books like *Masālik* provide us with the essential keys to enter the kingdom of this universal and timeless Message.

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3 All the references of our quotations are available at this URL; www.majalis.org/masalik.
Indeed this universal message of peace and worship of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba to humankind is nowadays worthier than ever of careful thought. The world today is threatened by growing ruthless collision between Western conception of life and the Islamic approach of human freedom endorsed by a group of Muslims labeled as “extremists” or “terrorists”. Recently, such a worldwide coldblooded struggle reached horrendous heights with September 11 attacks, the thousands victims of Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and never-ending armed conflicts in the Middle-East and all around the world.

Beyond real geopolitical and strategic or even strictly “religious” motivations, we contend that the deepest driving forces of this conflict are to be sought as well in the differing perspectives of the two systems, schematically taken, about human rights and duties, their true meanings and their limits in the universe. Such a “cultural” discrepancy is exacerbated by blatant lack of balance and of appositeness shown on either side in opposing their variances in the field of political interests. Western fanatic materialism and excesses - which led man to lose track of his own meaning and reality in the universe - is facing fierce religious activism - which went also far astray beyond the limits imposed by minimum respect for human life. Every disproportionate stance of one side produces unbalanced
responses from the other side, thus providing higher levels of hatred and misunderstanding to the dreadful escalation—unfairness always calls for unfairness. So, what both sides need is more balance and more clear-sightedness. Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s teachings and spiritual perspective of Islam offer this unhoped-for balanced model.

The Jihad of Knowledge and Worship

“And let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God.”

(Qur-ân v. 8)

In practicing such a Divine Order, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba made clear the true nature of his fight in a poem written in 1903, on the point of leaving for his second exile to Mauritania:

“ [O ye my persecutors!] ye banned me on the pretence that I am waging a war (Jihad) against you. Indeed ye are right because I am really combating for the Countenance of the Lord. But I am waging my Jihad through Knowledge (ulûm) and Fearing the Lord (taqwâ), as [an humble] subject of God and the servant of His Prophet; and the Lord who oversees everything may assuredly bear witness thereof… While others hold material weapons to be feared, my two weapons are [knowledge] and [worship]; and this is surely my way of fighting.” (Cf. his poem “O ye People of the Trinity!”).

Indeed, it may be somewhat unexpected to many, in our context of tarnished perception of Islam, widely portrayed, through mass media, as intolerant and intrinsically violent, to hear a Muslim leader, who was yet victim of glaring injustice from unbelieving rulers during 33 years, defending nonviolence, forgiveness and love for humankind. The following verses, taken from some Bamba’s poems, may assuredly show how Islam, if really understood and lived, can be tolerant and how it integrates organically all the high morals which lead man to surpass himself:
"I have forgiven all my enemies for the Countenance of the Lord who turned them away from me for ever, because I feel no resentment against them."

"O Supreme Master of the universe! O Thou that art beyond any resentment, grant Thy mercy to all the creatures, o Thou who guide those who go astray!"

"May all humankind benefit from me, o Lord!"

"Make me a source of bliss for all, black and white"

"Spare me ever damaging Thy creatures, be they living near me or afar, be they Muslims or unbelievers."

"O Lord! Lift me to the rank of Renovator of the Path of Islam, out of any hostility and war."

"O Lord! Spare me ever harming any of Thy creatures and protect me from their harm as well."

"O Lord! To whomever that is blaming me or who has offended me, forgive him and may he submit to Thee."

"Impart Thy Guidance, thanks to me, to the people of my time and to coming generations"

"The true warrior in God’s path is not he who kills his enemies, but he who combats his ego (nafs) to achieve spiritual perfection"

"Indeed, the toughest Jihad consists in hindering one’s mind from ever involving in aught that is not proper."

"Always cherish good feelings for all the creatures of God."

Such a peaceful and high attitude led Michelle R. Kimball, founder of the International Peace Project, to entitle "A Muslim Peacemaker of the Twentieth Century - Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba"
her introduction to the book “Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba and Qur’anic and Sunnah Foundations of the Muridiyyah Order”. She wrote:

“Amidst the heightened state of turmoil in the world today, associated with the apparent clash between Islamic and Western cultures, the life of one Muslim peacemaker warrants recognition - a Muslim saint who led a successful and completely nonviolent struggle for peace within the last century...Beyond the value of Bamba’s life and teachings for specific ethnic groups, he is a reminder of the adaptability and universality of the religion to different cultures and peoples through its inner tradition...Further study into the contribution Bamba made in the cultural and spiritual revival of his people will demonstrate the significance his universal message and nonviolent struggle has for attaining peace in the world today.”

In another article of “The Economist”, titled “Faith in the market” (December 19th, 2006) and devoted to Murids’ economic doctrine and industriousness, the author concluded:

“Little known as they are, the Murids might have a lot to teach the rest of the world—not only about how to respond to globalization, but how to practice religion in a peaceful way.”

Indeed, hitherto very little is relatively known about the richness of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s philosophy and teachings in the world today, particularly regarding his method of nonviolent resistance. Bamba succeeded in combining perfectly standing up for his faith and for his moral principles with acknowledging to others the right to live peacefully, as long as they try not to constrain him violently to give up his faith. Such a philosophy warrants certainly a certain examination so as to know its doctrinal and historical grounds.

Divine Guidance vs Human Strategy and Wisdom

It is noteworthy that the kind of nonviolence advocated by Bamba is quite different, to many extents, to that claimed by Gandhi or by Martin Luther King. As some have noticed it, both Gandhi and Martin
Luther King were killed through *violence*, although their being calling publicly for *nonviolence*. According to the Muslim perspective taught by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, this is not at all contradictory since, as worthy and as wise as Gandhi and King’s strategies might be, they are just human and rational *strategies* issuing from their only reasoning and beliefs. Even the deep spirituality referred to by Gandhi, although morally valuable and praiseworthy, it has no ultimate effectiveness and a *spiritual* value in the pure Islamic view. Since the principle of *Ahimsa* (the avoidance of violence) he was claiming originates from the religions of ancient India (Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism) which are ranked among pagan and polytheistic beliefs or among mere philosophies by Islamic orthodoxy. *Ahimsa* notably emphasizes vegetarianism and bans hunting and ritual sacrifice, contrary to Islam. As for M. Luther King’s nonviolence, it was primarily a useful strategy, inspired by Gandhi’s struggle and philosophy. Besides, it is known that King was counseled to adopt this strategy by Bayard Rustin, an African American civil rights activist, who has studied Gandhi’s teachings and who was well-known for his open homosexuality and his former ties with the Communist Party USA.

Human rational wisdom and rationality may well lead to success as it may lead to failure or to transitory setbacks which could end in future success. But, according to the Muslim beliefs and Sufi philosophy referred to by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, man has to submit his entire will to his Lord and to worship Him perfectly, in purifying his heart from all worldly vanities and desires aside from God, so as to attain true spiritual perfection which enables him to benefit from direct Divine guidance.

*“Fear God and God will teach ye.”* (Qur-ān ii.282)

*“O ye who believe! If ye fear God, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong).”* (Qur-ān viii.29)

*“This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God.”* (Qur-ān ii.1)
“And those who strive in Our (cause),- We will certainly guide them to our Paths: For verily God is with those who do right.” (Qur-ân xxix.69)

“So persevere patiently: for the End is for those who are righteous.”
(Qur-ân xi.49)

According to Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s philosophy, God’s direct teaching goes far beyond any rational strategy or human wisdom, and leads inevitably to ultimate success. In fact, that is real wisdom and clear-sightedness. Man can attain it only through Fear of God (taqwâ), which is defined by the masters as “complying perfectly to God’s Orders and avoiding all He forbids”. (Fear of God is often equivalent to worship and to good deeds, in Muslim vocabulary.)

Thence, the kind of spiritual Jihad promoted by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is quite different from that advocated by many modern Muslim “activists” as well. Inasmuch as the Sheikh wishes that Muslims may first perfect their faith, their trust in the Lord, their commitment to knowledge and worship, their behaviors and their morals through education and clear-sighted determination (himmah). Otherwise, their faith would remain a void principle which could not in the least shield them from being dominated by other civilizations and from losing their spiritual strength, whatever arms they may use. The real quintessence of Islam, which gave Muslims power and success in every domains, in the past, was unfailing fidelity to the spiritual and moral principles taught by the Holy Book and by the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH), revived and further theorized through Sufi masters’ teachings. God promises His help only to the true believers who fear Him really, not to zealous formal worshippers; as He asserted “Verily God will defend those who believe” (Qur-ân xxii.38). Such a dialectical principle of Faith-Guidance is the spiritual basis of Bamba’s thinking, as implied by his writings;

“[O Lord!] Impart me Righteousness and Thy Guidance, protect me from blame and grant me Worthiness by the Grace of the Prophet.”
“God, the Creator, has guided me [on His Path] and has led me to Him through all kinds of wonders. The Matchless Lord has freed me
from anything but Him and has led me [on the Right Path].” “I render thanks to the Supreme Protector who has protected me from all my enemies.”

Because, in Bamba’s view, that is Divine Guidance which has provided him protection and which has ensured his success, unlike preceding Muslim resistance fighters in Senegal who all failed to oppose to French colonizers, because they did not attain such a spiritual degree.

Although Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba did not dismiss absolutely or exclude the possibility to use material weapons, in case of self-defense or under the special circumstances provided for by Islamic law, his spiritual degree inspired him to use instead other kinds of weapons more suitable to his space and time—combating his own soul, purifying his heart and consecrating his entire life to raise the Divine Word and to benefit all humankind (khidma) so as to be guided and protected by the Creator Himself. According to this new perspective, if the Prophet (PBH) decided at a certain point to take up arms and to combat unbelievers, it was only after clear permission was given to Him by the Lord Himself, but not just through personal strategy or human aggressiveness. The word jihad itself conveys a wider etymologic meaning, that is “efforts” made in God’s Path.

Was it not such a mystical perspective, the Sheikh could have certainly followed the same violent model chosen by many previous Sufi resistance fighters who combated French colonialists through arms. Is evidence thereof what he said after the trying and frustrating hardships the French Governor of Dakar made him undergo on the way to exile (September 1895):

“Whenever I recall my sojourn in such a [awful prison] they put me in, and the [misbehavior] of that unfair governor, I feel like taking arms [to combat them]. But the Prophet himself dissuades me therefrom.”
This verse is an evidence of the spiritual perspective Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba gave his nonviolent struggle, which goes beyond mere human reaction of indignation and of revolt against glaring injustice, and which takes its roots from mystical motivations. Books like *Masālik-ul-Jinān* (Ways unto heaven) provide us with the vital groundwork to better understand the basic principles which can lead to this kind of spiritual philosophy.

**Conditions of Global Peace and Humanism**

However, contrary to the theory of Utopian peace and unconditional fraternity, Bamba is convinced that negative and destructive human conceptions are to be fought, in the suitable forms. So, unrestrained materialism promoted by Western modern way of life and thinking are held by the Sheikh as highly detrimental to piety and to humankind as well. Insofar as it has led man to forget the ultimate purpose of his stay on earth and his intrinsic meaning, because of his spiritual and moral emptiness. He criticized such a lack of spirituality in one of his poems:

“*[Many of the Western] are devoting themselves to what displeases the Lord. Satan has deluded them towards disobedience, audacity, and spiritual ruin. They are so lost that now they are wandering all around the world and have set themselves to oppress [peoples]...[As for Black natives], they have set themselves to imitate them, through dissoluteness, disloyalty and other immoral vices.*” (Ilhāmu Salām, v. 12-14,18)

Such a lack of moral sense, criticized by the Sheikh, is endangering humankind themselves insofar as it has taken them to the two deadliest wars in history, to the latent destruction of their ecological environment, to fashion a highly unfair and inhuman global economic model, to promote global approval of homosexuality and of other immoral values. Today, the only gods who are really worshipped by most people and who are supposed to fill their spiritual emptiness are sex, entertainment, and money.
Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s nonviolent struggle intended to show, through “knowledge and worship”, that such a materialistic perspective is a dead end for humankind and that only worshipping duly the Lord and complying with moral and spiritual rules may lead them to happiness in this world and in the Hereafter. Thus, in Bamba’s view, nonviolence does not mean unquestioning approval of all human misconceptions. For him, time is not at all money neither pure leisure, as the modern saying goes, but time is worship and seeking God’s Light instead.

“My time [as brief as] a human breath will be worth a precious jewel with which one would be able to buy a Wondrous and Eternal Treasure [on the Last Day]. Losing such a time without worshipping God shall entail great loss on the Last Hour. But if ever thou spend it in transgressing [the Heavenly Orders], that is an irretrievable disaster.” (Masâlik, v. 138-141)

“[O my Brother! know that] the greatest wish of the dead is coming back to life so as to spend on earth were it only the slightest lapse of time and to perform a single good deed liable to entail some benefit for them once back to the Hereafter.” (Masâlik, v. 133-134)

For Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, human rights can be perfectly achieved on earth only in complying first with human duties, which are, in reality, God’s Rights. Because every right claimed by a human being corresponds in fact to a duty incumbent on another human being. And the only ultimate motivation which can prevent man from putting his egocentric interest over others’ is faith in a Supreme Power. Then, true humanism must start from God so as to attain really human beings. But any humanism which claims to exclude God from its sphere of reasoning and to use pure rationality alone is condemned by the inherent limits of human nature itself. According to Bamba’s religious vision, God has to be restored in the Axis of the universe where the humanism of the Enlightenment excluded Him. Bamba described his conception of human rights in these admirable verses:
“Take great care of God’s Rights through your duties towards His creatures…Be always mindful of your duties towards your fellow men, instead of their duties towards you.” (Nahju Hadâil Hâj, v. 55, 57)

For Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, global peace and nonviolence can be attained only through mutual respect, ethics and worship. His conception of humanism makes of faith in God the medium of human relations and fraternity which can be classified in the three categories of rules of Ethics everybody is compelled to abide by:

“[The three basic principles of] Ethics are (1) showing mercy to anyone that is younger than you, (2) showing respect to anyone that older than you, (3) treating your fellows as you would like to be treated. Mind to do all of this for the sole Countenance of God, the Creator to whom belongs the Majestic Throne.” (Nahju Hadâil Hâj, v. 55, 57)

For Bamba, true human freedom is worshipping the Lord alone and conforming to His rules, but it is not most certainly claiming theoretical self-determination while one is enslaved by his basic instincts and by his animal urges.

**Back to the Sources of Bamba’s Nonviolence**

However, we cannot grasp fully the true significance of this kind of “Muslim nonviolence” advocated by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba unless we get back to his own intellectual and spiritual sources, and to some special circumstances which shaped durably his way of thinking. The main referring sources which influenced significantly Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba are the Qur-ân, the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBH) and the teachings of the Sufi masters. Other important and determining factors which must be taken into account are the historical background the Sheikh inherited from his family and from his social milieu, his own biography, his personal tendencies and his individual spiritual experiences through his mystical relationship with the Lord and His Prophet (PBH).
To explore extensively all these fertile research fields, we would certainly need to study each of them separately or in interconnection, to look for clues liable to back up his thinking. In this instance, we could try to bring out koranic verses and hadiths specifying the prerequisites of legitimate jihad and their limits. It could be also very interesting to review the historical and political issues raised by the dissensions within Muslim leadership factions after the death of the Prophet (PBH) and their lasting impacts in the overall perception of political neutral stance, theorized later by some Sufi masters. We could likewise investigate the historical background of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s family, through the very old Senegalese tradition of peaceful coexistence and of political neutrality between the rulers and some categories of clerical families (Serigne Fàkk-taal) to which belongs the lineage of the Sheikh (Cf. the book “Fighting the Greater Jihad” by Cheikh Anta Babou). In this trend, it would be also very edifying to examine the biographical path of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba and its various circumstances, as did, quite relevantly, some biographers and historians who tried to show how key events that occurred in his life affected his way of thinking.

All of these areas deserve, of a surety, careful and thorough examination to show how their combination contributed decisively to the nonviolent philosophy of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba. However, prior to scrutinizing the gestation process of Bamba’s thinking, one may be tempted to wonder a quite relevant question—considering the valuable teachings of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba about “Muslim nonviolence” and their great significance, particularly in our world today endangered by frenzied materialism and indiscriminate extremism, how is it that serious studies haven’t been carried out on this topic yet?