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Jeremy Dell

Printing and Textual Authority in the Twentieth-Century Muridiyya

Abstract: Printed poems known as *xasida* are some of the most common forms of reading material in Senegal today. How they became so ubiquitous is directly tied to the twentieth-century trajectory of the Muridiyya and its place in the broader history of African-run printing presses in Senegal. This chapter recounts the history of early efforts to print the *xasida* of Shaykh Amadu Bamba (1853–1927), the Muridiyya’s founding saint. Through private papers and oral histories, it tracks the efforts of Murid leaders to assert control over the printing of Bamba’s *xasida* after his death. It further shows that these efforts were largely a response to the unregulated dissemination of Bamba’s works by some of the first Senegalese-owned printing presses. Such competition, while perhaps evidence of a lack of centralized oversight, helped popularize Bamba’s writings. Alongside these developments, a market for handwritten copies of Bamba’s *xasida* remained active, influencing the aesthetics of printed *xasida* and informing Murid attitudes towards manuscript and print.

1 Introduction

Xasida – Wolof for the classical Arabic ode, or *qaṣīda* – are some of the most common forms of reading material in Senegal today.¹ Printed as cheap paper booklets, these poems are commonly sold in markets, bookshops, and bus stations across the country. They are also frequently performed and recorded by singers whose renown extends beyond circles of aficionados, thereby forming an integral part of the Senegalese soundscape. How they became so ubiquitous is directly tied to the twentieth-century trajectory of the Murid Sufi order, or Muridiyya, and its place in the broader history of African-run printing presses in Senegal. This chapter recounts the history of early efforts to put *xasida* into print – especially those composed by the Muridiyya’s founder Shaykh Amadu Bamba (1853–1927) – and the conflicts over authority that they sometimes engendered.

¹ In Wolof, the consonant ‘x’ shares the same pronunciation as the Spanish *jota* and the Arabic *khā*. See Samb 1983, 18.

In Wolof, the term *xasida* has come to encompass any poetry whose primary purpose is to express themes related to Islam. Although Bamba wrote different kinds of poems for different purposes, his entire poetic *œuvre* is often referred to somewhat indiscriminately as *xasida*. When viewed against the backdrop of Wolof expression more generally, *xasida* are but one form of many kinds of spoken genres that include *kañ* (work songs), *woyi baawnaa* (rain songs), *taaxuraan* (harvest songs), *tagg* (genealogies), *bàkk(u)* (fight songs performed during wrestling matches) and many others.² Unlike *xasida*, these poems were usually not put into writing, though some of them, such as the *woyi gàmmu* (songs for the celebration of the Prophet's birthday) and the *woyi yalwaan* (formulas that Qur'an school students pronounce while seeking alms), were associated with Islamic institutions and thus shared certain references with *xasida*.

The term *xasida* itself derives from the Arabic word *qaṣīda* (pl. *qaṣā'id*), often translated into English as 'ode', but which is in fact its own unique poetic genre. Its origins, as far as they are known, date to the sixth century CE, when 'classical' Arabic *qaṣā'id* such as the famous 'Hanging Poems' (*al-mu'allaqāt*) were performed. Given that these poems reflected the values and conditions of life in pre-Islamic Arabian society, it was not a foregone conclusion that they would come to have such wide influence across geography. Yet because poems like the *Mu'allaqāt* were understood as having captured the speech of seventh-century Arabian society, they became important sources for Qur'anic exegesis. The grammar of classical Arabic, crucial to linguistic Qur'an commentary, was often taught using such pre-Islamic poetry as source material.³

From its origins on the Arabian Peninsula, the *qaṣīda* form spread throughout the Islamic world, where it was adopted in its original Arabic but also adapted to non-Arabic languages like Persian and Urdu. African languages such as Hausa, Swahili and Fulfulde were also part of this dynamic. Although the earliest *qaṣīda* were copied, canonized and used to teach principles of grammar and prosody, the genre itself did not become fossilized. New contexts pushed the *qaṣīda* form in novel directions. Under the influence of Islam, for instance, the *qaṣīda* took on an increasingly panegyric function. Prophetic eulogy (*al-madh̄ al-nabawī*) and pious admonition (*wa'z̄*) became its most common subjects, and ones that Bamba frequently addressed in his own poetry. Bamba resembled other African poets in this regard, for they too had adopted the *qaṣīda* as a vehicle for pious action and the dissemination of Islamic principles.

² One Senegalese sociolinguist has tabulated more than 25 types of songs. See Cissé 2010, 96–98.

³ Allen 1998, 123.

In West Africa, collections of pre-Islamic poetry are commonplace.⁴ Most scholars were therefore familiar with the rules of the *qaṣīda* form, even if they did not elect to compose poetry themselves.

Although the *qaṣīda* was adapted over a wide geography, its general structure remained relatively uniform. Its core features included monorhyme, regular meter, and the division of each verse into equal halves known as hemistichs.⁵ The number of verses, and thus the overall length of the poem, varied tremendously. Majaxate Kala, one of Bamba's teachers, held that the *qaṣīda* form required a minimum of either seven or ten verses depending on which classical work of Arabic prosody one considered authoritative. Meanwhile, there was no upper limit. Kala elaborated on these points in a 313-verse poem titled *Mubayyin al-ishkāl min 'ilm al-'arūq wa-l-qawāfi li-l-faṭīn*, a remarkably compact work that details the types of meter and rhyme used in Arabic poetry, including the *qaṣīda*.⁶ Though the *qaṣīda*'s structure is quite rigid, the varieties of meter at a poet's disposal, along with the Arabic language's propensity for end-rhyme and a consistent verbal root structure, made for a rather supple form of expression.

Religious assembly was the main setting in which the technical skill required to construct a *qaṣīda* was displayed. Murids learned Bamba's poetry by heart and recited it collectively, thereby giving voice to the *qaṣīda* form that Bamba had mastered and becoming, in Johannes Pedersen's evocative phrase, 'a living edition of the great poetry collections'.⁷ Yet the diffusion of Bamba's poetry was not solely due to the practice of live performance. It also owed something to the organizational prowess of the Murid leaders and the work of ordinary Murid disciples, including some of the first generation of Senegalese who had their own printing presses. These individuals and their families provided a material link between the poetry that Bamba composed and the public recitations that played an increasingly visible role in Senegalese religious life.

Yet the process by which Bamba's poetry found its way in to print was hardly straightforward. Competing narratives emerged over who had the right to print his works, pitting official Murid leadership (consisting of Bamba's direct descendants and those whom he had appointed as shaykhs) against the independent initiatives of ordinary disciples. While such disagreements could be viewed as evidence of discord, the very competition to put cheap, printed material into wider circulation actually helped popularize Bamba's writings even

⁴ See Hunwick 1996, 84–85.

⁵ Wright 1967, 351–352.

⁶ Gerresch 1974.

⁷ Pedersen 1984, 7.

further (and the Muridiyya by extension). Unlike cases such as the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire, in which new material forms such as ‘manuscript pamphlets’ hastened the proliferation of competing polemics, here we see how disagreement over a new material form could help consolidate a new religious vision.⁸

2 Origin stories

Amadu Bamba was still a young man living in his father’s household when he started to write poetry in the 1860s and 1870s. His first poems were composed in the village of Mbakke Kajoor, where his father had settled after several tumultuous years that had seen the family flee their home region of Bawol and move to Saluum before finally settling in the region of Kajoor.⁹ At first, Bamba’s poetry was largely a by-product of his teaching. His earliest works were formulated explicitly as responses to questions from his students. Titles such as *Tazawwud al-ṣiḡhār* (*Provisions for the Children*) and *Tazawwud al-shubān* (*Provisions for the Youth*) suggested an audience of younger disciples. Both works focused on details of ritual practice in varying degrees of detail. Most of the verses in *Tazawwud al-ṣiḡhār*, for instance, consisted of instructions about how to prepare the body for worship. Fifteen steps were outlined that, if followed, would allow for the successful execution of prayer.¹⁰ These didactic works were clearly intended to encourage younger disciples in their observance of correct ritual practice.

In addition to these more practical works, many of Bamba’s early poems were versifications of canonical texts written by other Muslim scholars.¹¹ One of the first works that Bamba transformed into verse was *Bidāya al-hidāya* (*The Beginning of Guidance*) by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), a scholar whose

8 For the Ottoman comparison, see Shafir 2016, especially Chap. 3, ‘Pamphleteering in a manuscript culture: The circulation of cheap books and the polarization of Ottoman society’.

9 This serial displacement was a symptom of the wider instability that plagued Senegalese political life in the 1860s. It had two principal causes: 1) French interference in the internal politics of the Kingdom of Kajoor, and 2) the ongoing conflict between the French administration and the forces of Mābba Jaxu Ba in the region of Saluum. Bamba’s home region of Bawol was located between Kajoor and Saluum. For a summary of these dynamics, see Babou 2007, 41–47.

10 See ‘Tazawwud al-ṣiḡhār’, in Bamba 1989, verses 164–173.

11 Mbacké 1995, 112.

symbiosis of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) proved popular among West African audiences. In later writings, Bamba continued in the vein of this ‘juridical Sufism’, exhorting his disciples to neither neglect the demands of *fiqh* in this world nor the other levels of existence and meaning that form basic elements of Sufi thought.¹²

A key turning point in Bamba’s life came in 1895 when, on suspicions of organizing armed *jihad*, he was detained by French colonial authorities and deported to Gabon, where he was held until 1902. This experience, a foundational episode in the early history of the Muridiyya, was also reflected in Bamba’s poetry, producing a new kind of ‘poem of exile’.¹³ Bamba addressed his exile most directly in *Jazā’ al-shukūr* (‘Amends of the Most Grateful’), a poem he probably wrote during a second period of imprisonment in Mauritania (1903–1907).¹⁴ In this work, Bamba gave an account of his encounter with French authorities in Saint-Louis, the voyage aboard a French ship on the Atlantic, his imprisonment on the island of Mayumba in Gabon and eventual return to Senegal.

For a poet whose writings had previously tended towards abstract theological concerns, *Jazā’ al-shukūr* was a significant departure. It provided a newly concrete and worldly setting for understanding Bamba’s unequalled piety, captured in Wolof phrases like *Boroom Tuubaa, amul morom* (‘Amadu Bamba, master of the city of Tuubaa, is without peer’). It also offered Bamba opportunities to perform ‘miraculous’ acts such as the famous ‘ocean prayer’ (*julli géej gi*) recounted by the Murid poet Musa Ka.¹⁵ In sum, Bamba and his community viewed his imprisonment in Gabon as an immensely productive period of spiritual development. It was there that he honed the practice of the ‘Greater Jihad’, or *jihād al-akbar / jihād al-nafs*, a kind of internal struggle against the self that was central to his overall conception of Islam (and that, once again, had antecedents in the work of al-Ghazali).

Bamba also claimed to have perfected his knowledge of the Arabic language while in Gabon. From this perspective, life after exile represents yet another

¹² See, e.g., the introduction to Bamba’s ‘Paths to Paradise’ (*Masālik al-jinān*). For the concept of ‘juridical Sufism’, see Cornell 1998, 63–92.

¹³ Dumont 1975, 54.

¹⁴ Babou 2007, 126.

¹⁵ This was the prayer that Bamba performed while imprisoned aboard a French ship to Gabon. The crew prevented Bamba from completing his prayers onboard the ship, and so he placed his prayer mat on the water and completed his prayers directly on the surface of the ocean. This act is celebrated by Murids today as a sign of Bamba’s commitment to prayer. See Babou 2007, 138.

phase of his career as a poet. After returning to Senegal from his imprisonment in Mauritania (1903–1907), Bamba focused his writing exclusively on *madħa*, a type of praise poem which he used to honor the Prophet Muhammad. He even disavowed all of the poems he had composed before his exile in Gabon, stating that because they were written before his period of exile, ‘they are not agreeable to God and consequently have not been blessed’.¹⁶ He therefore advised his disciples to seek out only those poems composed after his return to Senegal. It is his *madħa* poetry, incidentally, that has furnished the corpus of *xasida* Murids recite in public assembly.

Overall, Bamba’s output as a poet can be roughly divided along the themes outlined here. His early poems were pedagogical tools written as responses to questions from students. He also excelled in the versification of canonical works written by other scholars. The dramatic sequence of events around his imprisonment in Gabon engendered another kind of narrative poem centered on themes of exile and redemption. His final phase, meanwhile, was clearly part of a devotional practice aimed at contemplating and praising the qualities of the Prophet Muhammad. Unlike his earlier pedagogical works, poems from this last phase were not intended as a means of imparting discursive knowledge. Instead, Bamba conceived of them as a form of service to the Prophet, or *khidma*, which, along with *ħubb* (love) and *hadiyya* (pious gift-giving), formed the triad of duties at the core of Murid doctrine and practice.¹⁷ From this perspective, Bamba’s popular moniker *Khādim al-Rasūl* (‘the servant of the Prophet’) could be considered a kind of pen name.

The narrative of Bamba’s exile has been recounted many times. Even his development as a poet, if perhaps a less dramatic theme than his imprisonment and deportation, has not gone unremarked.¹⁸ Yet the dissemination of Bamba’s poetry in the years after his death, although essential to its long-term influence, has yet to be studied in any detail.¹⁹ In the years and decades following Bamba’s death, the collection and publication of his poetry was undertaken by both the Murid leadership (as represented by the Caliph) and ordinary disciples alike. As with Bamba’s career as a poet, the history of publishing his poetry has its own origin stories. Recounting that history is impossible without considering Murid

¹⁶ Mbaké 1985, 21. Quoted in Babou 2007, 135.

¹⁷ Babou 2007, 85–95.

¹⁸ Dumont’s 1975 book remains the most detailed published study of Bamba’s poetry. See also Ndiaye 2009.

¹⁹ The issue is raised briefly in Babou 2007, 136 and 245 n. 105.

ties to other parts of the Muslim world and to the development of a print industry within Senegal itself.

According to Mustafa Jatar, the director of the Muridiyya's official *Bibliothèque Cheikoul Khadim*, the first time his writings were put into print, Amadu Bamba was still alive. The early history of such publishing efforts is replete with stories of obscure figures, missing manuscripts and short-lived connections to other parts of the Muslim world. Jatar relayed his account as a piece of family history in which his own father, Sëriñ Jatar, played an important role. Having been involved in the official efforts directed by Sëriñ Fallu, the Muridiyya's second caliph, to collect and publish Bamba's poetry, Sëriñ Jatar had often heard talk of disciples who before the advent of Senegalese-owned printing presses traveled to the Arab world (*réewu naar yi*) to have their shaykh's poetry printed. There were indeed instances of Tijani disciples from Senegal doing the same, and there are records of Senegalese Tijani shaykhs having their writings published in North Africa, even if the details of this process remain obscure.²⁰

Jatar had an obscure origin story of his own to share.²¹ It involved a man named Muhammad Madani who came from the Hejaz. Madani had been touring (*di wër*) through North Africa around the turn of the twentieth century when he first heard accounts of a famous *walī*, or saint, whom the French had imprisoned and exiled to Gabon. Soon after, Madani went to Saint-Louis, where he had direct contact with members of the Murid community. He traveled as far south as Dakar, but never made it to the Murid capital of Tuubaa, which was only a village at the time. Madani never had an opportunity to meet Amadu Bamba, but he was shown some of his writings. He obtained a copy of Bamba's *Mawāhib al-quddūs fi nazm nathr shaykhinā al-Sanūsī fi tawhīd*, a versification of a prose work by Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi. After leaving Senegal, he went to Egypt, where he had the '*Mawahibu*', as it is known, printed. In Jatar's account, this was probably the first of Bamba's *xasida* to appear in print.

Two other early accounts of Bamba's poetry being printed come from the colonial archive. According to the first, a work by Bamba titled 'le livre du trésor des biens' (possibly *Mawāhib al-Nāfi' fi Madā'ih al-Shāfi'*) was printed in Beirut by 'Mohamed Rashid and Mostafa El Halouani'.²² The second account involved a

²⁰ See, e.g., Niasse 1910 (available for consultation at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (Dakar), Fonds Amar Samb, E. cahier n. 3). For a brief discussion of this work on Sufi spiritual training, see Wright 2015, 85–86. A collection of poetry written by the Senegalese Tijani shaykh al-Hajj Malik Sy was also published in Tunis in 1915.

²¹ Interview with Mustafa Jatar, 9 September 2014.

²² 'Politique Musulmane, Activité des Marabouts - 1906–1917', Archives Nationales du Sénégal 13 G67. Cited in Sene 1982, 255.

Moroccan merchant named Abdelkarim who traveled through Senegal in 1911 and came into contact with Murid shaykhs. Henri Cor, governor of the colony of Senegal, was aware of his activities, and mentioned in a letter to the Governor General that Abdelkarim obtained two of Bamba's works which he intended to have edited and printed in Cairo by the famed printers of Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, one of the major distributors of Arabic printed material in West and East Africa. Cor noted that the manuscripts included 'religious poems', but did not specify any titles.²³

While early efforts to print the *xasida* of Amadu Bamba were sporadic, Murid disciples continued to disseminate his poetry in other forms. Before printers were available, many scholars in Bamba's entourage produced copies of his writings. There were professional copyists who sold manuscripts, and many handwritten copies of the Qur'an were distributed this way. In the 1930s, the first caliph of the Muridiyya and Bamba's eldest son, Sëriñ Mamadu Mustafa Mbàkke, established a workshop for professional copyists in Dakar. Named *Kër Sëriñ Bi*, the workshop produced three kinds of texts: 1) *bind al-quran* (copies of the Qur'an), 2) *bind al xasa'id* (copies of *xasida*), and 3) *bind ay ñaan* (prayers). Copies produced at *Kër Sëriñ Bi* were used for some of the first print versions of Bamba's *xasida*, but most of the workshop's output was directed towards a separate market for handwritten copies. As printers became more common in Dakar in the mid-twentieth century, the number of copies produced at *Kër Sëriñ Bi* decreased, but never disappeared entirely. The demand for handwritten *xasida* and *ñaan* persisted and the workshop is still open today.²⁴

Nevertheless, printing the *xasida* of Amadu Bamba remained a priority for the Muridiyya. The order's second caliph, Sëriñ Fallu Mbàkke (r. 1945–1968), oversaw a major effort to organize the collection and dissemination of Bamba's poetry. The project was entrusted to Mustafa Jatara's father, Sëriñ Jatara, and Lamin Jóob, the imam of the main mosque of Diourbel (Njarëm), an important town in the region of Bawol.²⁵ According to Mustafa Jatara, Jóob was charged with identifying authentic versions of Bamba's poems (*moom moo wax ni xasida*, or 'he was the one to say "this is a *xasida*"'). There was already a concern

²³ Gouverneur Henri Cor à GGAOF, 14 October 1911, ANS 19 G5. Cited in Sene 1982, 254. It bears mentioning that such efforts were not limited to Murids. Several of al-Hajj Malik Sy's works were published in Tunisia in 1914–1915 with subventions from the Governor-General. See Marty 1917, 181. On the al-Babi al-Halabi printers, see Gori and Reese in this volume.

²⁴ Interview with al-Hajj Adama Jaxate, 25 October 2014. Jaxate is the imam of the mosque at *Kër Sëriñ Bi* and directs the workshop of calligraphers.

²⁵ It was particularly notable in the history of the Muridiyya as the town where Bamba was kept under house arrest after his final return to Senegal.

that if authoritative versions of the *xasida* were not collected, then variations would emerge among copyists and it would become increasingly difficult to determine which ones were authentic.

Once Jatara and Jóob had received their instructions from Sëriñ Fallu, they began to travel throughout the countryside in search of disciples who held copies of Bamba's *xasida*. Manuscript owners were asked to either contribute their collections to the project or, short of that, loan them to Jatara and Jóob so that they could be copied. In order to facilitate these meetings, Sëriñ Fallu gave the pair a letter which he signed that explained the project. Jatara and Jóob presented it to everyone whose manuscripts they requested to see. The next step in the process entailed bringing the manuscript copies back to Tuubaa, where Sëriñ Fallu made the final editorial decisions about which manuscript versions would be used from those that were collected. Sëriñ Buso, an imam in Tuubaa, made a fair copy of the authoritative version that was then corrected by Sëriñ Assane Buso in Guéde.²⁶ Once that was completed, Sëriñ Fallu gave formal instructions (the *ndigal*) to have the *xasida* printed.

According to Jatara, the era of centralized oversight ended with the passing of Sëriñ Fallu in 1968. Once cheap printers and then copy machines became more widely available in the seventies, it became impossible to control the production and distribution of Bamba's writings: 'if you look at books today, those who produce them now are not like those who produced them at first', Mustafa Jatara recalled in his office.²⁷ Early print jobs, in his telling, were all authorized by Sëriñ Fallu (*bi idhn al-khalīfa Muḥammad al-Fāḍil*). Yet the broader history of booksellers, bookbinders and Senegalese-owned printing presses suggests that the printing of Amadu Bamba's *xasida* was never the exclusive work of the Caliphate, but instead involved ordinary disciples from the very beginning. These disciples formed part of the first generation of Senegalese printers to own and operate their own presses.

3 Printing families

While Jatara and Jóob initiated the project approved by Sëriñ Fallu, other Murid disciples, and even non-Murids, began printing the *xasida* of Amadu Bamba.

²⁶ The process was reminiscent of classical methods for certifying copies. See Pedersen 1984, 46–47.

²⁷ *Boo demee ci téere yi, li ñi ñuy moeler léegi, bakkul ak li nu daan moeler bu njèkk*. Interview with Mustafa Jatara, 9 September 2014.

Two paths were available for those interested in this pursuit in mid-twentieth century Senegal. The first entailed forging links with printers in North Africa and the Middle East who had the machinery needed to print material in Arabic; the second involved working within Senegal's own emerging print industry. These two strategies were not mutually exclusive, but over time more and more *xasida* were printed in Senegal rather than abroad.

This dynamic is illustrated in the career of Issa Niang, a Murid disciple who was part of the first generation of Senegalese printers to publish Bamba's *xasida*. Like many early booksellers, bookbinders and printers, Niang's entrance into the profession was gradual.²⁸ He lived in the village of Piiru Ndaari, located on the border of the historic regions of Bawol and Kajoor, and like most inhabitants of the countryside, his primary activity was farming. While frequenting the homes of Murid shaykhs, he came across books imported from Tunisia and noticed that, although they were printed, they still had the appearance of being handwritten (Wolof: *bind loxo*).²⁹ Motivated by a desire to spread Bamba's *xasida*, but also as a means of supplementing the income he earned from farming, Niang wrote to the Tunisian printer and editor whose address was listed in one of these books:

IMPRIMERIE LIBRAIRIE AL-MANAR
TIJANI EL-M'HAMDI
Case Postale 121 Tunis

مطبع المنار ومكتبتها
التجاني المحمدي
صندوق الوسطة ١٢١ تونس

Niang wrote to El-M'hamdi to ask whether the same kind of books could be printed for the *xasida* of Amadu Bamba. M'hamdi responded to Niang's letter, explaining the process by which a metal-plate (or 'cliché') could be cast from a papier-mâché in order to 'print your book in your own handwriting'.³⁰ This type of printing allowed for the production of a text that appeared handwritten while retaining the ability to produce multiple copies, a kind of 'manuscript in print'.³¹

Once Niang and M'hamdi settled on a price, Niang began ordering books from Tunis and selling them out of a shop in Piiru Ndaari, forming part of a

²⁸ The following is based on interviews with two of Issa Niang's sons: the imam Mbaye Niang of the central mosque of Plan Jaxaay, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Dakar, and Bassirou Niang, manager of the *Imprimerie Serigne Issa Niang* in the Dakar suburb of Pikine.

²⁹ Interview with Mbaye Niang, 13 September 2014.

³⁰ *Ṭab' kitābikum binafs khaṭṭ yadikum*. Tijani El-Mhamdi to Issa Niang, 19 October 1951, Private Papers, Mbaye Niang, Plan Jaxaay.

³¹ For an interesting parallel case involving 'handwritten' Japanese woodblock prints, see Chance and Davis 2016.

network of merchants who brought printed materials into the villages of rural Senegal. Customers came from Matam and Fuuta Tooro to buy books from him instead traveling all the way to the well-stocked bookstores of Dakar. Yet bookstores in Dakar also played a role in connecting Senegalese shaykhs and disciples to printers in North Africa. One that was particularly important in this regard was *La Librairie Kittani* run by Mukhtar al-Kittani at 44 rue Tolbiac. Al-Kittani had left Casablanca in 1947 and moved to Dakar, where he sold books imported from Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. He was well acquainted with many of Senegal's most prominent shaykhs, including Sērīñ Fallu Mbàkke and Abdul Aziz Sy, the head of the branch of the Tijaniyya based out of Tiwaawaan. Al-Kittani served as a link between Senegalese shaykhs and the Dar al-Kitab printers in Casablanca, with whom he managed the early publication of some of Bamba's *xasida*.³²

In addition to these North African connections maintained through sellers like Niang and al-Kattani, new Senegalese-owned printing presses also played a role in the diffusion of texts written by West African scholars. Niang himself eventually moved to Dakar, where he started his own printshop in 1952, the *Imprimerie Khoulaamoul Khadiim* (ar. *ghulām al-khādīm*, or the 'servant of the servant', referring to Amadu Bamba as *khādīm al-rasūl*).³³ The largest of these early Senegalese-owned printing presses, however, was undoubtedly the *Imprimerie Diop*. Founded by Abdoulaye Diop in the early 1950s, it became one of the main print outlets for Senegalese businesses, political parties, and shaykhs. It had antecedents in a workshop that Diop ran out of the courtyard of his Dakar host family in 1948 (though born in Dakar, Diop's family roots were in the Fuuta Tooro region of the Senegal River Valley).³⁴ The business grew with the support of the then-Governor General of French West Africa, Bernard Cornut-Gentille. Having learned of a young Senegalese man who had trained in typography and bookbinding at Dakar's *Mission Catholique*, Cornut-Gentille visited Diop in his fledgling printshop where he worked without electricity using manual printing presses. Impressed by the operation, Cornut-Gentille arranged for Diop to move

³² Interview with Saad al-Kattani, 6 September 2014. See as well the 'Selected Works of Aḥmad Bamba' listed in Creevey 1979, 307.

³³ Family circumstances had encouraged Niang's move to Dakar, but he was also following the advice of his partner in Tunis, who thought it would be easier for them to do business if Niang lived closer to a town with a post office. Interview with Mbaye Niang, 13 September 2014.

³⁴ Interview with Pape Samba Diop, 28 October 2014.

to a new facility where he would be able to use electric-powered presses.³⁵ Over the 1950s and 1960s, *Imprimerie Diop* became a hub of activity for Senegalese politicians and writers.

The combination of connections to printers in North Africa and a nascent print industry in Senegal meant that by the 1950s it was becoming easier for disciples (and the public at large) to obtain print versions of Bamba's *xasida*. Fernand Dumont, a French technical adviser who wrote a book about Bamba's writings while working for the Senegalese Foreign Ministry in the 1960s and 1970s, was able to find printed *xasida* that dated from 1956–1957.³⁶ By the mid-1950s, such poems were being printed by several actors operating relatively independently of one another. Yet the *xasida* that Senegalese and North African printers put into circulation did not enter a completely free space. On the contrary, it was a space that both the Murid leadership and the French colonial administration sought to regulate. These were not equally powerful entities, to be sure, nor did they have the same motivations or employ the same methods, but they still both attempted to oversee the production and dissemination of Bamba's poetry. For Murid leaders, preventing the circulation of faulty versions of Bamba's *xasida* was a priority. For the French, such regulation was simply part of a more general policy of controlling the forms of media and information that entered French West Africa.

4 Regulating texts

The increasing proliferation of Bamba's poetry in print form eventually drew a response from the Murid leadership. In 1957, the Caliph Sëriñ Fallu Mbàkke (a son of Amadu Bamba) issued a decree seeking to regulate the printing and dissemination of Bamba's poetry:

His Excellency the Caliph El-Hadj Falilou Mbacké, residing in Touba (Diourbel *cercle* - Senegal), asks all who wish to edit or print the religious works of the Great and Most Venerated Amadu Bamba (Arabic poems known as 'Khassahide') to request his authorization according to the following conditions:

1. Submit to him a manuscript copy or manuscript copies of the works to be printed.

³⁵ A sign hanging over the entrance to *Imprimerie Diop* read 'Bienvenue à Monsieur le Gouverneur de l'Afrique Occidentale, Monsieur Cornut-Gentille'. Interview with Pape Samba Diop, 28 October 2014.

³⁶ Dumont 1975, 18.

2. Once initial approval is granted, have these manuscript copies corrected by reputable scholars in order to avoid all orthographic errors or other irregularities that might come from these copies.

3. After correction, these manuscript copies must be submitted to El-Hadj Falilou Mbacké for final approval as shown by his signature and the stamp affixed below, and in the absence of which no authorization is valid.

Touba, December 11, 1957
EL-HADJ FALILOU M'BACKE³⁷

Appearing in both Arabic and French, the decree had one clear objective: to bring all printing of the *xasida* under the authority of the caliph. The timing of the announcement suggests that by the late 1950s, the Murid leadership was trying to regain control over a process that had largely developed out of their purview. Ordinary disciples had taken the initiative to publish Bamba's *xasida*, and the Caliph based in Tuubaa (Touba) was now trying to reassert some control. For a time, Sëriñ Fallu's decree seemed to have its desired effect. When conducting research on the writings of Amadu Bamba in the 1960s, Fernand Dumont found that most print copies available for purchase either bore the stamp of Sëriñ Fallu or his signature, as required by the decree.³⁸ However, as printing presses, mimeographs and, eventually, photocopy machines became more common, it became impossible for Murid leaders to scrutinize every single poem put into circulation.

In theory, the process laid out by Sëriñ Fallu's decree should have made it possible for the Murid leadership to at least produce 'authorized' versions of Bamba's *xasida*. But what is the precise corpus of texts referred to when speaking of the '*xasida* of Amadu Bamba'? The answer is not always obvious. Lucy Creevey's 'selected bibliography' of Bamba's poetry listed 21 titles.³⁹ Dumont recorded 41 printed works that were available on the market while he was conducting research in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴⁰ Amar Samb, who served as director of Dakar's *Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire* from 1971 to 1986, said that the Institute's library held 156 poems written by Bamba.⁴¹ The manuscript collection of Shaykh Serigne Mor Mbaye Cissé in Diourbel holds roughly 400

³⁷ The copy I consulted came from the private papers of Mbaye Niang, Plan Jaxaay. I was not able to find a copy of the decree in any public archive, but it is still held by some printers in their private collections. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

³⁸ Dumont 1975, 18.

³⁹ Creevey 1979, 307.

⁴⁰ Dumont 1975, 12–15.

⁴¹ Samb 1979, 240.

works attributed to Bamba.⁴² It was a common saying among Murid disciples, meanwhile, that when placed on a scale all of Bamba's poetry amounted to 700 kilograms.⁴³ In other words, the number of *xasida* Bamba actually wrote is difficult to quantify with any precision.

Determining an exhaustive list of Bamba's poetry was probably not feasible at the time of Sëriñ Fallu's decree. While this would appear to have been a major obstacle to regulating the dissemination of Bamba's poetry, from another angle one could imagine why arriving at a complete and authoritative list of Bamba's works may not have been particularly urgent. To enumerate each one of Bamba's poems would render them finite, and the spiritual project of the Murid founder – the love and gratitude that he expressed for the Prophet Muhammad via his poetry – should in theory be inexhaustible. Even in his own writings, Bamba had alluded to works that he had written and then refused to circulate.⁴⁴

The fact that both printers working under the authority of the Caliph and those who operated independently were profitable spoke to the overall demand for Bamba's poetry. Abdoulaye Diop claimed to have printed 35,000 copies of the Qur'an copied in Sëriñ Dioumbe Cissé's hand.⁴⁵ Collections of *xasida* would have been much shorter texts, so it is not inconceivable that such print runs would have been in the thousands. One scholar in the early 1960s gave an estimate of 20,000 copies for one of Bamba's works.⁴⁶ In such a context, the ability of central authorities in Tuubaa to enforce Sëriñ Fallu's decree probably relied more on the moral authority of the Caliph than on any practical steps that could be taken to enforce its regulations.

Murid leaders in Tuubaa were not the only, or even the most powerful actors seeking to regulate the dissemination of Bamba's poetry. In addition to caliphal authorization, printing materials in Senegal in the 1950s still required the approval of French administrators. Texts were to be presented in advance and receive official approval before being disseminated. Most of the requests fielded by French officials came from Levantine and Moroccan merchants who, before the advent of Senegalese-owned printing presses, were responsible for

⁴² Kane 1997.

⁴³ The figure of 700 kilograms is drawn from Samb, but seven tons is also commonly cited.

⁴⁴ This applied specifically to poems he had written while in exile. See Mbacké 1985, 21. Quoted in Babou 2007, 135.

⁴⁵ Prinz 1988.

⁴⁶ Monteil 1962, 101. In 2014, Bassirou Niang of the *Imprimerie Serigne Issa Niang* sold 10,000 copies of Bamba's *Mawāhib al-Nāfi' fi Madā'iḥ al-Shāfi'*. Interview with Bassirou Niang, 9 September 2014.

importing the bulk of Arabic-language materials into French West Africa.⁴⁷ Approval could come from the Director of Political Affairs, the Office of Muslim Affairs or customs officials. A list of publications appearing in Senegal was maintained and included nearly 50 titles in the mid-1950s. These included trade publications, union newsletters and newspapers run by political parties. Each entry included title, publication frequency, editorial information and address. Colonial officials were especially concerned about literature, music, and other forms of expression that could be construed as ‘pan-Arabist’. Bamba’s *xasida*, by contrast, were not viewed as a particularly threatening form of religious text.

5 Conclusion

The *xasida* of Amadu Bamba encompassed many different worlds in twentieth-century Senegal. Such writings were first and foremost expressions of Bamba’s own piety. They demonstrated his knowledge of Islam and his mastery of the Arabic language. In this sense, they were acts of devotion. Yet they were not personal documents. Aside from his exilic poetry, Bamba’s writings rarely referred to any specific events in his life or even to broader social conditions. Instead, they were normative statements that sought to instill in their readers (and listeners) the virtues of a proper Muslim life and, in a manner similar to *dhikr*, bring disciples closer to God. Though their content may have transcended any particular sociopolitical context, they still became the founding texts of one of the major Muslim movements of the twentieth century.

The effort to preserve and disseminate Bamba’s poetry became a key component of that movement. Under Sëriñ Fallu, the publishing wing of the Muridiyya came into existence, mobilizing disciples to collect and edit Bamba’s *xasida* and prompting several of them to create links with North African printers. Some eventually elected to enter Senegal’s own nascent print industry. These efforts were sometimes overseen by the centralized authority of the Caliph, but just as often they were the result of disciples’ own initiative. Deciding who had the authority to reproduce Bamba’s *xasida* was an unsettled question,

47 Alfred Le Chatelier reported finding a vibrant book trade among Moroccan merchants in the Senegalese city of Saint-Louis in the 1880s. In their shops one could purchase ‘manuscripts from Fez, printed books from Bulaq [the famous Cairo printing press], Smyrna, [and] Beirut’. See Le Chatelier 1899, 261; Sene 1982, 251.

and one that resonates to this day.⁴⁸ Yet disagreement over the right to reproduce Bamba's *xasida* has only served to further popularize the Muridiyya, thus demonstrating how contestation can actually serve to bolster a movement. Meanwhile, the emergence of printed *xasida* did not put an end to the demand for handwritten copies. On the contrary, while Dumont conducted his research on Bamba's poetry in the 1960s and 1970s, he could still find 'modest copyists, sitting on their mats, [who] write calligraphy of the works of their Master with extraordinary patience and remarkable ability [...] near them small children, boys and girls perhaps six or seven years old, already practice on their writing boards. They will carry on the tradition, come what may'.⁴⁹ The workshop at *Kër Sëriñ Bi* bears out this prediction. Alongside these developments, a market for handwritten copies of Bamba's *xasida* remained active, influencing the aesthetics of printed *xasida* and informing Murid attitudes towards manuscript and print, which remain an indelible part of textual culture in Senegal today.

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48 In my conversations with printers, many expressed a desire to see the official Murid leadership take a more robust stance in regulating the publication of Bamba's writings, arguing that the market was saturated with 'counterfeits' – works that fail to list the printer's name and contact information (a common practice). Sëriñ Fallu's successor as caliph, Sëriñ Abdul Ahad, brought the first printing press to Tuubaa, where he established the *Bibliothèque Cheikhoul Khadim* in 1977. However, the demand for Bamba's *xasida* exceeds the capacity of any one printer.

49 Dumont 1975, 17.

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