

Being a Murid

The Ritual Practice of Work

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As a Murid you don't speak of miracles, as it is not miracles that bring you closer to God. It is because of hard work, because of the *ndigal* (order of a sheikh) that we are able to search for God. That is what being a Murid is all about...¹

To be a Murid it is essential to work, you need to educate yourself – you need to know who *Sëriñ* Touba (Amadu Bamba) is and knowing him will teach you to work!²

The Muridiyya Sufi order was founded by Amadu Bamba in Senegal, West Africa around 1880.³ Today, of Senegal's approximately 13 million inhabitants about 94% is Muslim and most of them are affiliated with one of the country's Sufi orders – a remarkable statistic in the Islamic world where Sufis are generally a minority. With an estimated four million adherents the Muridiyya is the second largest order, immediately after the demographically dominant Tijaniyya.⁴

The Murids maintain a centralized allegiance to the holy city of Touba, where Bamba's descendants reside and from where his heritage is kept alive. Extensive urbanization and a steady flow of migrants to urban areas over recent decades mean that Murids are practicing their faith in changing circumstances, as the urban scene differs from the predominantly rural context where the order originated. Because we are particularly interested in the ritual dynamics of changing contexts, we focus on Murids living in the Senegalese capital of Dakar. This paper affords insight into the practice of work, a key element in the ritual spectrum of the Muridiyya, and concentrates on how contemporary Murids conduct their ritual practice in their urban context.

¹ Personal interview with Amadou, 3 June 2007.

² Personal interview with Fatoumata, 6 May 2007.

³ Note on transliteration: for Wolof (the lingua franca of Senegal) words and concepts I follow the Wolof-French dictionary (J.L. DIOUF: *Dictionnaire Wolof – Français et Français-Wolof*. Paris 2003). In the case of personal names their often more common French spelling is used. Many religious concepts have an Arabic origin but are presented in their Wolof transliteration.

⁴ C.A. BABOU: *Fighting the greater jihad. Amadu Bamba and the founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Athens 2007) 193.

1. Ritual dynamics of work

The close connection between work and the Murid Sufi order has caught the attention of numerous scholars in the past century.⁵ As far back as 1913 French colonial administrator and Islamic specialist Paul Marty reported in detail on the Murid's work ethic.⁶ The Murid 'doctrine of work' has been studied mainly from socio-economic and historical perspectives, narrowing the actual perception of it. Studies of the religious dimensions are rare and seem to rely primarily on written sources, like the writings of the founder of the Muridiyya sheikh Amadu Bamba.⁷ The actual practice of this work and its place in the lived religion of the Murids are often overlooked. Although there seems to be general agreement on the importance of work in the Muridiyya, its place in religious practice is not clear. An accurate description of what ritual work actually entails and how it is embedded in the ritual practice of the Muridiyya is sorely needed.

A ritual approach makes it possible to shed some light on the structure and meaning of the Murid practice of work. Defining the practice as 'ritual' work sets it apart (at least for the purpose of this article) from ordinary work done merely to earn a living. It is useful to distinguish clearly between ritual (out of the ordinary) work and day-to-day work, as the structure and meaning differ substantially. To specify different dimensions of the ritual practice of work I use Ronald Grimes's terminological differentiation between 'ritualization', 'ritualizing' and 'rite'.⁸ The Murid practice of work can certainly be seen as ritualization, an activity that is not necessarily culturally defined as ritual, but is viewed as such by an observer. It is potential ritual. It could also tend towards ritualizing, in which case work should be seen as emerging ritual, a ritual practice that is deliberately cultivated and that happens peripherally. Ritual work could also be a rite, denoting enactments located in concrete times and places that are widely recognized by Murids and are distinct from ordinary behavior.⁹ This careful differentiation enables us to understand the practice of ritual work in contemporary Muridiyya.

This study is based on fieldwork – interviews, conversations and observations – in Senegal,¹⁰ combined with a study of available literature, in which the rather fragmented information on work was gathered and put in a new perspective.

⁵ For an overview of prominent studies on the Muridiyya, arranged by topic, see: BABOU: *Fighting the greater jihad* 194-195.

⁶ P. MARTY: 'Les Mourides d'Amadou Bamba', in: *La revue du monde musulmane* 25 (Paris 1913) 1-164 and IDEM: *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal* 1 (Paris 1917).

⁷ F. DUMONT: *La pensée religieuse d'Amadou Bamba* (Dakar 1975).

⁸ R. GRIMES: *Ritual criticism. Case studies in its practice, essays on its theory* (Columbia 1990) 9-10.

⁹ 'Ritual refers to the general idea of which a rite is a specific instance ... ritual does not 'exist' ... ritual is an idea scholars formulate.' In GRIMES: *Ritual criticism* 10.

¹⁰ Fieldwork conducted during four months in Senegal (Dakar and Touba) in 2007 and during shorter annual visits between 2004 and 2011.

2. The Muridiyya

Ritual work is firmly rooted in the teachings of Amadu Bamba, founder of the Muridiyya, and is propagated by the way the Sufi order is organized. So before we turn to the practice of ritual work some historical and organizational background is needed.

2.1. Brief historical introduction

The Muridiyya was founded in the late 19th century by the charismatic Muslim scholar sheikh Amadu Bamba Mbacké (c. 1850-1927). Although Islam had adherents among the Senegalese elite from the 11th century onwards, it only gained a popular following in the course of the 19th century with the emergence of Islamic movements led by various local preachers. By the end of that century the most characteristic movements of the period were in evidence: the major Sufi orders or *tariqas*.

Amadu Bamba rapidly gathered a substantial following and became well-known for his pacific resistance against the colonial government that watched him critically. In 1895 he was arrested by the French administration and exiled to Gabon for seven years (1895-1902). Even after his return he was frequently subjected to house arrest and other restrictions. Whereas they were meant to undermine his popularity, these measures had the opposite effect. The hardships not only furthered Bamba's personal spiritual development, but also made him immensely popular and established his status as a saint. His experiences are recounted in an extensive body of miraculous tales that make up an appealing hagiography, illustrating and illuminating his religious teachings.¹¹

Bamba founded Touba, a place that was revealed to him in a vision, now the throbbing heart of the Muridiyya. Because of the restrictions imposed by the French Bamba could not live there during his lifetime, but when he died in 1927 he was allowed to be buried there. Once situated in a remote forest, Touba has become a thriving city with almost a million inhabitants.¹² Bamba's tomb – an important place of pilgrimage – is now part of the largest mosque in sub-Saharan Africa. Touba is the physical and spiritual center of the Murid order.

2.2. A Sufi tradition

Amadu Bamba developed his teachings, the Path of the Muridiyya, from the Sufi tradition he grew up in. He was born into a renowned Muslim family and

¹¹ F. NGOM: 'Ahmadu Bamba's pedagogy and the development of Ajamī literature', in *African studies review* 52/1 (2009) 99-123.

¹² E. ROSS: 'Touba: a spiritual metropolis in the modern world', in *Canadian journal of African studies* 29/2 (1995) 222-259; and C. GUËYE: *Touba: la capitale des Mourides* (Paris 2002).

was educated by his father and uncles from an early age. Sufism has a long tradition in Islam and can be described broadly as ‘the intensification of Islamic faith and practice, or the tendency among Muslims to strive for a personal engagement with the divine reality’.¹³ It is also referred to as Islamic mysticism, aptly described by Huston Smith:¹⁴

The Sufis are the mystics of Islam. Every upright Muslim expects to see God after death, but the Sufis are the impatient ones. They want God now – moment by moment, day by day, in this very life. And they are willing to undergo the disciplines that make that possible.

The mystical dimension of Islam is as old as the religion itself and has been shaped by many Sufi masters over the centuries, often adapted to the time and circumstances they were living in. Some have founded their own *tariqa*, which signifies both the method – ‘the path’ – and the organizational form: the Sufi order. The Sufi order provides teachers and guides that initiate followers into the specific teachings and praxis. These sheikhs often have a lineage that goes back to the prophet Muhammad.

Although love of God is at the heart of Bamba’s doctrine, he was only too aware that for people the mystery of God is hard to unravel. Bamba sees Muhammad, the perfect man who managed to communicate with God, as his prime example. He views himself as *Xadim Rassul*, servant of the prophet. Bamba’s perception of Sufism was shaped by a desire to blend mysticism, *sharia* and participation in social life, as he rejected extreme asceticism and heterodox religious practices.¹⁵

Whereas the teachings of most classic Sufi masters were generally followed by an elite, Amadu Bamba directed his message to the masses – in particular to the young people of his time. Bamba doesn’t preach an asceticism that rejects the world, but one that is practiced in real life. His Sufi teachings are directed to educating the body, the mind and the soul and are meant to instill valuable knowledge that leads to good action.¹⁶ This focus on action called for a new pedagogy that emphasizes work and religious practices. Its basic principles are laid

¹³ J.O. VOLL & O. KAZUO: ‘Sufism’, in *The Oxford encyclopaedia of the Islamic world*. *Oxford Islamic studies online*, www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0759 (16 March 2013).

¹⁴ H. SMITH: ‘Foreword’, in J. Fadiman & R. Frager (eds.): *Essential Sufism* (New York 1997).

¹⁵ C.A. BABOU: ‘Bamba, Amadu’, In *Oxford Islamic studies online*, www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t343/e00068 (8 April 2013).

¹⁶ A. ZITO: *Prosperity and purpose, today and tomorrow. Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba and discourses of work and salvation in the Muridiyya Sufi order of Senegal* (Boston 2012).

down in the *xassaides*,¹⁷ Bamba's writings, and comprise three main stages. The first stage entails exoteric education (*talim*, 'instruction') which transmits knowledge through the study of Islamic sacred scriptures and sciences. Second is esoteric education (*tarbiyya*, 'training') that targets the soul through education of the body and spirit. The third stage (*tarqiyya*, 'ascension'), attained by only a handful of specially gifted disciples, allows elevation beyond the futility of material life.¹⁸

On the basis of these principles Bamba designed a system of lifelong education that combines traditional scripturally centered instruction with a more practical dimension aimed at transforming the disciples' character and behavior. It equips common people with skills, character and attitudes to deal with life's challenges. The program underlines the importance of work and turning words into deeds, as spiritual growth comes about through hard work. It is concretized in ritual practice that is feasible for all members of society. This esoteric education, *tarbiyya*, is the cornerstone of Murid ritual work. Fundamental to this holistic education system is the guide/teacher-pupil (sheikh-*taalibe*) relationship, common to all Sufi orders. Through submission to a sheikh a *taalibe* is able to gain knowledge of life, God and the hereafter.

2.3. Role models: Bamba, Fall

Modeling the sheikh-*taalibe* relationship are Amadu Bamba and his most prominent disciple, Ibrahima Fall. For *taalibes* the life of Bamba and Fall is exemplary, as is their mutual relationship. They are a source of inspiration and inspire the *taalibe* to become a *Murid saadix*, a true Murid.

Fall found Bamba after a year-long search for a spiritual guide. At their first meeting he allegedly fell on his knees and said: 'I submit myself to you, in this life and the next. I will do everything that you order me; I will abstain from anything that you forbid me.' This solemn pledge of allegiance has become the Murid initiation rite and is performed by individual *taalibes* after choosing a personal sheikh. Ibrahima Fall's submission to Bamba is exemplary: 'Maam Sheikh Ibra Fall led by example, it is through his work, through his devotion, his teachings about how to surrender yourself ... He was a true servant; Ibra Fall is a model for all *taalibes*.¹⁹ Fall is commonly referred to as *Babul Muridina* ('gate to Muridism') and the striking 130 metres high central minaret of the grand Touba mosque – lit by a purple-blue light at night – is called *Lamp Fall* ('light of Fall'), a shining reminder of his importance. His scrupulous work ethic and loyalty to Amadu Bamba are reflected in an extensive body of vivid narratives. This strong oral tradition conveys the hardships Bamba had to endure

¹⁷ From Arabic *Qasida*: poly-thematic poem, usually translated as 'ode', composed according to strict metrical rules. 'Qasida', In J.L. ESPOSITO (ed.): *The Oxford dictionary of Islam*; www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1924 (10 July 2013).

¹⁸ BABOU: 'Bamba, Amadu'.

¹⁹ Personal conversation Mbaye, 7 July 2010.

and how Fall provided his daily needs through hard physical labor. Fall freed his master from day-to-day earthly worries so he could focus on his spiritual work. The stories refer to his heroic role in the foundation of Touba; how he fearlessly conquered the wilderness and cut down trees to open up space.

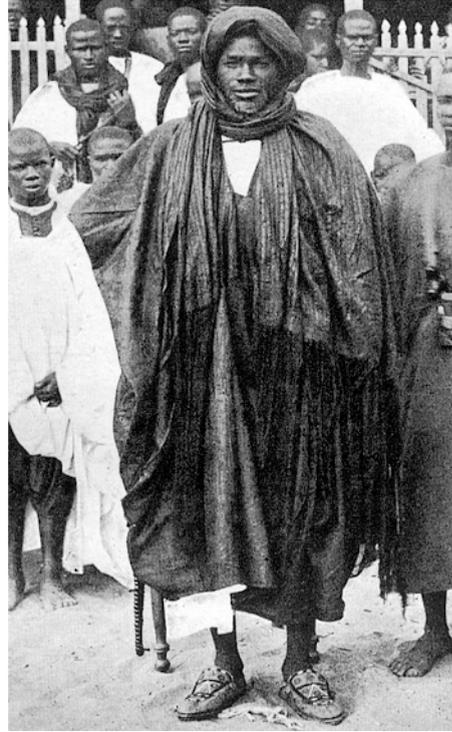


Illustration 1 & 2: Amadu Bamba (l.) and his disciple Ibrahima Fall (r.) These pictures were taken in 1913 and first published in P. Marty: *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal* 1. *Les personnes* (Paris 1917)

His persistent appeals to the colonial administration for the release of Bamba from exile are frequently praised. These stories are also widely depicted in popular culture such as murals, pictures and music videos.²⁰ They attest how Fall always went the extra mile, even going to the extremes of not saying the prescribed daily prayers and not fasting during Ramadan. He spent every minute of the day working for his master. It all contributes to the popular perception of servanthood and the cult of work. The complementary relationship between Bamba and Fall still appeals to modern-day *taalibes*. Even though not all of them aspire to this extreme level of service to their sheikh, Fall is seen as the ideal *taalibe*. Those who do choose his particular path are known as *Baay Fall*.

²⁰ A. ROBERTS & M. NOOTER ROBERTS: *A saint in the city: Sufi arts of urban Senegal* (Los Angeles 2003).

With their often distinctive appearance (dreadlocks and patchwork clothing) they make up a small but eye-catching, publicly present subgroup of the Muridiyya.

2.4. Follow the *ndigal*: a chain of authority

Sheikhs in the Muridiyya are directly linked to Amadu Bamba, as they are either his direct descendants (known as Mbacké-Mbacké) or descendants of his early companions that were ordained sheikhs by him. They inherited Bamba's spiritual knowledge and share his *baraka*.²¹ This lineage chain establishes their authority and creates fruitful *taalibe*-sheikh relations. It constitutes an environment in which ritual work can be practiced. By entrusting themselves to a sheikh *taalibes* are in a position to be educated through the *ndigal* – the 'recommendation' or 'order' – of the sheikh. It is through the *jébbalu*, the 'pact of allegiance' that the *taalibe* is able to exercise blind trust and obedience. It creates the necessary condition for following the *ndigal*, for performing ritual work. A *taalibe* explains:²²

The act of *jébbalu* is acknowledging an intermediary between you, the prophet Muhammad and God as it is not so easy to come close to God. When you do the *jébbalu* it is to search for God ... so you submit yourself to your sheikh, follow his *ndigal* without any hesitation... that is the spiritual training that establishes your faith in God ... It is the way of the Muridiyya.

The sheikh's *ndigal* is legitimate, as he is part of an acknowledged chain of authority. All sheikhs and *taalibes* in the Muridiyya are part of a larger system that derives from sheikh Amadu Bamba. This lineage establishes a hierarchy that undergirds the *ndigal* and ritual work:

²¹ Its most fundamental meaning is blessing, beneficent force or supernatural power conferred by the Almighty on humankind. Uncommonly pious individuals are privileged with *baraka*. In their turn those blessed with *baraka*, whether living or dead, can transmit it to ordinary mortals, who then benefit by amassing both material fortune and spiritual rewards. J. CLANCY-SMITH: 'Barakah', in *The Oxford encyclopaedia of the Islamic world*. *Oxford Islamic studies online*;

www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0102 (1 May 2013).

²² Personal interview Djily, 17 June 2007.

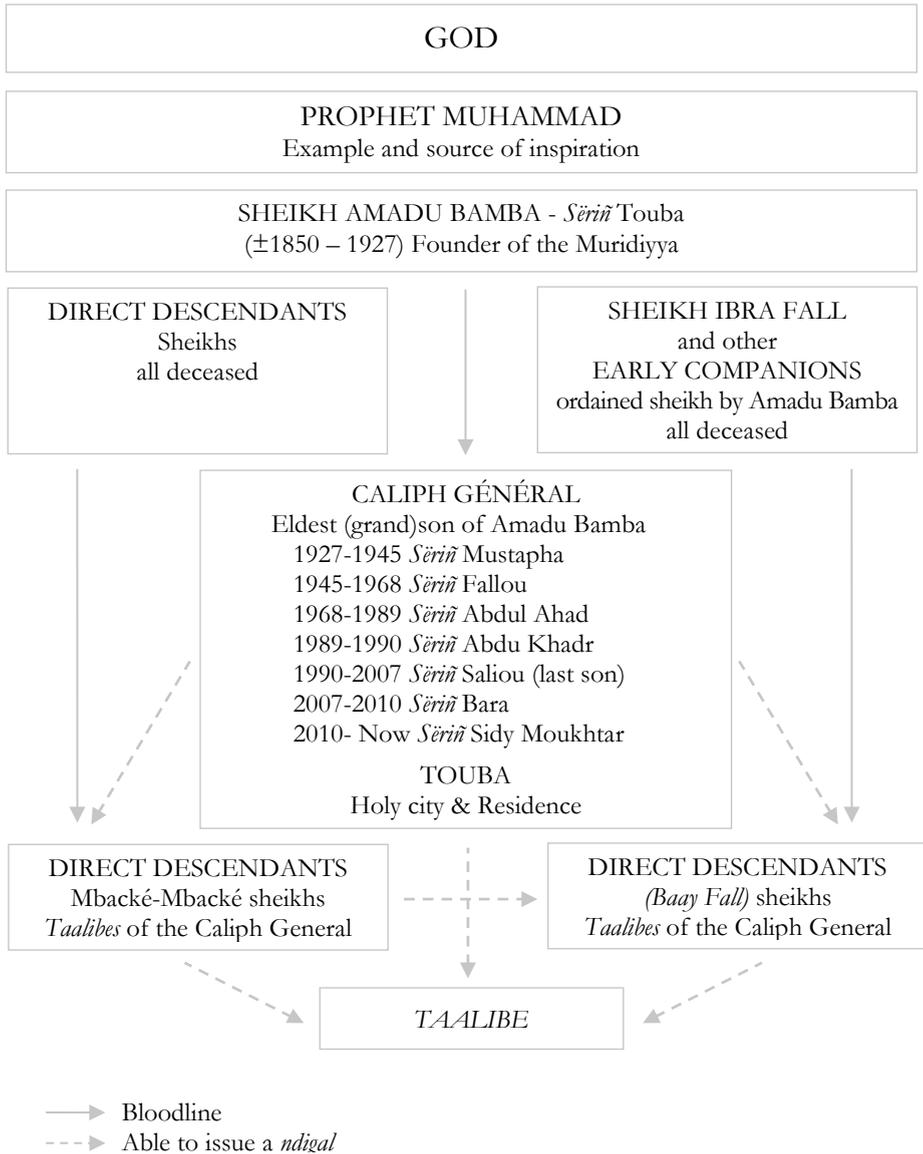


Figure 1: Murid hierarchy, explaining the legitimacy of the *ndigal* and the constitution of ritual work

A *taalibe* explains the respective positions and roles of *taalibes* and sheikhs in the Murid system:²³

²³ Personal interview Ahmadou, 24 April 2007.

A *taalibe* is someone who searches for God and a sheikh is there to guide you, to teach you. What I aspire to and what I am learning now have to do with the fact that we are people and not animals. It is all about how to live your life on this earth, it is not easy to live with all these people and you also have to think about the life after this. A good *taalibe* is someone who follows the instructions of his sheikh, the teachings of *Sëriñ* Touba and those from God.²⁴ And he knows these are the same instructions... A good *taalibe* visits his sheikh and talks about his problems, because if you don't talk you cannot change anything. They are born sheikhs, that is why they know things we don't know... A sheikh is like a ladder that reaches up to God, a ladder you have to climb yourself... When you submit yourself to a sheikh named Mbacké or Fall, they connect you with Amadu Bamba, and he will take you to God...

Following the hierarchy sketched in the foregoing figure, it also becomes clear why *taalibes* generally refer to ritual work as *liggéeyenl Sëriñ* Touba, 'working for *Sëriñ* Touba'. Sometimes they are more specific and refer to their personal sheikh or his lineage (*liggéeyenl Sëriñ* Saliou or *liggéeyenl Sëriñ* Fallou).

3. Ritual practice of work

Bamba's idea of *tarbiyya* or esoteric education is concretized in the ritual practice of work: following the *ndigal*. The structure of this ritual practice can be illustrated as follows:



In this structure we recognize the classical rite of passage described by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep.²⁵ These rites of passage are defined by Van Gennep as 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' and display a typical threefold pattern of successive ritual stages: separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal) and incorporation (post-liminal). Victor Turner took up this model of ritual analysis and developed it further.²⁶

Having adopted Van Gennep's process view of ritual, Turner emphasizes the importance of the liminal, intermediate stage. Whereas ritual exemplifies the

²⁴ The Wolof title *sëriñ* ('leader', religious authority, scholar or practitioner of religious sciences) is sometimes translated as *marabout*, which is problematic because of the latter's association with occult charlatanism in colonial sources and some socio-scientific literature. Among Murids the name *Sëriñ* Touba is one of Bamba's most common honorifics; see ZITO: *Prosperity and purpose* 139.

²⁵ A. VAN GENNEP: *The rites of passage* (Chicago 1960) 189-191.

²⁶ V. TURNER: *The ritual process. Structure and anti-structure* (Chicago 1969).

transition of an individual or group from one state to another, in the liminal phase they are often secluded from everyday life. They are caught up in an anti-structure where their status is ambiguous.

In his work Turner presents three analytical components of liminality that are useful for understanding Murid ritual work.²⁷ The first component is communication of *sacra*, where secret symbols are communicated to the ritual subjects: simple symbols that usually represent the unity and continuity of the community. The second concept concerns the ludic deconstruction and recombination of familiar cultural configurations, which force the ritual subjects to reflect on the basic values of their social and cosmological order. And the third concept refers to the simplification of the relations of the social structure, in which the only remaining structural characteristic of liminality is the authority of the ritual instructor; between the ritual subjects there is a sense absolute equality that Turner calls *communitas*.

3.1. Aiming at transformation

By performing the *jébbalu* the *taalibe* submits himself to the sheikh of his choice and formally becomes a Murid. This pact of allegiance marks a separation from his life before, as the path of the Muridiyya is now open to him. It is seen as the starting point of the *taalibe*'s genuine search for God. He is detached from his former social structure or social conditions. The *jébbalu* sets the fundamental conditions for the performance of ritual work.

The second ritual phase is liminal: the *taalibe* is no longer in the old state and has not yet reached the new one. It is what *taalibes* call 'being in a *ndigal*'. The ritual work they perform in following the *ndigal* is out of the ordinary; even when the actions are the same as those of regular work, their intention and purpose are different and they are interpreted differently. Following a *ndigal* is a matter of blind faith and trust, above all of humility, for without complete submission one is not able to learn. A *ndigal* is aimed at transforming the soul by overcoming difficulties and challenges; it is seen as a divine test. This *tarbiyya* education goes beyond mere transmission of knowledge; *xam-xam* has to be actively acquired through interpretation of the *ndigal* that is given. By imposing the *ndigal* the sheikh translates Bamba's teachings into ritual practice, which the *taalibe* has to internalize. All this is done with the purpose of becoming a *Murid saadix*, a true Murid. The acquired spiritual knowledge can be applied in this world, where it provides helpful survival tools, and in the hereafter, where it provides healing, redemption and salvation.²⁸ In return for following the *ndigal* the *taalibe* earns the prayers of his sheikh. These prayers will dispose God fa-

²⁷ V. TURNER: *The forest of symbols. Aspects of Ndembu ritual* (Ithaca 1967) 99-108; V. TURNER & E. TURNER: *On the edge of the bush. Anthropology as experience* (Fucson 1985) 291-301; V. TURNER: *From ritual to theatre. The human seriousness of play* (New York 1982) 203-206.

²⁸ ZITO: *Prosperity and purpose* 139.

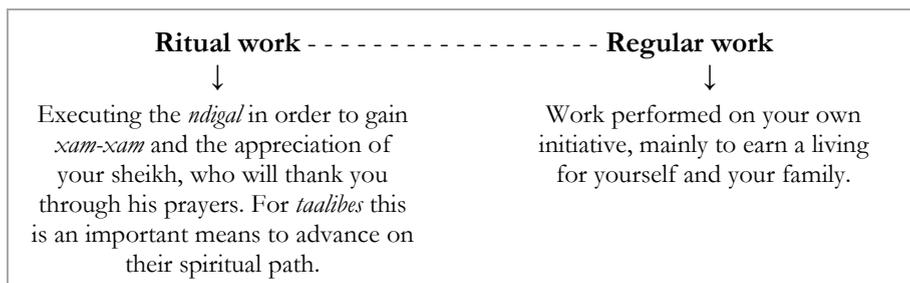
vorably towards him, which will manifest itself in *xéewal* (Wolof for ‘unexpected prosperity’, ‘chance’, ‘felicity’).

In the post-liminal phase the *taalibe* reintegrates the acquired knowledge with his regular life and enters a new, stable state with its own rights and obligations. But the path of the Muridiyya is sustained work and the ritual process described above is repeated over and over. It is a gradual advance, a common quality of the Sufi path.

There is another side to ritual work. Not only is it a means to spiritual growth but also an important act of worship. It is through ‘good works’ – exchange, sacrifice and commitment – that *taalibes* define their relationship with God.

3.2. *Wéy ndigal*: regular work – ritual work

In following the *ndigal* a Murid works with a specific intention. This sets it apart from the regular work one does to earn a livelihood. Having a paid job – which is more common among *taalibes* in Dakar – makes it possible to donate *àddiyya*. Nowadays one even needs money to accomplish certain *ndigals*, implying that one has to have a regular job in order to do ritual work. So having a paid job becomes more important and the meaning assigned to it changes. Whereas in the beginning (when becoming a *taalibe* Murid) there is a strict division between ritual and regular work, the boundaries between the two gradually become blurred. Specific work practices can be placed on this continuum:



Many *taalibes* explained the erasure of these boundaries as a spiritual advance, expressed as *Wéy ndigal* (‘being in a permanent *ndigal*’). As this *taalibe* aptly puts it:²⁹

It is like with praying ... When you say your prayers faithfully five times a day as you were taught as a child, you come to see that you spend only five times ten minutes remembering God. That is 50 minutes, while a day has 24 hours! I think that is a bit mean ... So I strive to work for God 24 times seven, like Sheikh Ibra Fall taught us to do. *Wéy ndigal!*

²⁹ Personal interview with Bouba, 16 April 2008.

The idea is that in the initial stages an explicit *ndigal* is needed, as the *taalibe* does not know what he has to do. In more advanced stages he is able to initiate ritual work himself.

3.3. The place of ritual work in the ritual system

Murid ritual work is embedded in a broader ritual system that is connected with the five pillars of Islam. These are the foundations on which the religion rests and constitutes the basis of worship, of the sacred law that governs social relations, and of theology.³⁰ Sufi orders are renowned for intensifying ritual life, as they add a deeper dimension to existing Islamic practice. The Murid order also deepens the ritual practice based on the five fundamentals:

3.3.1. Pillar *Shahada* – *Jébbalu*

To the first pillar, the profession or witness of faith (‘there is no god except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God’), Murids add the *jébbalu*. This provides a basis to learn and deepen their faith, as it lays down the basic terms for the practice of ritual work.

3.3.2. Pillar *Salat* – *Zikr*

The second pillar, *salat*, is reinforced with the typical Sufi activity of *zikr*, a devotional remembrance of God that involves litanies and prayers. *Zikr* may be an individual act, but the term usually refers to collective devotions. Each *tariqa* has its own distinctive poems and prayers and in the Muridiyya Bamba’s *xassaides* are frequently used. The poems are chanted, recited, read and studied individually and in groups. The chanting of *xassaides* is called *jàng*, which in Wolof literally means ‘to learn’. This reflects the idea that through chanting a deeper meaning can be discovered and experienced.

3.3.3. Pillar *Zakat* – *Àddiya*

In addition to the regular *zakat*, the offering of welfare alms, Murids also give *àddiya* (Wolof: ‘pay tribute’, a pious gift). These gifts (money or goods) are generally handed directly to their personal sheikh. Sometimes *àddiya* can be donated when a *taalibe* is not able to work for his sheikh. The sheikh can use these gifts to redistribute wealth among his disciples, but they are also used to pay for the sheikh’s personal (and family) expenses, as they often have no other source of income. *Ndigals* for *àddiya* can also be issued when organizing special religious events and gatherings, like a *màggal* or Ramadan meals. Recently, in January 2013, the caliph general *Sèriñ* Sidy Mukhtar issued a *ndigal* to all Murids to contribute financially to the construction of two more minarets, restoration work

³⁰ M.M. AYOUB: ‘Pillars of Islam’, In *The Oxford encyclopaedia of the modern Islamic world. Oxford Islamic studies online*; www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236MIW/e0636 (2 May 2013).

and embellishment of the Touba mosque. The *ndigal* was broadcast on the national media and every Murid was asked to contribute a minimum of 500 CFA.³¹

3.3.4. Pillar *Hajj* – *Màggal*

In addition to a pilgrimage to Mecca, which all adult Muslims who are physically and financially able is required to make at least once during their lifetime, Murids are actively involved in *màggal* (Wolof, ‘to commemorate’ or ‘to celebrate’) pilgrimages. The so-called ‘grand *Màggal*’ – commemorating Bamba’s departure for exile in Gabon³² – draws hundreds of thousands, some say millions, of Murids to Touba.³³ Organizing a *màggal* entails a lot of (ritual) work and demands substantial financial investments. A *ndigal* of the caliph general puts some sheikhs in charge of certain parts of the grand festival. They in their turn issue *ndigals* to mobilize a labor force and raise funds among their *taalibes*.

3.3.5. Pillar Ramadan

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is a major ritual in the Muslim world. It is also a month of spiritual contemplation set apart from the other months of the year. During Ramadan many sheikhs call their *taalibes* to spend some time in Touba. This period offers plenty of scope for ritual work, as Touba is flooded with people that need to be cared for. Through the *ndigal* of their sheikh many *taalibes* are involved in the preparation and distribution of meals for *ndogu* or *iftar*, the breaking of the fast every evening after sunset. The *Baay Fall* in particular take this task upon themselves and spend their days gathering ingredients and cooking the meals that are brought to the grand mosque in a colorful parade to be distributed.

4. Being a Murid in the city

An ongoing process of urbanization is steadily changing the context of Murid ritual work. Murids were once mainly farmers in rural areas, but they are gradually being superseded by a growing number of urban traders and wage laborers scattered throughout the big cities of Senegal, other parts of Africa, Europe and North America.³⁴ I focus on by far the largest city and capital of Senegal, Da-

³¹ 500 CFA is about 75 euro cents. About six weeks after the *ndigal* it was announced that about 5 billion CFA had already been raised. The biggest contributors were publicly named. www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/ndigel-du-khalif-ndash-une-contribution-de-500-francs-par-mouride-touba-recolte-deja-5-milliards_n_88961.html.

³² This exile is seen as a period in which Bamba was severely put to the test. It also was an opportunity for spiritual growth.

³³ Besides the grand *màggal* there are numerous other *màggals*. These commemorate historical events and major figures related to the Muridiyya

³⁴ C.A. BABOU: ‘Urbanizing mystical Islam. Making Murid space in the cities of Senegal’, in *The international journal of African historical studies* 40/2 (2007) 197-223.

kar, where the Murid population has grown substantially over recent decades. Migration increased after the disastrous droughts of the 1970s when farmers were forced to seek a livelihood elsewhere. Particularly in Dakar large numbers of people from all over the country and from diverse backgrounds gathered and were forced to live together. Gradually they established a new 'Dakar identity' – 'that is the new ethnicity in Senegal now, to be from Dakar!'³⁵ This is what many Murids Dakar now call their home, as they no longer have concrete connections with the Murid heartland they originally migrated from.

In the Murid heartland with its Murid majority their education was safeguarded through well-established *daara tarbiyya* ('working schools') and traditional Qur'anic schools. Ritual work was practiced in villages founded by sheikhs throughout the region, mainly in the form of hard physical labor in the sheikh's fields.

Their move to Dakar separated *taalibes* from their personal sheikhs and the Murid social setting. Dakar is marked by ethnic and religious diversity and the process of becoming a Murid unmistakably changes. Once one was likely to grow up in an all-Murid family, in an all-Murid area that naturally provided a Murid upbringing and all the facilities needed. Being a Murid in Dakar is less straightforward. Here Murids have to negotiate their ritual practice of work, demanding ritual changes, ritual reinvention and new organizational forms to fit the new circumstances.

4.1. Becoming a Murid in the city

Up to their teenage years Dakar youths enjoy a fairly standard Islamic upbringing; they learn how to pray from family members and often attend a Qur'anic school in their neighborhood, where the Islamic educators are not necessarily Murids. Usually their first contact with the Muridiyya in Dakar is not via Murid sheikhs, as most of them live in the somewhat remote holy city of Touba. The first contact is generally through other Murids – *taalibes* in their surroundings. The prominent presence of the Muridiyya in popular culture (e.g. in music, murals and oral literature) and their very public and appealing religious manifestations (e.g. the street *ziker* on Thursday evenings and on weekends) make them very visible to young people. Extensive media exposure (television, radio, newspapers and the internet) further publicizes and arouses sympathy for the order.

In this initial period (aspirant) Murids identify mainly with the key figures of the order, in particular sheikh Amadu Bamba, sheikh Ibra Fall and the caliph general. At this stage choosing a personal sheikh and performing the *jébbalu* (formal entrance to the Muridiyya) is not possible. Nonetheless they refer to

³⁵ F. MCLAUGHLIN: 'Dakar Wolof and the configuration of an urban identity', in *Journal of African cultural studies* 14/2 (2001) 153-172. McLaughlin describes the emergence of a Dakar identity, in which the Wolof language – the lingua franca of the Murid heartland – is the binding factor.

themselves as (symbolic) *taalibes* of the caliph general or of Amadu Bamba himself. Although not yet formally Murids, for which the *jébbalu* is a requirement, they increasingly consider themselves Murids.

Whereas formerly women automatically followed their husbands (or fathers), in present-day Dakar we see girls and young women making their individual choices advancing on the Murid path – choices they plan to stick to also after marriage.³⁶

The growing number of (aspirant) Murids in the city – separated from their sheikhs in Touba – triggered new modes of organization, as it was necessary to find new ways of implementing Bamba's teaching goals. The formation of *dabiras* was the answer to the specific needs of Murids in the new context.³⁷ Through these organizations they can become practicing Murids in the city. *Dabiras* vary from loosely organized groups of friends to well organized, NGO-like bodies. They generally operate under the guidance of a *dianwiñe* (Wolof: 'placeholder'), a *taalibe* appointed by his sheikh or elected by the group to perform this duty.

Although the *dabira* does not formally replace the *taalibe*-sheikh relation, it provides a programme that enables one to be a Murid without committing oneself to a personal sheikh. The *dabira* creates a context in which Murids can practice their ritual repertoires and a platform for the performance of ritual work.

In Dakar we also see the rise of so-called 'city sheikhs' who reside or spend a lot of time in Dakar and are organized to cater for the urban *taalibe*'s specific needs and circumstances.³⁸ They bring Touba to Dakar, as many *taalibes* are not in the position to travel to the holy city themselves.

4.2. Ritual work in the Dakar context

A recent *ndigal* issued by the caliph general Sidy Mukhtar was announced by his spokesman on the media. The broadcast ended with a personal appeal, in which the representative urged his fellow Murids to spare no effort when it comes to obeying the *ndigal*, 'a central element in our faith that provides us with divine

³⁶ The changing position and roles of Murid women in the Dakar setting and their participation in ritual work are interesting and deserve more in-depth research.

³⁷ The *dabira* or *daaira*, an urban institution that attends to religious and socio-economic concerns, became the locus for the propagation of Murid education (BABOU: 'Bamba, Amadu'). Today *daaira* membership is the standard mode of participation in all Sufi orders in Senegal and across all sectors of society, being the chief institution of Senegalese Sufism (L.A. VILLALÓN: 'Sufi modernities in contemporary Senegal. Religious dynamics between the local and the global', in M. VAN BRUINESSEN & J. DAY HOWELL (eds.): *Sufism and the 'modern' in Islam* (London 2007) 173-191.

³⁸ Sheikhs like Abdu Karim Mbacké who offer an educational programme for *taalibes* in Dakar: www.makarimalakhlaq.org/spip.php?article 15. Other sheikhs with a large following in the cities are *Sëriñ* Modou Kara and sheikh Béthio Thioune.

blessing and guarantees success'.³⁹ Although the *ndigal* was addressed to all Murids, special reference was made to Murids living in Dakar, acknowledging their particular context. Once again I explore the ritual practice of work on the basis of the five pillars of Islam (see section 3.3) to illustrate the common ritual practices of modern-day Murids in Dakar.⁴⁰

4.2.1. *Jébbalu*

An explicit *ndigal* from a personal sheikh is technically required for the practice of ritual work. But as most *taalibes* in Dakar, being far from the sheikhs in Touba, have not (yet) performed the *jébbalu*, this is rather problematic. *Taalibes* initially identify with Amadu Bamba, the caliph general or sheikh Ibra Fall (or other key figures of the Muridiyya), as in the case of this young man:⁴¹

I have not done the *jébbalu* yet. But it was *Sëriñ* Fallou that has spoken to me in my dreams... and sometimes I see his reflection in a window or mirror. So I know he is with me, he is my sheikh now ... He died a long time ago, even before I was born I will do the *jébbalu* with one of his sons, but I have to visit them in Touba and make my choice there.

In Dakar aspirant Murids don't so much search for a personal sheikh to become a Murid. Often they first search for a *dabira* that suits them. *Dabiras* can be affiliated with a certain sheikh or simply submit to the caliph general and they provide a substitute for the traditional *taalibe*-sheikh relation. Acquiring membership of a *dabira* is not formalized and depends on the *dabira*. But just as the *jébbalu* is preceded by a search for the right personal sheikh, the choice of a *dabira* has become very important. One can choose from a large number of *dabiras*, ranging from all-female groups to ones organized around a specific sheikh (located either in Dakar or Touba) or holy person (like Maam Diarra, Bamba's mother) and *dabiras* that gather colleagues, students or simply people living in the same neighborhood.

The *dabira* becomes a platform for ritual work, as it communicates and promotes *ndigals* from Touba. The choice of a certain *dabira* can also function as a preamble to the actual *jébbalu* with the sheikh the *dabira* is affiliated to, either because the *dabira* will visit the sheikh in Touba or in some instances because it arranges for the sheikh to visit Dakar. In October 2012 caliph Sidy Mukthar stayed in Dakar for some weeks, officially to pray for pilgrims leaving on the

³⁹ www.youtu.be/yG0Nw-FZ8s8; www.youtu.be/LYhYXdPq1Ts (22 March 2013).

⁴⁰ Fieldwork: interviews, conversations, observations and participating in weekly *dabira* meetings in Dakar and various *maggals*.

⁴¹ Interview Fatoumata, 17 May 2007.

hajj. Many Dakar *taalibes* took this rare opportunity to visit him. During his stay *xassaides* were constantly chanted around the house.⁴²

4.2.2. *Zikr*

Anyone who walks the streets on the outskirts of Dakar on a Thursday evening will hear religious chants coming from numerous houses and rooftops. After sunset small groups of young *Baay Fall* take over small streets performing their intense and distinct *zikr* that can go on all night long. Thursday evening is also when most *dahiras* meet and an important part of these gatherings is reserved for studying the *xassaides*. The accent is not so much on the content of Bamba's poems – written in Arabic – but on how to recite and chant them. And it truly takes a team effort to render these chants. Some *dahiras* have become renowned for their harmonious chanting. These chants have become a widespread Murid practice that occupies a central place in *dahira* meetings and in any religious ceremony. Until recently only men practiced this type of chanting, but in Dakar more and more women are getting involved in this practice, although they generally perform the chants in an all-female setting. The less stylized *zikeroulab* – consisting mainly of frequently repeated litanies – is performed by men and women together. A young woman describes a regular weekly *dahira* meeting:⁴³

Every Thursday evening our *dahira* gathers; all the people involved are colleagues from work. A regular meeting starts with studying some *xassaides* with our *dianriñe*; it is hard work and we learn how to pronounce and chant them. The sounds are really beautiful and they have a big impact on me, it feels like I can really understand and feel Bamba's message ... But it is not easy to perform these chants together, it is hard work. At the end of the evening we do a *zikeroulab* together, we sing and dance. Anyone can take the lead in this, it simply has to come from the heart ... you direct your heart and body to God, and we do this together ... It is good to do this with your friends.

A wide range of chants and *zikeroulab* is recorded and distributed on cd, dvd and the internet and they are often used by Murids as a tool for individual contemplation when one is not able to practice it in a group.

4.2.3. *Addiya*

Although donating financially to their personal sheikh or the caliph general is a common practice among all Murids, Dakar *taalibes* with regular jobs are best able to do so. For many donating money (or goods) earned through honest labor equals the practice of ritual work. *Addiya* is generally not a specific sum of money but depends on the financial situation of the *taalibe* – although pressure

⁴² During the same stay he visited the construction site of a new Murid mosque in Dakar (financed with money raised through a *ndigal* issued earlier that year), www.htcom.sn/article2906.html.

⁴³ Personal interview Boubacar, 4 July 2007.

to donate generously can be considerable. The membership fee each *taalibe* contributes to the *dahira* is also considered *àddiya*.⁴⁴

Through our *dahira* we also collect *àddiya*; it is a fixed amount every week. Sometimes a *ndigal* comes from Touba to collect money for the mosque or for preparations for the *màggal* – it is our duty to obey. Most of these *àddiya* we use to fulfil our obligations like going to the grand *Màggal* and to the *màggal* in Porokhane [in honor of Maam Diarra, Bamba’s mother, who is buried there], as our *dahira* is responsible for organizing this. But part of these *àddiya* is also used to help people in the *dahira* that need our support, like when they or their relatives need to see a doctor or get medicine, for example.

But as unemployment is rife in Dakar, financial contributions are not feasible for all, as was evident in a recent *ndigal* (22 March 2013) of the caliph general *Sērīñ* Sidy Mukhtar. He recommended that all Senegalese Murids return to the deserted villages in order to rework the land. This *ndigal* was explained on two levels: those who can afford it should invest in the primary needs of these villages such as water, the construction of a mosque and electricity to help people settle there. Those who are unemployed in the city and therefore lack financial means should fulfill the *ndigal* by cultivating the fields.⁴⁵

This was not the first *ndigal* that called for a return to the fields. In recent decades young Dakar Murids have joined others to work in their sheikh’s fields around Touba in preparation for the rainy season and at harvest time. For those who are born and raised in Dakar this is a novel experience, as most of them have never worked in a field in their lives. Camping in tents near the fields, sleeping, eating and working together with fellow Murids contribute to a memorable experience.

4.2.4. *Màggal*

The most important Murid occasions are the annual pilgrimages called *Màggal* to commemorate certain historical events linked with the Muridiyya or its major figures. Most *Màggal* take place outside Dakar, so urban *taalibes* have to make quite an effort – financially and time-wise – to participate. Transport, meals and accommodation are mostly organized by their *dahira*.⁴⁶

We take part in the grand *Màggal* every year. We go to Touba for almost a week to help with the preparations ... you know over a million people are coming. Being a Murid means being well organized, that is what the *màggal* also shows. Of course

⁴⁴ Personal interview Bamba, 26 May 2007.

⁴⁵ www.al-himma.com/component/content/article/128-sectionactualitespassees/907-recommandation-du-khalife-general-des-mourides-pour-un-retour-aux-villages-dorigines-deserts-et-un-demarrage-imminent-des-travaux-champetres-a-partir-du-mercredi-27-mars-2013 and <http://toubainfos.com/ndigel-du-calife-des-mourides-pour-la-revivification-du-terroir/>

⁴⁶ Personal interview Aida, 9 June 2007.

we visit the mosque to pray at Bamba's grave and we go to the house of the caliph to receive his blessing ... but it is also important that we keep busy preparing meals, distributing water, keeping the city clean there is a lot of work during the *Màggal*.

The Grand *Màggal* of Touba is by far the most important pilgrimage and an estimated one to two million pilgrims come to Touba in the course of a few days.⁴⁷ Not only is Touba crowded with pilgrims, Dakar seems 'empty' during those days, adding to awareness of the Murid's increasingly dominant position (real or perceived) in Dakar.

The *dabiras* often spend the whole year preparing for the *màggal* by weekly saving money. Some *dabiras* have a *ndigal* to perform certain tasks during the *màggal*, like providing pilgrims with water as they queue to visit Bamba's grave or cleaning the premises; others are 'stewards' responsible for the orderly course of events. It is conducive to ritual work in the special context of the holy city where the *taalibes* from Dakar experience their liminal state intensely. This enhances the experience of the practice of work.

These rare trips to Touba also make it possible to seek out a personal sheikh and actually do the *jébbalu*.⁴⁸

I did the *jébbalu* when I visited Touba during the *Màggal*, my sheikh asked me to stay with him for some time. This was an important period in my life, as I was not much used to the life in Touba, everything is different there ... no distractions of city life and it is also tough because of the extreme heat and the dust, it is very different from Dakar. Days in Touba are full and they are empty at the same time and when you least expect it, the sheikh suddenly gives you a *ndigal*. I did many things: I studied certain *xassaides*, did some construction work, prepared meals and spent my time waiting and thinking ... What I bring from Touba is hope ... it gives me courage to pursue my goals in life. Maybe I see my sheikh once a year, but he is in my head and in my heart.

4.2.5. Ramadan

Ramadan in Dakar, like elsewhere in the Islamic world, is a time of awareness and contemplation. Through heightened consciousness of their own bodily needs Muslims become more aware of the presence of God and their gratitude to for his providence in their lives. Ramadan is a month of liminality in many respects.

The daily fast is broken with the so called *iftar* meal in a family setting. Murids in Dakar *dabiras* increasingly organize public *iftar* meals called *ndogu*. *Dabiras* prepare meals that are carried in a parade to a central square, where they are distributed free of charge. It has been a tradition in Touba for some time to

⁴⁷ There are no official statistics; numbers of one to two million are estimates made in the media.

⁴⁸ Personal interview Ahmadou, 24 April 2007.

feed all Ramadan visitors. *Baay Fall taalibes* in particular are renowned for this. Dakar *taalibes* spend time in the holy city:⁴⁹

I spend at least one week of Ramadan with my sheikh in Touba. It is a wonderful opportunity to spend time with him and with my fellow *taalibes*. And as *Baay Fall* we are responsible for cooking and distributing meals for the needy during Ramadan. We *Baay Fall* don't fast during this period, we make it possible for others to fast in peace. They don't have to worry about food afterwards, as that is what we are doing. We prepare the meals and bring them in a big procession to the mosque where the food is distributed.

This overview shows the various forms ritual work takes in the city of Dakar. We see how the ritual practice is negotiated in this context and how it takes shape in a rich, on-going process.

5. Conclusion: negotiating ritual work in an urban context

This paper explores the Murid practice of work in the dynamic context of Senegal's major city, Dakar. Whereas the relation between Muridiyya and work is predominantly studied from a socio-economic perspective, a specifically ritual approach broadens these rather limited perspectives. We showed how this work is embedded in the religious tradition (2) and ritual practice (3) of the Muridiyya, and how it is negotiated in the changing context of urban life (4). Our particular ritual approach afforded insight into the dynamics of changing contexts. With changing circumstances rites need to be adapted to fit the new situation. Grimes's analytic differentiation allowed us to map the actual Murid practice of ritual work. To paint the full picture it is necessary to look beyond traditional and prescribed rites and be alert to emerging ritual. The common ritual practice includes as yet peripheral ritualizing and ritualization that have a strong potential for becoming rites. It is not so much the typical threefold structure (3) of the ritual practice of work that changes as the interaction between ritual actors and the interpretation of each phase that is being adapted and fine-tuned.

With the greater distance between the *taalibe* and his sheikh ritual work has to be reimagined and reinvented. For *taalibes* in Dakar the *jébbalu* no longer seems to be a strict requirement for the performance of ritual work, as the initiating rite between a *taalibe* and his personal sheikh is either postponed or ignored. The pledge of allegiance now takes different forms and is directed to the group (*dabira* or broader Murid community) and/or (symbolic) Murid figures like Amadu Bamba, Ibra Fall or the caliph general. The second phase of the *ndigal* is therefore also interpreted differently, as the order is no longer primarily issued by a personal sheikh. *Ndigals* from the caliph general become increasingly important and some city *taalibes* (like the *taalibes* of popular city sheikh Béthio

⁴⁹ Personal conversation Abdoulaye, 6 September 2009.

Thioune) even stated that there are only group *ndigals*. So in becoming more and more group-oriented they are no longer tailor-made, individual teaching tools. This changes ritual work on a personal level, but it also has an impact on the Murid's organization as a *tariqa*. The clear anti-structure of the middle phase – when engaged in a *ndigal* – seems to stay intact particularly when *dabira taalibes* work in the sheikh's or caliph's fields; liminality and *communitas* are experienced strongly. The final stage of reintegration is marked by the knowledge gained. The acquired *xam-xam* has to meet the needs of the city *taalibe* and is constantly reinvented and adapted to the specific urban context.

It will be an interesting study in ritual dynamics to keep track of this, as it offers helpful and tangible leads for further research into the doctrine of work. It moreover provides valuable insight into the lived religion of Sufi Islam in general and the Murids in particular.

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