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Mamadou Lo, Un aspect de la poésie “Wolofal” Mouride: l’éducation morale et spirituelle de l’Aspirant (al Murid) dans la production de Sëriñ Mbay Jaxate

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Review of Mamadou Lo's book: *Un Aspect de la Poésie "Wolofal" Mouride: L'Éducation Morale et Spirituelle de l'Aspirant (al Murid) dans la Production de Sëriñ Mbay Jaxate. (L'Harmattan Senegal, 2020).*

The author, Mr. Mamadou Lo, has a dual education. He is well versed in the Senegalese French-based education system as he is in the Murid education system. He has served as a humanities teacher in the Senegalese education system and as an Education and Training Inspector until his retirement. He is one of the early members of the Hizbut Targiyyah, a Murid organization born out of the Murid students' organization called *Dabira des Étudiants Mourides de l'UCAD* (Université Cheikh Anta Diop) which was founded in the 1980s. He joined the organization in the 1990s. The group has flourished to become one of the most powerful Murid organizations in the world, with its members and branches spread around the globe. The organization has been led by Serigne Atou Diagne who passed away on January 22, 2021. Its new leader is Serigne Youssou Diop. Since its founding, the movement has been focused on the dissemination of the ethos and teaching of the founder of the Muridiyya, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. Mr. Lo is now retired and lives in Touba and continues to play leadership roles in the Murid community in Touba, including coordinating the academic curricula of the Complex Cheikh Ahmadou Khadim, which is intended to be the first Murid self-funded university designed to propagate the teachings of the Muridiyya and provide students with the scientific and technological skills they need to succeed in the 21st century. Mr. Lo's first exposure to the Wolof Ajami literature commonly called *Wolofal* in Senegal began when he was working on his MA thesis at the University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar, which he successfully defended in the academic year 1992-1993. His thesis focused on the works of Sëriñ Mbay Jaxate (also spelled as Serigne Mbaye Diakhaté), one of the most famous Murid Ajami poets. This book expands the efforts he began in his MA thesis in a significant way.

The style and form of this 446-page book follows the French tradition, with the table of contents at the end. It includes front matters (dedications, acknowledgements, a preface, and a foreword), which are followed by an extremely rich corpus of 59 Wolof Ajami poems transcribed in the standard Wolof Roman orthography. A French translation accompanies each Roman script transcription. The corpus of the transcribed and translated texts constitutes almost half of the book (page 23 to 246). This is certainly the most extensive Roman script transcriptions and French translations of Wolof Ajami poems to date. Despite the differences between Wolof, the language of the Ajami texts, and French, and the differences of worldviews and metaphors expressed through these languages, Mr. Lo succeeded in conveying the key meanings of the texts without jeopardizing their aesthetic qualities. To ensure that people who are literate in French but lack Wolof competence appreciate the nuances of the key local concepts and metaphors in the Wolof texts, he provides useful footnotes where relevant. The poems capture the worldview of the Murids and how the poet, Mbay Jaxate, used Wolof poetry to provide Sufi moral and spiritual education to the Wolof masses. The corpus includes panegyric poems, expressions of gratitude to God and Bamba, life challenges and how to overcome them, the enemies and sicknesses of the soul and how to get rid of them, as well as poems dealing with life and death, the code of ethics of Murid disciples, and poems that remind Murid leaders their responsibilities toward their followers. The transcriptions and French translations of the 59 poems constitute an important contribution to the ongoing efforts of making more accessible the largely unstudied written primary sources of Africa.

The rich corpus is followed by a brief three-page introduction (page 267-270) and the five major parts of the book. Part 1 (page 271 to 297), which consists of three chapters, provides the historical context in which the poems were produced. This part is enriched by insights from the late Murid scholar, Serigne Same Mbaye, one of the leading Senegalese Islamic scholars of the twentieth century. It includes discussions on the traditional Wolof society, its political and social organization,

the emergence of Bamba, and the founding of his Muridiyya Sufi movement. This part provides the needed background for the following sections.

Part 2 (page 297 to 327) also includes three chapters. It deals with the genesis and development of Wolof Ajami poetry and its key features. Drawing on the existing literature (mostly in French), Lo discusses the relationship between Wolof oral tradition and Murid Ajami poetry. He notes that Murid Ajami poets, including Sëriñ Mbay Jaxate (the focus of the book) and some of his colleagues who devoted their lives to writing Ajami poems to convey the teachings of the Muridiyya to the masses actually began producing fine Arabic poems. This is widely heard in Murid communities, which highlights these poets' agencies and pragmatism. They opted for Wolof because they understood that the local language was more useful than Arabic to communicate to the masses who do not speak or read Arabic. The innovative changes that Wolofal scholars made to the Arabic script to be able to render Wolof sounds that do not exist in Arabic are briefly discussed as well as the lack of standardization in Ajami texts that often creates daunting challenges for outsiders. This section contains useful discussions on the metaphors and the central themes in Mbay Jaxate's poetry, including moral and spiritual education of Murids, the relationship between Murid disciples and their leaders, praises dedicated to Bamba, and prayers. Mr. Lo also mentioned important Murid scholars who have produced works in Ajami in prose, including Serigne Shuhaybu Mbacké and Serigne Modou Mamoun Niang. However, El-Hadji Mbacké, the most prolific and versatile Murid Ajami prose writer today is overlooked.

Part 3 (page 329-352) includes two chapters. In this part, Lo provides important testimonies from Abdoul Ahad Touré, a specialist and eminent reciter of Mbay Jaxate's poems. The testimonies reveal the leadership of Serigne Abdoul Ahad Mbacké (1914-1989), the third Calif of the Muridiyya, in the collection, preservation, and recording of Mbay Jaxate's poems. The insights in this section show how Abdoul Ahad, who founded the central Murid library in Touba called Daaray Kaamil,

envisioned Mbay Jaxate's poems as important archival and educational resources to be preserved and disseminated broadly in Murid communities. He saw Mbay Jaxate's poems as important indigenous pedagogical tools for the moral and spiritual education of the Murids.

Part 4 (page 353-374), which consists of one chapter, deals with the figures of speech (metaphors, allegories, comparisons, etc.) in Mbay Jaxate's poems. Lo illustrates each of the figures using examples drawn from the corpus of transcribed and translated poems. Some of the common metaphors he discusses include the use of the image of Senegambian "wrestlers" (Wolof: *mbër*) to refer to saints, and "hunters" (Wolof: *rëbbkat*) to refer to Murid disciples who need to be prepared to endure hardship like hunters in their quest for blessings and moral and spiritual ascent. Because Mbay Jaxate was a farmer, he naturally uses metaphors dealing with farming. Lo shows that the figures of speech, interrogations, repetitions, enumerations, and the theses and antitheses in his poems are carefully chosen pedagogical devices designed to convey the Sufi ethos of the Muridiyya to his Wolof speaking audiences more effectively.

Part 5 (page 375-420), which consists of four chapters, deals with key themes in Mbay Jaxate's poems and the intertextual relations between his poems, liturgical Islamic texts such as the Quran and the hadith, and the writings of his own teacher and role model (Bamba). The themes discussed in this part include *Jihad of the Soul* (also known as the Greater Jihad) as construed in the Muridiyya, the hurdles, sins, and human flaws that prevent Murid disciples from succeeding in their spiritual quests. This part includes a description and a strong rebuke of false and immoral religious leaders, and provides general guidelines on exemplary moral and spiritual living, and the profile of the ideal sincere Murid (Murid Sadiq).

This part is followed by a brief conclusion (page 421-425), an appendix (page 427-439), and the bibliography (441-443). The appendix is useful for those interesting in diachronic linguistics and the evolution of the Wolof society as reflected in language change. Many of the words in the

appendix drawn from the poems are no longer in use today. Many have been replaced by loanwords, especially from French. The appendix shows the richness of the Wolof language that loanwords from French and Arabic blur, as reflected in the terms that Mbay Jaxate uses to refer to the local ecology, seasons, agricultural life, and the lives of the Wolof people in the first part of the 20th century when many of his poems were written. For those interested in lexicography, diachronic linguistics, historical and cultural change as reflected in language, the appendix is a good place to start.

The bibliography engages internal Murid sources and some publications in French. This is possibly due to the author's lack of fluency in English or his lack of access to the recent publications in English on the Muridiyya and its rich Ajami sources. Finally, the book could also have been enhanced with samples of Mbay Jaxate's actual Wolofal texts placed next to the transcriptions and French translations to allow the reader who has never seen such Wolofal texts to appreciate their forms and aesthetics. These minor comments aside, Mr. Mamadou Lo must be congratulated for accomplishing this excellent and important work that makes accessible to broader audiences beyond the Murid community Sëriñ Mbay Jaxate's poems and astute literary techniques he deployed to provide exemplary moral and spiritual education to the Wolof speaking masses.

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