

An Interview of Sheikh Mansour Diouf

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Head of the Murid Brotherhood [Sufis mostly in Senegal and The Gambia]



Question: You are one of the leaders of the Murid brotherhood. Please tell us about the organization.

Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, a Senegalese (1853–1927) created the Murid Brotherhood. By profession, I am a finance engineer, currently working for the government of Senegal. I am the finance and accounting officer of the Senegalese agency for rural electrification, where I represent the Minister of Finance.

Question: In the Murid Brotherhood, what is your spiritual role?

I am a religious leader with disciples who depend on me. Many people have pledged their allegiance to me and follow me everywhere. Their destiny, thanks to God, is in my hands. Everything I tell them to do, they do; anything I forbid, they refrain from it. This is based on the precepts of Islam.

Question: It seems rather uncommon in Islam that a religious figure is involved in professional and political life.

It's a blessing for me. The religious side comes from my blood, my lineage; it's a legacy of my family. Perhaps by accident, I had the chance to go to school and succeed, more or less, and become a civil servant. Since I was given this opportunity, I do my best to combine the two. The very basis of Muridism is to worship God, to follow God and to honor him through Islam and work. If my occupation allows me to better exercise my religious responsibilities and vice versa, I can only rejoice.

Regarding Muridism, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba is unfortunately an unknown great figure, though he has sacrificed himself for humanity....

His father was a religious leader and many people came to the house to learn the Qur'an and theology. His mother died very early, at the age of thirty-three. When his father died too, he had a revelation. He suddenly stood up, and said, "All those who had come once to learn, I set them free. But all those who have come to follow the way of God, come with me."

People did not understand him. Many left. They had been hundreds but only forty remained. Now he was following the path traced by the Prophet. One day, he said that Prophet Muhammad came to see him. It was a real meeting, after creating a city, the present big city of Touba, where there had been only a forest. Actually, when I came here, I had goose bumps, because it reminds me of his story. He was hiding in this forest, nobody saw him. When people found him, he made them understand that if there is one thing he loves on earth, it was where he was, that city. He stayed seven years.

During that period, Prophet Muhammad found him there and told him that God had raised him to the rank of *hout bou samane*, the person who decides everything, who has the mastery of the destiny of men. Even before a tree leaf falls, it should ask his permission before it falls. He replied to Prophet Muhammad, "Thank you, I think all this is good, but I did not come for that." "What did you come for?" the Prophet asked him. "I have come for the good Lord to allow that whenever I pray for someone, that person goes to Paradise." Ahmadou Bamba replied.

Prophet Muhammad said to him, "It is not possible. In any case, if you want to obtain this, you will undergo many painful hardships. You know when it starts and you do not know when it ends. Even I

cannot intervene, it's between you and the good Lord."

He said, "I can endure. In any case, my desire to save humanity, to save all populations gives me that strength and that courage. Shall I die or live? Only God knows."

The prophet took note and immediately afterward, the trials began. The first thing is that he had to leave that city, which he loved so much. They deported and took him to Gabon in 1895, to a forest. All the people deported there were dying. He stayed seven years there.

Question: This was during the French colonization. Did the French perceive him as a rebel?

They did indeed see him as a rebel; whereas, he was a peacemaker, who never used weapons.

Every time the authorities would call him, he would respond. They locked him up; he accepted it, but he was praying all the time because he said it was a pact he'd signed with God, to suffer for humanity.

After a day in August 1895 when he left Touba, he returned only thirty-two years later -- after his death. He'd been deprived of everything he loved. He suffered, as did his family, his wives and his children. They took him to Gabon and then to Mauritania before placing him under house arrest. Seven years in Gabon; three in Mauritania, fifteen more under house arrest, which meant that from 1895 to 1927, the year of his death, he was not at home, and he was not with his family. He said it was the price to pay for humanity. One can see that he was a man who had sacrificed himself for humanity and thus, without knowing why, people follow him and revere him. They follow us who are his descendants because of this. I have no merit, all the merit is his. It is his legacy, which we have to keep.

Question: In light of this legacy, the course Rev. and Mrs. Moon followed probably strikes a chord in you. They have also gone through much persecution.

I had thought there was no one on earth like my guide. When I met Mrs. Moon and heard her story, the image of my revered leader came to me. These people have sacrificed themselves, have exhausted themselves, have been imprisoned. Nevertheless, they could hold on, peacefully, they did not try to take up arms. They did not try to take revenge and all they have is available for all humanity. Therefore, I say these are people like my leader and fortunately, they are still on earth. Fortunately, there is another sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, another woman like his mother. That's what I feel through the Moon family. When I came here, I was impressed.

Question: This is your first trip to Korea and especially to the Hyo Jeong Cheonwon complex. You first met Ms. Moon in the United States.

That was the first time I met her, and her staff and the first time I had real insights into this organization, with which I share many values -- peace, living for the sake of others, giving one's life to others. These are values that I share. I deeply respect this family and this community.

Question: How do you feel being in the fatherland of the Moon family, and to be in their residence?

I always feel God through them. I feel God because, behold! These are people who have taken refuge in the forest, and who have transformed this forest completely. They have transformed it into a haven of peace. Being here makes me feel humble and modest. Being here also gives me the will that generates courage. When I see Mother Moon, all the strength in her, in contrast with the tranquility, humility and modesty of her approach, reminds me of the Qur'an saying, "And they do not comprehend anything of his knowledge save what he wills." (Qur'an 2.255) He who knows that from the knowledge of God, one embraces only what he wills, is modest. The fate of men is in the hands of God.

He who knows this is humble. In her, I see humility and modesty. I also see, in her husband, whom I unfortunately could not meet, the courage and the will. When I heard about the path that he has traveled and see his faith... This environment inspires me with a sense of spirituality, which makes me think that it is a place where it is impossible for God not to fulfill a prayer, because of the wisdom here, because of this symbiosis of light, green lush and beauty, but also human warmth and self-giving. Since I have been here, I have spent my time praying for humanity, for my guide, but also for Rev. Moon, so that he may be at peace where he is. I am sure he is in peace.

Question: When you are in Mrs. Moon's presence, how do you perceive her?

I see in her the great scholars of Islam, the feminine aspect. The Qur'an often recalls Muhammad's first wife Khadija, who was wise, who helped him, supported him, understood him. She was not an ordinary person. When I think of Sheikh Amadou Bamba, I think of his mother, Mame Diarra Bousso, who sacrificed herself for him, for humanity and who gave her life.

She died at thirty-three, the same age as Jesus. When I see Dr. Moon, I also think of the Virgin Mary. I think of all those great women in the Qur'an whom God praised. They have laid the foundations of a pure humanity, a healthy humanity. Seeing Mrs. Moon, that's the kind of person I see. All that she does Islam prescribes.

Unfortunately, Islam remains unknown. It is a religion of peace that demands one loves one's neighbor, that we sacrifice for the sake of others, that we see others as better than ourselves. This is what she does -- helping people, sacrificing, giving herself, praying for them, and so on. For me, she is a true leader for Islam. I take this opportunity to say that today Islam needs it. If I understand correctly, she did not come for a religion, she came for everybody. Since she came for everybody, I want her to know that Islam is part of this everybody. Islam has a bad image, which everyone knows, the image of a religion of terror, war and terrorism. No, this is not Islam. The true Islam of the Qur'an, dictated by Prophet Muhammad, is Islam that advocates peace, development, the communion of hearts with God. Today, I believe that the action she has taken other communities must also carry out. I see all the communities here -- yellow people, black people, white people, Catholics, Protestants. I think this is the moment to think of Islam. She should help the pacification of the Islamic world.

Question: Mrs. Moon feels something for the African continent. She will be in Dakar at the end of the year. It will be an opportunity for her to see the peaceful Islam you are defending.

How do you see the organization of this summit? What will it represent?

This summit means much for me, for Senegal, for the African continent, and for humanity.

Question: What will the theme of the summit be?

The theme will be Africa united in peace. Africa needs this unity, needs this peace. I need not go into details; everyone knows what is going on in Africa. The mere fact that the continent remains poor, even though it is endowed with a great deal of wealth, speaks volumes about the need to save Africa and to support it. As Reverend Moon and his wife have brought changes, wherever they have passed, I believe that they will bring transformation, at the summit of Dakar, when they come.

Question: Religious leaders, political leaders, civil society representatives will be at the summit....

Question: It will be a summit of a thousand people, with the heads of state of the African Union. Fortunately, the president of the Republic of Senegal, Macky Sall, after receiving a delegation from UPF, decided to invite the presidents that we would like to have at this summit. He also decided to get involved and participate in it. He quickly perceived the importance of this summit and the benefits it can bring to Dakar, Senegal and beyond. At this summit, Dakar will be the hub of peace in Africa and perhaps even in the world. For this reason, I appeal to all contemporary humanity to see the great importance to this summit, which must be one of peace, not only for Africa but for the world. Hence, I think of giving a wink to Saudi Arabia to see the possibility of their participation in this summit. Islam needs this event now more than ever. Through my interpersonal skills in the country, we will try to get in touch with all the great Muslim dignitaries. That Mrs. Moon and UPF help us in this direction would be good, so that Islam has a place, can send a message of peace and can show to the world that through Dr. Moon, through the UPF, we have inter-religious cooperation, which can bring peace all over the world, and especially in Africa.