



THAQĀFIYYĀT: Jurnal Bahasa, Peradaban, dan Informasi Islam

ISSN (Print): 1411-5727, ISSN (Online): 2550-0937

<http://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/adab/thaqafiyat/index>

Vol 23, No. 1 (2024)

Research Article

# Conquering Oppression through Cosmopolitanism: Islam, Race, and Racism in Writings of Edward Wilmot Blyden and Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba

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**Submitted: March 11, 2024; Reviewed: June 05, 2024; Accepted: December 11, 2024**

**Abstract:** This essay analyzes the Sufi religious thoughts of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of the Murid Islamic brotherhood of Senegal, as reflections of the cosmopolitan openness to the “other” and the rest of the world that the Pan-African scholar, Edward Wilmot Blyden, celebrates in his book, entitled *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887). Blyden admired, in late nineteenth-century West African Islamic traditions, cosmopolitanism, and rejections of violence that one also finds in Bamba’s book, *Mawahibul Quddus*. Bamba’s text was produced in the late nineteenth century and was translated into English in 2003 as *God’s Sacred Identity*. Using Blyden’s book as an early exploration of the West African cosmopolitan tradition of resistance and celebration of rationality that mesmerized him, this essay explores how similar ideas were noticeable in Bamba’s Sufism. In his theology, Bamba also examines how reason and cosmopolitanism can dismantle racial and other forms of intolerance and domination.

**Keywords:** Islamic Reform; Racial Identity; Anti-Colonialism; Edward Wilmot Blyden; Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba

**Abstrak:** Esai ini menganalisis pemikiran religius Sufi dari Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, pendiri *Murid Islamic brotherhood of Senegal*, sebagai refleksi keterbukaan kosmopolitan terhadap "yang lain" dan dunia, yang dirayakan oleh cendekiawan Pan-Afrika, Edward Wilmot Blyden dalam bukunya yang berjudul *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887). Blyden mengagumi tradisi Islam Afrika Barat pada akhir abad ke-19 yang menunjukkan kosmopolitanisme dan penolakan terhadap kekerasan, yang juga ditemukan dalam buku Bamba, *Mawahibul Quddus*. Teks Bamba ini ditulis pada akhir abad ke-19 dan diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Inggris pada tahun 2003 dengan judul *God's Sacred Identity*. Dengan menggunakan buku Blyden sebagai eksplorasi awal tradisi kosmopolitanisme Afrika Barat yang menawan baginya, esai ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana ide serupa terlihat dalam sufisme Bamba. Dalam teologinya, Bamba juga mengkaji bagaimana akal dan kosmopolitanisme dapat membongkar intoleransi rasial dan bentuk dominasi lainnya.

**Kata Kunci:** Reformasi Islam; Identitas Ras; Anti-Kolonialisme; Edward Wilmot Blyden; Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba

## INTRODUCTION

Although they had no personal contacts, Edward Wilmot Blyden and Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (who is commonly known as Serigne Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké) were cosmopolitan intellectuals who shared similar admirations for an open-minded Islam that stresses the importance of learning and individual freedom as complements of religiosity. They both celebrated Islam and regarded cosmopolitan awareness and philosophical inquiry as necessary expressions of spiritual ascension, dismantling the conception of Jihad as the irrational and unjustified use of violence against others. Another connection between Blyden and Bamba is that they were both Pan-Africanists since they firmly believed that blacks were equal to other races and struggled for the global intellectual recognition of this parity. In addition, the two leaders dispelled the myth of black inferiority through a valuation of the cosmopolitan benefits of an intellectual culture that was built on science and religion rather than dogma. Yet neither one was fixated on race since they did not perceive it as an obstacle to cosmopolitanism, namely, to one's capacity to advance humankind through rationality and spirituality.

Moreover, Blyden and Bamba were similar since their Pan-Africanisms aimed to enable blacks to be grounded on their local traditions without being closed off from world knowledge and cultures. Even if he was a predecessor of Bamba, Blyden was akin to the Senegalese cleric since he combined cosmopolitan openness to the world with a firm embrace of African heritage and blackness. James Conyers defines Blyden's Pan-Africanism as a "philosophy [which] was predicated on the idea that there was a

unique and distinct African cultural personality” (144) that the intellectual gathered from his 50 years of experiences in Africa. Furthermore, according to Conyers, “he [Blyden] became convinced that an African nation must rest upon principles that reflected its own unique history, culture, and worldview” (143).<sup>1</sup> Blyden was comparable to Bamba whose Pan-Africanism also emphasized the African’s rootedness into his or her traditions. However, Blyden and Bamba were not advocates of reckless essentialism or violence since they both theorized Jihad and blackness in cosmopolitan terms as fluid entities that are open to change for the sake of universal peace and progress. Bamba’s vision of an Islam that is grounded in appreciation of one’s blackness and heritage, non-violence, world knowledge, and philosophical rationality was a perfect example of the kind of late nineteenth-century West African Muslim cosmopolitanism that fascinated Blyden. This Islam was cosmopolitan since, as Edward E. Curtis suggests, Blyden regarded it as a religion that reflected “a high degree of literacy among West African societies” that were skilled “in the use of Arabic, reading, writing and speaking with great fluency” (28-29).<sup>2</sup> According to Curtis, Blyden was mesmerized by these African communities to whom Islam had come with “temperance” and “by the pen, not the sword” (29).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Blyden perceived West African Islam as a counterpoint to the Christianity that Europeans used during slavery and colonization to exploit Africans by giving them a “Gospel” while dispossessing them of their riches, honor, dignity, and personality. Bamba was an early-twentieth-century example of the non-violent and cosmopolitan West African Islam that countered European imperialism since it was also based on reasoning, peace, and negotiation.

Using Blyden’s classic book, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887) and Bamba’s *God’s Sacred Identity* as examples, this essay situates Bamba’s Jihad in the cosmopolitan Islamic cultures of Senegal which, during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, was the antithesis of imperial aggression. Drawing from Blyden’s insights on the history of religious communities in colonial West Africa, this study aims to understand the cosmopolitan dimensions of Bamba’s thoughts which were also part of these traditions. Bamba’s cosmopolitanism is noticeable in *God’s Sacred Identity*, a book Moustapha Mbacké translated into English in 2003 from its Arabic version, *Mawahibul Quddusi*.<sup>4</sup> In this work, Bamba interprets major philosophical concepts that stress the centrality of reason and cosmopolitan complementarity as means to defeat intolerance and violence.

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<sup>1</sup> James Conyers, “Edward Wilmot Blyden and the African Personality: A Discourse on African Cultural Identity,” in *Racial Structure & Radical Politics in the African Diaspora* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2009), 143–44.

<sup>2</sup> Edward E. Curtis IV, *Islam in Black America* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002), 28–29.

<sup>3</sup> Edward E. Curtis IV, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), *God’s Sacred Identity /Mawahibul Quddusi*, trans. Moustapha Mbacké (New York: Khadimu Rassul Productions, 2003).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Defining Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism inspires individuals, societies, and cultures to perceive themselves as living and interacting with other people, communities, and traditions that also deserve attention, respect, and worth. Kwame Anthony Appiah captures the essence of cosmopolitanism when he writes: “The behind the Golden Rule is that we should take other people’s interests seriously, take them into account. It suggests that we learn about other people’s situations, and then use our imaginations to walk a while in their moccasins. These are aims we cosmopolitans endorse. It’s just that we can’t claim that the way is easy.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, cosmopolitanism emphasizes humility and deference toward other people and customs. In this sense, being a cosmopolitan requires a positive outlook or disposition toward other people. As Mark Bracker rightly points out in a partial summation of Appiah’s thesis, “cosmopolitanism entails helping others who are in need, no matter who or where they are. Although commentators disagree concerning how much one should be expected to sacrifice in order to meet these obligations, there is considerable consensus concerning the existence of an obligation to help others in need, including distant strangers” (*Educating for Cosmopolitanism* 3-4).<sup>6</sup> Thus, cosmopolitanism is a noble goal to reach and practice despite its abstract and subjective aspects.

Furthermore, cosmopolitanism is not devoid of challenges since it has mostly been theorized as a set of Eurocentric worldviews that blacks, who are perceived as devoid of modernity and freedom, must assimilate to advance. In his essay, entitled “The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism” (2000), the eminent scholar Mamadou Diouf provides a very compelling critique of the extant scholarship on cosmopolitanism when he argues that discussions of this concept and other terms, such as “modernity” and “globalization,” especially those emanating from Africa, “tend to privilege unilateral assimilation of the civilizing mission of colonialism and the modernization necessarily defined by the West.”<sup>7</sup> Against this established practice, Diouf asserts: “For some time, the latter has been supplemented by Islamic modernity, which is both modern and cosmopolitan.”<sup>8</sup> The crucial problems Diouf identifies stem from African scholars’ reliance on the dominant Western epistemologies which, thus far, have tended to represent Africa in

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<sup>5</sup> Kwame A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), 63.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Bracker, *Educating for Cosmopolitanism: Lessons from Cognitive Science and Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Mamadou Diouf, “The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism,” *Public Culture* 12 (October 1, 2000): 679–702, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-12-3-679>.

<sup>8</sup> Diouf, 679.

diffusionist frameworks that feed the endless binary between tradition and modernity, forgetting the excellent point that Diouf also makes when he argues that Africans such as the Mourid community have always been able to build on their indigenous realities while being open to the global and cosmopolitan world. Situating this discussion in the context of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the modern world, Diouf writes: “And while Islamic fundamentalist movements have attacked, sometimes in a violent manner, these local and unique forms of Muslim appropriation, postcolonial subjects continue to pursue their ambivalent and ambiguous projects of constructing autonomous or subordinate identities while also struggling to reconcile native temporalities and forms of spirituality with the temporality of the world at large.”<sup>9</sup> Diouf’s statement allows us to recognize the importance of cosmopolitanism in African contexts, thereby extending the remarkable and extant scholarship on this philosophy beyond the Western frameworks in which it has been mostly studied.

Cosmopolitanism is by no means a recent inquiry since it has preoccupied many scholars over the past centuries. One finds traces of cosmopolitanism in the writings of Emmanuel Kant, which expanded the Enlightenment’s reliance on the power of reason as a means of imagining and realizing humankind’s greater potential to be good to one another, to those of black intellectuals such as Blyden and Bamba. Yet the origin of modern scholarship on cosmopolitanism is often credited to Kant’s definition of “a universal *cosmopolitan existence*.” Pheng Cheah describes Kant’s concept of cosmopolitanism as one that refers to “the regulative idea of ‘a perfect civil union of mankind’” and a “constitutional global federation of all existing states ‘based on cosmopolitan right’ (*ius cosmopolitanicum*)” and “articulated around the idea that ‘individuals and states, co-existing in an external relationship of mutual influences, may be regarded as citizens of a universal state of mankind.’”<sup>10</sup> Kantian cosmopolitanism is at the core of most Western interpretations of an idea that sometimes calls for the erasure of territorial, national, and cultural borders in search of a global, earthly, and planetary space in which societies recognize the humanity and other ties they share. Allen W. Wood clarifies the contours of Kantian cosmopolitanism when he writes: “Kant’s philosophical project, however, is truly cosmopolitan in its intent, not limited by any geographic or cultural borders. Its articles are meant not merely as precepts of a *ius gentium*, applying to the relations between sovereign states, but beyond this also as principles of a *ius cosmopolitanicum*, which regards *all* peoples of the earth as a ‘single universal community’ or ‘universal state of humankind’ founded on a ‘universal right of humanity.’”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Diouf, 679.

<sup>10</sup> Cheng Peng, “The Cosmopolitical – Today,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998), 20–41.

<sup>11</sup> Allen W. Wood, “Kant’s Project for Perpetual Peace,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998), 62.

Yet cosmopolitanism is not always linear since it sometimes stresses differences and isolations rather than global commonality. In this sense, cosmopolitanism is not uniform, coherent, and uncontradictory because it is often embedded in a usually unresolved dualism toward other people, cultures, ideas, and entities that are considered as both similar to and different from one's own. In this sense, notions such as cosmopolitan justice, freedom, equality, and development should be conceptualized in terms of both relativity and globality since one is prone to imagine or understand them in individual as well as collective contexts at the same time. The problem is that people's ideas of how these things work to benefit everybody become compromised by personal proclivities that favor members of their race, ethnicity, nation, huts or clans over those of others. Both Blyden and Bamba denounce such kinds of personal impulses by using genuine cosmopolitanism as a means to staunch racism, prejudice, and violence.

### Who Was Edward Blyden?

According to Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, "Blyden was born the third of seven children in the then Danish colony of St Thomas in the Virgin Islands, at a time when slavery had not yet been abolished," even though both of his parents were free.<sup>12</sup> Blyden's family was literate and instilled in him a love of languages and literature that later fascinated an American minister called Rev. John P. Knox who met the teenager and his family in 1845 in St. Thomas. In May 1950, Blyden traveled with Mrs. Knox to the United States for the first time to attend her husband's *alma mater*, Rutgers' Theological College.<sup>13</sup> Blyden's ambitions and the Knox family's support were soon marred due to racism. As Lynch observes, "he [Blyden] was refused admission because he was a Negro. Efforts to get him enrolled in two other theological Colleges also failed."<sup>14</sup> What's more, Blyden was vulnerable to the Fugitive Slave Law since he could have been kidnapped and sold like other blacks although he was born free and was highly educated. Alternatively, as Richard Brent Turner points out, a group of Presbyterian supporters of the American Colonization Society "convinced" Blyden "that he could not stay in the United States" after he was denied admission into Rutgers' Theological College "because of his race."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, John Pinney, Walter Lowrie, and William Coppinger offered Blyden the opportunity to do missionary work

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<sup>12</sup> Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787* (London: Routledge, 2003), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden : Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1967), 4; Edward E. Curtis IV, "'Introduction' to 'Edward Wilmot Blyden, 'Islam in the Western Soudan' (1902)," in *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States* (New York: Columbia UP, 2008), 18–19.

<sup>14</sup> Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden : Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), 48.

in Africa.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to the sponsorship of the American Presbyterian leaders, Blyden arrived in Monrovia, Liberia, in January 1951, with the mission “to bring Christianity and civilization to the ‘barbarous tribes’ of Africa.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Blyden’s tasks were problematic since his superiors intended them to serve Western colonialism under the pretense of bringing God and culture to Africans. Being a shrewd intellectual, Blyden used the travel opportunity that the American Colonization Society gave him to counter the organization’s primitivizing and condescending mission of “civilizing” and “Christianizing Africans.” Traveling to Africa allowed Blyden to establish the intellectual tradition of Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism that Martin Delany, Henry McNeal Turner, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey inherited and continued by perceiving Africa, albeit in romantic terms mostly, as the promised land of salvation of the Black race. Blyden is uniquely relevant in this tradition because he was so enamored with the West African Islamic traditions that he witnessed during the years in spent in Africa that he wrote about them in numerous texts, including *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887), as a means to enlighten Americans and Europeans about advanced West African cosmopolitan cultures that countered Western misconceptions and condescension toward blacks.

By the 1870s, Blyden was so accustomed to West African customs that he traveled to Sierra Leone where he taught Arabic to missionaries and established excellent relationships with Fulah Muslim leaders. In a letter to the Rev. Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society, written on September 6, 1871, Blyden expresses his admiration for Fulah Muslim leaders who welcomed him to Freetown and called him “Mukhtar—the chosen one” (89).<sup>18</sup> Another Islamic name Blyden acquired from the interior of West Africa was Abdul-Karim, which, although it was common for Mohammedans to bestow upon their favorite Western guests, indicates the strong affinities Blyden had with these Muslims. Also, as Adib Rashad points out, Blyden “was one of the first Pan-African nationalists who embraced the tenets of Islam. Although he did not, according to most historical evidence, become a practicing Muslim, Blyden never relented from his vociferous promotion of Islam as a religion that could liberate people of African descent from oppression. In this respect, it might be safe to say that he was one of the first advocates of Black Muslim nationalism” (149-150).<sup>19</sup>

### **Blyden’s Cosmopolitanism as a Tool against Racism**

Blyden’s nationalist philosophy stemmed from his conception of cosmopolitanism as a way out of racism. First, he regarded blacks of the diaspora as

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Brent Turner, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Brent Turner, 48.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden*, ed. Hollis R. Lynch (New York: Kto Press, 1978), 89.

<sup>19</sup> Adib Rashad, *Islam, Black Nationalism & Slavery: A Detailed Histor* (Beltsville: Writers’ Inc., 1995), 149–50.

people who should not allow racial prejudices to prevent them from achieving their cosmopolitan potential. In the preface of *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, Blyden urges blacks, including “Negro youth in Christian lands” and “the Christian Negro,” to avoid “the tendencies created by previous training to growth on racial lines.”<sup>20</sup> Blyden wanted blacks, who were trained by missionaries to see Africans in the diaspora and the continent as inferior, to change their thinking. For Blyden, blackness did not equate to low status and should not prevent blacks from seeing themselves as people who could change the world. Invoking cosmopolitanism as the goal of human development, Blyden writes: “[A]s Mr. Herbert Spencer once said to me, there is no such thing as caste; and, secondly, that if any man, whatever his race, has anything to say worth listening to, men of all races who think will give him more than a respectful hearing.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Blyden regarded cosmopolitanism, or one’s ability to advance human interests, as a philosophy that trumps racial identity. In this vein, he urged diasporan blacks to believe in their cosmopolitanism and unleash it to overcome the prejudices Europeans built about Africa where “altered circumstances” exist (ii-iii). Blyden states:

The Christian Negro has, hitherto, as I have tried to show throughout this volume, rarely been trained to trust his own judgment, or to think that he can have anything to say which foreigners will care to hear. His subordinate position everywhere in Christian countries has made him believe that what his foreign teachers think is the only proper thing to think and that what they say is the only right thing to say. He is therefore, untrue to the natural direction of his powers, and attempts to soar into an atmosphere not native to his wing.<sup>22</sup>

Blyden dismantles racism by providing many examples of cosmopolitan West African Islamic communities that demonstrate the equality between blacks and whites. For instance, in the chapter entitled “Mohammedanism in Western Africa,” he writes: “The quite development and organisation of a religious community in the heart of Africa has shown that Negroes, equally with other races, are susceptible of moral and spiritual impressions, and of all the sublime possibilities of religion.”<sup>23</sup> Through these lines, Blyden contributed to the struggle against the racism that was virulent in the United States from colonial times to the Jim Crow Era. During that period, African peoples and cultures were often represented in historical and anthropological studies as the products of a primitive, static, and finished world. Writing in 1837, the German thinker Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argued in *The Philosophy of History* (1837) that Africans

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iii. <sup>20</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1887),

<sup>21</sup> Edward W. Blyden, i.

<sup>22</sup> Edward W. Blyden, ii.

<sup>23</sup> Edward W. Blyden, 200.



did not contribute to the history of the world. Hegel wrote: “What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Underdeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which has to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History.”<sup>24</sup> Fifty years after Hegel disparaged Africans, Thomas Jefferson declared in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785): “To our reproach it must be said, that though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.”<sup>25</sup> Jefferson’s racism prompted him to deny that Phillis Wheatley, an African American writer of Senegambian origin, wrote the book of verses called *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). Jefferson said: “Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Wheatley; but it could not produce a poet” and dismissed her work by saying “The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism.”<sup>26</sup> Jefferson’s scientific racism stemmed from a Western mindset that perceived blacks as musical, religious, and emotional people who were nevertheless devoid of reason and rationality. He said: “Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they (blacks) are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior.”<sup>27</sup> One can therefore note that Jefferson was not certain about the scientific veracity of his claim since he somewhat recognized that blacks had “reason” even if he minimized this potential. Ironically, it was in the religion, memory, and emotion that Jefferson credited them that blacks have demonstrated their ability to exhibit the reason he denied them. For instance, religion allowed Wheatley to represent enslaved Africans in America as people who would achieve equality in heaven since they adopted Christ as their savior, thereby earning the right to salvation. She writes: “

Remember, *Christians, Negroes*, black as *Cain*,  
May be refin’d, and join th’ angelic train.<sup>28</sup>

Blyden interprets this passage as part of the “able defences of the race written” in America during colonial times, albeit “in the patronising or apologetic tone” that pleased White Christian abolitionists who assumed “that Negroes have souls to save just as white men have, and that the strength of Nature’s claim is not impaired by their

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<sup>24</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York and Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991), 99.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1995), 143.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Jefferson, 140.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Jefferson, 139.

<sup>28</sup> John C. Shields, *The Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 184.

complexion and hair.”<sup>29</sup> Even if, as Tunde Adeleke argues, in his book, *UnAfrican American* (1998), Blyden subscribed to the Eurocentric ambivalence of most early Pan-Africanists toward Africa,<sup>30</sup> he was deeply disturbed by Western biological and scientific racism. In this sense, Blyden was like Wheatley since he also used Christianity to dismantle racism and express deep respect for the victimized blacks. Moreover, instead of representing only enslaved or Christianized Western blacks, Blyden also portrayed the free ones he met in Africa as models of cosmopolitanism. In this vein, as Adib Rashad argues in *Islam, Black Nationalism and Slavery: A Detailed History* (1995), “He [Blyden] seemed convinced that it was the African convert to ‘Mohammedanism’ and the Negro colonist from Christian countries who most advanced civilization in equatorial Africa. He believed that Mohammedanism -- with its structured worship, literature, and political, social and economic institutions -- would rapidly supersede a detrimental and debilitating paganism.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite the primitivizing that transpires in his view of Equatorial Africans as worshippers of “paganism,” Blyden regarded the Mohammedans and Christians among them as cosmopolitan since he validated their capacity to influence “civilization” through their intellectualism and institutions. Therefore, one must note that although Blyden was, as Kwame Bediako argues, “rather dismissive of Africa’s indigenous pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religion – describing it forthrightly as ‘Paganism’” (14), he was fascinated with certain traditional customs that made the continent’s populations appear in his eyes as more cosmopolitan than Europeans.<sup>32</sup> In a summation of Blyden’s thesis, Curtin IV states: “Unlike white missionary Christianity, he [Blyden] argued, Islam promoted human equality and encouraged the development of indigenous culture. It helped build black nations, educate black minds, mold the black character, foster industry and philanthropy, and protect black persons from genocide.”<sup>33</sup> In a similar vein, as Bediako points out, Blyden said that the African “has developed and organized a system useful to him for all the needs of life’, a system as his ‘environments have suggested – to be improved not changed by larger knowledge’” (10).<sup>34</sup> This “larger knowledge” alludes to the cosmopolitanism in which Blyden viewed Africans as participants. They contributed to it through customs that brought people together rather than separated them. Such traditions include “African institutions of

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<sup>29</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1998), 27.

<sup>31</sup> Adib Rashad, *Black Nationalism and Slavery: A Detailed History* (Beltsville, MD: Writers Inc. International, 1995), 150.

<sup>32</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Edward E. Curtin IV, “‘Introduction’ to ‘Edward Wilmot Blyden, ‘Islam in the Western Soudan’ (1902),” 18–19.

<sup>34</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 10.

education for initiation into adulthood and African economic institutions of communalism and clan unity which acted to minimise accumulation of wealth by a few and to mitigate destitution and crime,” and other practices which, convinced Blyden that “Africa was in advance of Europe with its pronounced individualism and egotism.”<sup>35</sup> These customs that Blyden noticed in the African Christian and Islamic societies he visited in the late nineteenth century led him to perceive Africans as pioneers of a global cosmopolitan society in which all people are treated equally with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Blyden perceived West African Muslims as major contributors of this cosmopolitanism. Writing against the prejudices of many West Christians towards Africans, Blyden laments how many Americans, white and black, “do not believe that these tribes are hopelessly inaccessible to the influence of the Gospel.”<sup>36</sup> Denouncing European prejudices toward West Africa’s Mohammedans, Blyden states: “[W]e ought not to grudge the Africans the glimpses of truth which they catch from the Koran; for ‘a knowledge of a part is better than ignorance of the whole.’”<sup>37</sup> These assertions reveal Blyden’s perception of West African Muslims as cosmopolitan societies with literacy that Western Christians should imitate. His recognition of this Islamic culture as cosmopolitan prompted him to write: “Mohammedanism in Africa, instead of being treated in the offhand and contemptuous manner adopted by some, who seem to have gathered all their knowledge of the religion from the *Arabian Nights*, ought to be approached with earnestness and respect; for there is much in it which Christians may profitably study, and from which they might glean important lessons.”<sup>38</sup> Blyden’s appreciation of Africans’ cosmopolitanism led him to celebrate them as models of black nationalism in the United States. According to Clifton E. Marsh, “Blyden’s perceptions of Islam in Africa led him to believe that ‘Islam strengthened and hastened certain tendencies to independence and self-reliance already at work, and amalgamated its own forms with African ones.’”<sup>39</sup> Blyden’s perception of African Islam as worthy of reverence stemmed from his view of this religion as a cosmopolitan and tolerant faith that brings opposites together rather than sever them. He regarded cosmopolitanism as the expression of complementarity between peoples and cultures, such as those of Africans, Arabs, and Europeans. Discussing the relations between Africans and Arabs, Blyden notes the former’s ability to adapt the latter’s religion and culture to their customs without giving away their autonomy. He states:

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<sup>35</sup> Kwame Bediako, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Edward W. Blyden, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Edward W. Blyden, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Clifton E. Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 86.

While it brought them a great deal that was absolutely new, and inspired them with spiritual feelings to which they had been utter strangers, it [Mohammedanism] strengthened and hastened certain tendencies to independence and self-reliance which were already at work. Their local institutions were not destroyed by the Arab influence introduced. They only assumed new forms, and adapted themselves to the new teachings. In all thriving Mohammedan communities, in West and Central Africa, it may be noticed that the Arab superstructure has been superimposed on a permanent indigenous subculture; so that what really took place, when the Arab met the Negro in his own home, was a healthy amalgamation, and not an absorption or an undue repression.<sup>40</sup>

Conversely, Blyden perceived the Europeans' relations with Africans as noncosmopolitan since it was founded on primitivizing and condescension toward people who had been enslaved, colonized, and perceived as inferior. Opposing this racist and imperialist history, Blyden urged Europeans to appreciate a cosmopolitan view of Africans as central contributors to world development. Blyden declares: "There is a solidarity of humanity which requires the complete development of each part in order to the effective working of the whole. To make the African a parasite upon the European would be no gain to mankind."<sup>41</sup> Thus, Blyden regarded Africans as contributors, rather than dependents of cosmopolitanism. He viewed West African Mohammedans as cosmopolitan communities led by reason and dialogue rather than ignorance and coercion. Speaking about West Africa, he writes:

The history of the progress of Islam in this country would present the same instances of real and eager mental conflict, of minds in honest transition, of careful comparison and reflection, that have been found in other communities where new aspects of truth and fresh considerations have been brought before them. And we hold that it shows a stronger and more healthy, intellectual tendency, to be induced by the persuasion and reason of a man of moral nobleness and deep personal convictions to join with him in the introduction of beneficial changes, than to be compelled to follow the lead of an irresponsible character, who forces us into measures by his superior physical might.<sup>42</sup>

In this passage, Blyden attacks Western racism which functioned as a monarchical and dictatorial system that prevented blacks of the diaspora from engaging

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<sup>40</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 13–14.

<sup>41</sup> Edward W. Blyden, 77.

<sup>42</sup> Edward W. Blyden, 200.

in the cosmopolitan intellectual activities in which West African Muslims were involved during the late nineteenth century. Blyden viewed these Africans as people who contributed to cosmopolitanism by moving, traveling, learning, and engaging in discourses with one another. He regarded them as developers of the cosmopolitanism that was crucial in the washing of the historical affronts that the West perpetrated against blacks since slavery. Acknowledging the crucial role of Africans in the global emancipation of blacks, Blyden writes: “[I]n spite of all, the Negro race has yet its part to play—a distinct part—in the history of humanity, and the continent of Africa will be the principal scene of its activity. The mistake which Europeans often make in considering questions of Negro improvement and the future of Africa, is in supposing that the Negro is the European in embryo—in the undeveloped stage—and that when, bye-and-by [sic], he shall enjoy the advantages of civilization and culture, he will become like the European.”<sup>43</sup> Blyden’s view of Africa as “the principal scene of” the “activity” of the “Negro race” anchors his Pan-Africanism in the cosmopolitanism of Africans. As Gibril R. Cole argues, though Blyden’s *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* “is regarded as one of the key texts of nascent Pan-African thought in the late nineteenth century, it is also Blyden’s attempt to highlight the dynamic cosmopolitanism of the people among whom he resided in the last decades of his life.”<sup>44</sup> Identifying who these people were, Cole states: “It is not surprising that the cross-cultural and religious encounters among Islam, Christianity, and Yoruba and indigenous African religions in Sierra Leone and across West Africa inspired the triple-heritage intellectual framework that permeated Blyden’s magnum opus, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Blyden’s nationalism was cemented from African cosmopolitanism since the continent gave him models of religious cohabitation, tolerance, and hybridism that proved that blacks were as advanced as other populations.

### **West African Cosmopolitanism in *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race***

Blyden’s account of Africa’s early contributions to cosmopolitanism is also noticeable in the detailed analysis of black Muslims’ life in late nineteenth-century West Africa that he makes in *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*. In this book, Blyden refers to El-Hadj Omar Tall, who was one of the most distinctive Senegalese Muslim leaders of the late nineteenth century. With great reverence and admiration for this leader, Blyden writes:

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<sup>43</sup> Edward W. Blyden, 316.

<sup>44</sup> Gibril R. Cole, *The Krio of West Africa : Islam, Culture, Creolization, and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013), 211.

<sup>45</sup> Gibril R. Cole, 211.

One of the most remarkable characters who have influenced the history of the region of country between Timbuktu and the West Coast was a native of Futa Toro, known as the Sheikh Omaru Al-Hajj. He is said to have been a Waleeu, a man of extraordinary endowments, of commanding presence, and great personal influence. He was educated by the Sheikh Tijani, a Muslim missionary from Arabia. Having spent several years under the instruction of this distinguished teacher, visiting Mecca in the meanwhile, he became profoundly learned in the Arabic language.<sup>46</sup>

This passage registers Blyden's fascination with West African Muslims whom he met during the second half of the nineteenth century. As is apparent in his description of Sheikh Omaru Al-Hajj as "a Waleeu, a man of extraordinary endowments, of commanding presence, and great personal influence," Blyden was strongly enthralled by the knowledge, deportment, and influence of the West African cleric. This appeal could have stemmed from his conviction that the cleric was a proof of the African's intellectual and spiritual equality to Europeans. This parity was crucial for diasporan blacks who had been fighting for recognition of their humanity for centuries. In this sense, Turner interprets Blyden's "numerous visits to Muslim areas in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1860s and 1870s" as journeys during which "Blyden became deeply impressed by the level of learning among African Muslims and by Islam's ability to unify African peoples."<sup>47</sup> Turner continues: "Blyden interacted with Muslim scholars who could not only 'reproduce from memory any chapter of the Koran, with its vowels, and dots and grammatical marks,' but also discuss the Muslim classics in Arabic. He admired the social and political organization of these communities, which he attributed to the influence of Islam and indigenous structures that had occurred in West and Central Africa over the centuries."<sup>48</sup> Blyden's fascination with African Muslims stemmed from his perception of these individuals as major architects of black cosmopolitanism, that is, the development of conscious, literate, and highly knowledgeable communities that could bring social, political, cultural, and economic development for blacks worldwide. Blyden's "black cosmopolitanism" is apparent in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* where he states: "When the African shall come forward with his peculiar gifts, he will fill a place never before occupied. But he must have a fair opportunity for his development. Misunderstood and often misrepresented even by his best friends, and persecuted and maligned by his enemies, he is, nevertheless, coming forward, gradually rising under the influences of agencies seen

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<sup>46</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), 51.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Brent Turner, 51.

and unseen.”<sup>49</sup> Although his allusion to his irreverent “friends” sounds personal and could refer to the Western Christians whose support he hoped to have unconditionally for his philanthropic work in Africa, Blyden’s statement stresses his cosmopolitan and nationalist philosophy which regards blacks as people who will continually and greatly contribute to world civilization if they are given the opportunity to do so.

Yet Blyden’s attitude toward African Muslims reflects more than respect, fascination, and nationalism since, as is noticeable in his view of El-Hadj Omar Tall, it registers his acknowledgment of the in-born cosmopolitanism of a pioneer Senegalese Muslim intellectual and leader whose status as “Waleeu” and scholar of the Arabic language was part of a broad tradition. Such a culture is the neglected Senegalese and West African Muslim civilization that Blyden perceives as cosmopolitan. Highlighting this dimension, Blyden argues that West African Muslims prioritize religious fervor and the belief in the pre-eminence of their religion’s message above any other interests and concerns.<sup>50</sup> Blyden witnessed this West African Islamic spiritual fundamentalism in the 1870s and 1910s when, according to many scholars, he traveled to many territories such as the Soudan, Timbuktu, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, and Nigeria, and other geographic locations.<sup>51</sup> Blyden’s visit to Senegal, in 1902, has been recorded in the book, *Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912*, in which Hollis R. Lynch describes the traveler’s fascination with the Islamic culture he found in the country. Lynch writes:

In March 1902, Blyden visited Senegal and his good impression of French rule in West Africa was again confirmed. He wrote to his friend, E. D. Morel, the British journalist and reformer, praising the continuity of French administrative policy and their fostering of native agriculture. Blyden was impressed, too, with the French scheme of training and using Muslim Negroes as officials. He reported that his guide during his stay in Senegal was Al Hajj Ahmed Sek, a Jolof, ‘thoroughly educated in French and Arabic, and who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca’. Sek took him to a Muslim court presided over by Alkadi

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<sup>49</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 318.

<sup>50</sup> Edward W. Blyden, 11.

<sup>51</sup> For a record of Blyden’s travels, see Abdul Karim Bangura, “Futa Jalon to 1800,” in *Nyclopedia of African History: Volumes 1-3* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 537–38; For Blyden’s visit to Senegal, see Hollis R. Lynch’s following description of a form of linguistic cosmopolitanism (proving the point that Diouf made earlier about the influence of the “civilizing mission” in assessments of African cosmopolitanisms): In March 1902, Blyden visited Senegal and his good impression of French rule in West Africa was again confirmed. He wrote to his friend, E. D. Morel, the British journalist and reformer, praising the continuity of French administrative policy and their fostering of native agriculture. Blyden was impressed, too, with the French scheme of training and using Muslim Negroes as officials. He reported that his guide during his stay in Senegal was Al Hajj Ahmed Sek, a Jolof, ‘thoroughly educated in French and Arabic, and who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca’. Sek took him to a Muslim court presided over by Alkadi (Judge) Bakai Ba, by Blyden’s account, a dignified, physically impressive and learned African, whose decisions in all civil and religious cases affecting his co-religionists were final. Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden : Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912*, 201.

(Judge) Bakai Ba, by Blyden's account, a dignified, physically impressive and learned African, whose decisions in all civil and religious cases affecting his co-religionists were final.<sup>52</sup>

This passage reveals Blyden's conception of cosmopolitanism as a quality determined by the Senegalese's ability to absorb the French civilizing mission. By basing his fascination with Senegal on "the continuity of [the] French[']s administrative policy and their fostering of native agriculture" and the Senegalese dignitaries' ability to speak French, Blyden somewhat viewed cosmopolitanism in diffusionist and civilizationist terms as the colonized individual's capability to be acculturated and competent in the imperial power's culture. Yet Blyden's conception of cosmopolitanism is not necessarily colonialist and dismissive since it values the Senegalese Muslim dignitaries' aptitude to combine their knowledge of French administrative culture and language with their own African and Arabic traditions. Similarly, Blyden describes the Islamic culture of the "Mohammedan creoles" of the 1870s Sierra Leone country he visited as people "who have not deviated much from the customs of their ancestors" despite "their having enjoyed facilities for European education superior to their fathers."<sup>53</sup> The passage attests to Blyden's respect for the sophisticated, tolerant, complementary, and open-minded Islam of West African Muslims.

### **Cosmopolitanism in Bamba's Islam**

The cosmopolitan Islam that Blyden praises in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* would have found an example in Bamba's *God's Sacred Identity / Mawahibul Quddusi*, where the image of a progressive and tolerant Islam is fully present.<sup>54</sup> Blyden's cosmopolitanism resonates with Bamba's which also recognizes the importance of complementarity between opposites and a rejection of hatred and violence. Like Blyden, Bamba theorizes cosmopolitanism as knowledge one gains through the deployment of reason, intellectual negotiation, and rationality, not through the use of force or other impositions.

### **Who Was Serigne Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké?**

According to Abdoulaye Dieye, the other name of the major Senegalese Islamic religious leader known as Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, is Cheikh Ahmad ibn Muhammad

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<sup>52</sup> Hollis R. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden : Pan-Negro Patriot, 1832-1912*, 201.

<sup>53</sup> Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, 64.

<sup>54</sup> *God's Sacred Identity* is oftentimes mentioned as "Mawāhib al-quddūs" by John Hunwick in the fourth volume of the very ambitious monograph entitled *Arabic Literature of West Africa: The writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (2003). Yet most of the internet sources mention it as "Mawahibul Xudoss."



ibn Habiballah.<sup>55</sup> Bamba was born in 1854 in the village of Khuru Mbacké.<sup>56</sup> Bamba had an elite background since “He came from a scholarly family at the court of the king, *damel*, of Kayor; his father also had relations with the Gambian resistance leader Ma Ba.”<sup>57</sup> In 1886, Bamba founded Murīdiyya, which is the second-largest Islamic brotherhood in Senegal.<sup>58</sup> One year later, he founded the city of Touba, in West-Central Senegal, where he taught his followers about the precepts of Islam and the virtues of righteousness, peace, and hard work. Bamba’s teachings and life were founded on solid and undivided belief in and devotion to God. He theorized faith as “*Iman*” (Belief) in God but also as “*tawhid*.”<sup>59</sup> Cheikh Anta Babou defines “*tawhîd*” as the “science de l’unicité de Dieu » (the science of the oneness of God) which, along with *tasawwuf* (mysticism), Bamba considered as “l’âme et le corps de la religion” (“the soul and body of the religion [Islam]).<sup>60</sup>

Yet, even if his main preoccupation was scholarship and Islam, Bamba’s status as a teacher who rallied peasants made him an enemy of the French colonials. Even if they were apolitical, Bamba’s teachings were perceived as radical in a colonial context in which the French wanted Senegalese populations to be docile, servile, and subservient to them. In an attempt to impose their civilizing and colonial missions, the French designed a plan to eliminate Bamba. Ousmane Oumar Kane explains: “Taking seriously the warnings about the potentially subversive nature of Ahmadou Bamba’s activities, the French colonial state arrested him on August 10, 1895, at the village of Diewol. On September 5, 1895, a meeting of the Conseil Privé de la Colonie du Sénégal ruled to send Bamba into exile in Gabon on September 21 of that same year.”<sup>61</sup> Bamba’s belief in “*tawhid*” allowed him to overcome the deadly ploys that the French devised against him. First, as Shaykh Moustapha Mbacke notes, when the French designated him for “execution,” after he signed “the Chapter of the Purity of Faith,” saying that “He is Allah, the One and only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute,” “he [Bamba] was put in the lion’s chamber to be slaughtered as the others.”<sup>62</sup> However, Mbacké notes, the French

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<sup>55</sup> Abdoulaye Dièye, *Touba, Signes et Symboles. Maurice* (Mauritius: Editions Deggel, 1997), 15.

<sup>56</sup> Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, *Le Jihad de l’âme: Ahmadou Bamba et La Fondation de La Mouridiyya Au Sénégal, 1853-1913* (Paris: Karthala, 2011), 215.

<sup>57</sup> Knut S. Vikør, *Sufi Brotherhoods in Africa. The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Oxford UP, 2000), 449.

<sup>58</sup> Lucy E. Creevey, “Ahmad Bamba 1850-1927,” in *Studies in West African Islamic History* (International Specialized Book Services, 1979), 278–80.

<sup>59</sup> Shaykh Moustapha Mbacké, “Introduction. » *God’s Sacred Identity. By Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké) With Full Arabic Lyrics* (Charlotte, NC: Conquering Books, LLC, 2003), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Cheikh Anta Mbacké Babou, *Le Jihad de l’âme: Ahmadou Bamba et La Fondation de La Mouridiyya Au Sénégal, 1853-1913*, 135.

<sup>61</sup> Ousmane Oumar Kane, *The Homeland Is the Arena: Religion, Transnationalism, and the Integration of Senegalese Immigrants in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 36.

<sup>62</sup> Shaykh Moustapha Mbacké, “Introduction. » *God’s Sacred Identity. By Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké) With Full Arabic Lyrics*, 5.

later found Bamba “alive with a tamed lion sitting next to him in a docile fashion.”<sup>63</sup> Another demonstration of Bamba’s faith was when he “took his prayer mat and threw it in the midst of the Atlantic Ocean” when “the French attempted to prevent him from praying aboard the boat” that was supposed to take him to Gabon during the exile.<sup>64</sup> These pivotal moments that are remembered during Murid religious chants attest to Bamba’s cosmopolitan faith in the power of righteousness over materialism and tyranny.

### Bamba’s Cosmopolitanism

A major expression of Bamba’s cosmopolitanism appears in his views on race as a construct that does not reduce blacks to inferior beings. Bamba reminds us of Blyden who also prioritizes knowledge as a means to confirm that blacks are equal to everyone else. Bamba’s empowerment of blacks is evident in his following statement that the scholar Zain Abdullah found on a banner during a Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Day in New York City: “OUR BLACKNESS SHOULD NOT BE AN OBSTACLE TO OUR KNOWLEDGE AND OUR PERFECTION. ALL MEN WERE CREATED EQUAL. CHEIKH AHMADU BAMBA.”<sup>65</sup> As Abdullah argues, the saying “is clearly reminiscent of a familiar theme in Black American history. This moving signage creates a ‘visual epistemology,’ in the language of Allen and Mary Roberts, or a social narrative that interjects new ways of seeing Blackness. In this case, the banner is particularly interesting in how it advocates a Murid approach to racial equality. It also makes a striking appeal to racial legitimacy by referring to ‘Our Blackness.’”<sup>66</sup> Bamba’s appreciation of blackness is further evident in numerous passages of his *Khassaid* (Khassida) poetry in which he cautions his disciples against under-appreciating the skin color that God gave them. Bamba’s embrace of his blackness is noticeable in the book, *Massalik Al Jinan [Ways Unto Heaven]*, in which he tells his followers, “everything that is in this book is authentic; so have faith in it and do follow its recommendations.”<sup>67</sup> Bamba continues:

47- And never be dissuaded from holding this book in due regard by my belonging to the black race

.....  
 49- So black skin does not imply insanity or ill understanding...<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Shaykh Moustapha Mbacké, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Shaykh Moustapha Mbacké, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 111.

<sup>66</sup> Zain Abdullah, 111–12.

<sup>67</sup> Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, *Ways Unto Heaven*, trans. Abdoul Aziz Mbacké (Senegal: Majalis Research Project, 2009), Verse 45.

<sup>68</sup> Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, Verses 47 and 49.

Bamba's emphasis on race derives from the tense decades of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries when French colonials' views of Africans as inferior produced among the latter populations the kind of low self-esteem, or "psychoexistential complex" of colonized African and Caribbean blacks that Frantz Fanon analyzes in *Black Skin, White Masks*.<sup>69</sup> Known as the effects of the French civilizing mission, this complex was prevalent among a class of uprooted and acculturated blacks who mirrored Europeans as the paths to salvation. Discussing the prejudice that enabled this inferiority complex, William Fortescue writes: "It was believed in France that French civilization was superior to all other contemporary civilizations, that the values of French civilization were potentially universal and that the French had a special mission to spread their civilization throughout the world. The French 'civilizing mission' (*mission civilisatrice*) was thought to be particularly applicable to Africa, since the French, like other Europeans, tended to estimate the cultural sophistication of traditional African societies."<sup>70</sup>

The French civilizing mission had its equivalent among Arabs who also had racial and cultural prejudices towards Africans. In their introduction to their book, *Facts, Fiction, and African Creative Imaginations* (2010), Toyin Falola and Fallou Ngom identify stereotypes in "the views of Raymond Mauny and Maurice Delafosse (who linked the creation of major sub-Saharan African empires to external factors) and the fact that some African Muslim leaders sought prestige through what Cheikh Anta Diop referred to as 'sherifism,' the tendency to connect themselves and their families, through fictitious genealogical trees, to Prophet Muhammad or Arab origin."<sup>71</sup> Falola and Ngom continue: "Generally, black Africans are counted as members of the larger Muslim community, the Umma Islamiya, when their numbers and support are needed to boost the importance of the worldwide Muslim community, often in the context of conflict with the West. Otherwise, black Africans (whether Muslims or not) are tacitly perceived throughout the Arab world and the Maghreb, whether acknowledged or not, primarily as 'natural' slaves."<sup>72</sup>

Bamba dismantles both the Western and Arab racial discrimination by urging his followers not to equate blackness with inferiority, whether intellectually, culturally, or otherwise. He also summons the devotees not to dismiss his work because of his "belonging to the black race," since "black skin does not imply insanity or ill

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<sup>69</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 25–26.

<sup>70</sup> William Fortescue, *The Third Republic in France 1870-1940: Conflicts and Continuities* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 167.

<sup>71</sup> Toyin Falola and Fallou Ngom, *Facts, Fiction, and African Creative Imaginations* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.

<sup>72</sup> Toyin Falola and Fallou Ngom, 3–4.

understanding.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, Bamba’ transformative contribution to cosmopolitanism is his use of racial pride as a pathway to a peaceful world in which understanding and intelligence, not color, become the criteria for determining one’s humanity. Docteur Ibrahima Deme alludes to this cosmopolitanism when he writes: “I used to say that social transformation, in the Marxist sense of the term, is the legacy of Serigne Touba Khadimou Rassoul who successfully achieved it without shedding a single drop of blood, including the emergence of new and soothed power relations in which birth, ethnicity, race, nationality, social status do not constitute discriminating criteria of spiritual elevation and, therefore, of the acquisition of Approval of God or his Representative.”<sup>74</sup> Deme’s assertion hinges on Bamba’s cosmopolitanism which prioritizes a Jihad based on negotiation rather than imposition of power. This “Jihad of the soul” is cosmopolitan since it is founded on the perception of faith in and blessing from God and his Representative (the Prophet Mohammed) as more important than one’s nativity, class, group identity, national origin, and class status. A clear example of this cosmopolitanism (that one can call cosmopolitan Jihadism) is noticeable in *Massalik Al Jinan* in which Bamba writes:

48- For [as quoted from the Book] the most honorable human being before GOD is who that fears HIM the most, without any possible doubt.<sup>75</sup>

This declaration registers Bamba’s cosmopolitan view of humanity as an identity deriving from one’s fear of “ALLAH” rather than one’s membership in a race, ethnicity, class, or nationality. Rather than basing the individual’s worth in a fixed identity, Bamba assesses it from daily actions for humankind. Bamba stresses this cosmopolitanism in the 173<sup>rd</sup> verse of the *Khassaid* entitled “Nahju Qada il Hajj” (“The Way of the Satisfaction of the Needs”) where he states: “The value of each person

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<sup>73</sup> Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, *Ways Unto Heaven*, Verse 49.

<sup>74</sup> The original quotation in French is:

J’ai l’habitude de dire que la transformation sociale, au sens marxiste du terme, c’est Serigne Touba Khadimou Rassoul qui l’a réussie sans verser une seule goutte de sang, notamment par l’émergence de nouveaux rapports de forces apaisés où la naissance, l’appartenance ethnique, la race, la nationalité, la position sociale ne constituent point des critères discriminants d’élévation spirituelle et, partant, de l’acquisition de l’Agrément de Dieu ou de son Représentant.

See Docteur Ibrahima Deme. “Témoignages sur Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, Serigne Touba, Khadimou Rassoul (PSL), Fondateur de la Mouridyya (1855-1927) La révolution culturelle universelle continue de plus belle ! »

<http://www.actusen.com/temoignages-sur-cheikh-ahmadou-bamba-mbacke-serigne-touba-khadimou-rassoul-psl-fondateur-de-la-mouridyya-1855-1927-la-revolution-culturelle-universelle-continue-de-belle/#>. Accessed January 7, 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké, *Ways Unto Heaven*, Verse 48.

depends on his Good Deeds; the ignorant are enemies of the People of Knowledge.”<sup>76</sup> This statement suggests a cosmopolitanism founded on one’s betterment of human conditions through daily positive actions for others that one respects and venerates unquestionably. Discussing an adult’s proper attitude toward the youth, Bamba writes:

- 51. Be lenient towards the youth and give them no council except that which according to you, can save them
- 52. [It] is likely [to] put them on the Right Path; [if they] respect the people of authority, even if they appear despicable and vulgar.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, unmitigated respect of others, independently of their age, background, lifestyle, color, gender, and other identities, is so crucial for Bamba that he regards it as key to the kind of cosmopolitan mutuality that the Christian saying “Do to others as you would like them to do to you” captures. Bamba’s cosmopolitanism is based on a similar value of reciprocal respect between people, as is apparent in the poem, “Nahju Qada il Haj,” in which he lists pillars of his philosophy that he calls “the Rules of the Virtuous Conduct.” Among these rules, one finds key elements of cosmopolitanism that negate violence and celebrate mutual treatment and wishes, indulgence, respect, freedom, and cohabitation as the ways of living and building a tolerant society. He writes:

- 49. The Way of Virtuous Conduct consists in showing [the proper] indulgence toward  
young people, following the example of father and mother, to respect those in authority
- 50. And to treat your peers like you would treat yourself, for the FACE OF THE CREATOR, that occupies the Throne (Arsh)
- 51. Be lenient towards the youth and give them no council except that which according to  
you, can save them  
.....
- 56. [You should] be with everyone, during your life, exactly as you would wish them to be with you.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The original statement that is quoted here is: « La valeur de chaque personne est fonction de ses Bonnes Actions ; les ignorants Sont les ennemis des Gens du Savoir. » See *Nahju Qadâil Hâjd (LA VOIE DE LA SATISFACTION DES BESOINS)*. Ouvrage Intégral. <http://www.htcom.sn/ouvrage-integral-153.html>. Accessed January 8, 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Bamba Mbacké, “Nahju Qada il Haj.” [www.daaraykamil.com](http://www.daaraykamil.com). Internet Archive. Accessed January 8, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Bamba Mbacké, “Nahju Qada il Haj.” [www.daaraykamil.com](http://www.daaraykamil.com). Internet Archive. Accessed January 8, 2016.

Through these statements, Bamba lays the foundations of his non-violence philosophy which is grounded on the conception of Jihad as resistance in which one's faith should not lead to violence and intolerance toward others, whether they are oppressors or not. In this logic, faith, dialogue, and diplomacy, which are core elements of Islam, are the passageways to a nonviolent and cosmopolitan world. Referring to the Prophet Muhammad Rassoul Alahi (Peace Be Upon Him), Bamba lauds him as "[T]he praiseworthy Ahmad, who brought the Quran and convinced the infidel by the strength of argument."<sup>79</sup> Bamba's reference to the word "argument" is crucial, since it signifies his firm belief that mediation and peacekeeping are effective means to convince those who do not agree with our points of view. Bamba's rationale negates violent Jihadism by suggesting that converting another person or earning their agreement must not be made with aggression, but with intellectual and peaceful persuasions. This strategy worked in Bamba's political struggle since it allowed him to finally be free from the exiles, imprisonment, and other deprivations that the French imposed on him during the late- nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when he spiritually and physically resisted their oppression. This subjugation began when the French exiled Bamba from 1895 to 1902 to Gabon for fear that his popularity among a few kings of Senegal would lead him to wage a Jihad against the colonial establishment. According to Babou, the arrest occurred on August 10, 1895, while the deportation took place on September 21 of that year.<sup>80</sup> Decrying Bamba's ordeal, Donald Cruise O'Brien writes in his book, *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood* (1971):

He [Bamba] was taken prisoner by a French detachment in the same year, and subsequently sentenced with Samba Laobé [Penda] to indefinite exile in Gabon. The charges against him were vaguely stated, and it was admitted that 'no clear instance of the preaching of holy war could be held against Amadu Bamba', but it was evident that the administration was much perturbed by the fact that he had a potentially warlike following, including 'the ex-companions of Al Būri' and 'the ex-warriors of Lat Dior', in short 'a real army of *tyédodo*'.<sup>81</sup>

Bamba's arrest probably stemmed from the French colonials' plan to eliminate him from the Baol region, where his social, political, and economic power was growing, so that they could freely conduct their imperial business. However, as Babou argues, even if Bamba's arrest took place during a time when the French colonial administration

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<sup>79</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), *God's Sacred Identity /Mawahibul Quddusi*, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2007), 126.

<sup>81</sup> Donald Cruise O'Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 42.

“moved ahead with the aggressive policy of colonization that began with Louis Faidherbe in 1854 but experienced mixed fortunes with the ebbs and flows of French metropolitan politics,” the real reasons of the detention must be sought not in the notion that the French wanted to destroy Bamba or his “Muridiyya” brotherhood, but “in the internal politics and inner workings of the colonial bureaucracy.”<sup>82</sup> Yet other scholars believe that the conspiracy against Bamba might have had sinister reasons. For instance, Ousmane Kane points out: “Moustapha Mbacké argues that the French and British colonial states allied with the Vatican to kill Ahmadu Bamba while he was in exile in Gabon, but their many attempts were unsuccessful because of the mystical powers of Ahmadu Bamba.”<sup>83</sup> Therefore, Bamba was like Blyden since he too suffered from racial discrimination that forced him into exile and attempted to make him perceive his race and culture as inferior.

Moreover, like Blyden, Bamba deployed cosmopolitanism as a tool that enabled him to survive European oppression. Bamba used it as a means of negotiating with the aggressors, finally softening the Europeans into liberating him and letting him practice his Islamic faith freely with his devotees without bloodshed. Against the French colonial’s harassment, Bamba used peace and tolerance which, eventually, made the imperial power realize its injustice and acquiesce to the cleric’s fight for the freedom to worship God with his followers. For instance, as Babou remarks, “From 1889 to 1912, the Murids entertained tense relations with the colonial administration . . . Murid villages were evacuated and the Murid leadership harassed by African chiefs and colonial administrators. But in 1912, the French realized the futility of coercion and decided to move Bamba back to Diourbel, in the heartland of Muridiyya.”<sup>84</sup> Explaining Bamba’s resistance against racial oppression, Babou also states: “The change of tactics was an effort to diminish the popularity of Bamba that they sought was fueled by his image as a freedom fighter and a martyr, and an attempt to create avenues for what the lieutenant governor of Senegal called a ‘policy of rapprochement.’”<sup>85</sup> In return, Bamba and his followers developed “a three-step strategy” that helped him solidify Muriddiya in Bawol: “[F]irst, physical occupation of the land by Murid disciples; second, the cultural reshaping of the landscape through the use of Islamic sacred architecture, geometry, and religious rituals; and third, the containment of French cultural influence.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, like Blyden’s, Bamba’s resistance against racial harassment was

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<sup>82</sup> Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913*, 123, 125–26, 126.

<sup>83</sup> Ousmane Kane, *The Homeland Is the Arena: Religion, Transnationalism, and the Integration of Senegalese Immigrants in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 154.

<sup>84</sup> Babou, “The Senegalese ‘Social Contract’ Revisited: The Muridiyya Muslim Order and State Politics in Postcolonial Senegal,” in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 128–29.

<sup>85</sup> Babou, 128–29.

<sup>86</sup> Babou, 129.

cosmopolitan in that it employed counter-co-optation to deflect the colonials' attempt to weaken his movement. Through peace and tolerance, Bamba was able to reverse the French's "rapprochement" policy by carving lasting space for his movement that would allow the Murid to survive in Laïceté without compromising their Islamic faith. Blyden deployed a similar resistance strategy by using non-violence and negotiation to fight for black freedom. Blyden used the limited leverage that the American Colonization Society gave him to create with black Africans ties that later became foundations of modern black cosmopolitanism and Pan-Africanism. The connections that now exist between Murid communities and blacks of the diaspora originated from the seminal and comparable models of unified Pan-African communities that both Blyden and Bamba celebrated or established during their lifetimes.

In a similar vein, one gleans from Bamba's book his firm belief that Jihad is not a war of a person against another since it is an internal struggle in which an individual attempts to gain salvation from God through devotion to him. Bamba writes:

As the one who guides himself by the science of the Divine Unity (TAWHID) is superior to the ignorant and the imitator.

After that, know that religious sciences constitute the best of inheritances and the most gracious of favors that God grants to a worshipper.

But the knowledge of the Divine Unity (Tawhid) is the best provision for man in his grave and on the Day of Resurrection.<sup>87</sup>

In this philosophy, an irrational act such as violent Jihadism cannot be legitimate since it betrays the prime duty of a Muslim, which is to know God and be faithful to him through one's asceticism, or self-purification, rather than one's fruitless attempt to force one's views on others. For Bamba, fundamentalism does not mean violence on the other since it does not preclude the use of reason as an activity through which one learns the power of God. For this reason, Bamba portrays intellectual activity, dialectic, and reasoning as activities that lead one to be aware of the self-sufficiency and pre-eternity of God when they are employed with intelligence and rationality. This vision of Jihad was useful to Bamba since it allowed him to win the French administrators' proclivity to leave his disciples and him free to worship their faith as long as they did not constitute a threat to the colonial establishment. Thus, Babou is accurate in his statement that "Amadu Bamba opted for the jihad of the soul and that he opposed the jihad of the sword" and that the colonial administration "appreciated" his "public condemnation of political violence and his call for peace."<sup>88</sup> Bamba's

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<sup>87</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), *God's Sacred Identity /Mawahibul Quddusi*, Verses 9, 10, and 11.

<sup>88</sup> Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of*



non-violence philosophy is apparent in the following passage of a 1910 letter to Malik Sy, the leader of the Tijaniyya brotherhood of Senegal, in which he wrote: “I have decided to give . . . some advice to my Muslim brothers in order that they not be drawn into wars . . . The French government, thanks to God, has not opposed the profession of faith but on the contrary has been friendly toward Muslims and encouraged them to practice [their religion].”<sup>89</sup> Bamba’s peaceful and conciliatory approach was highly beneficial to Muriddiya since it allowed the movement to establish itself as a pillar of global Senegalese social, economic, and cultural development. Therefore, like Blyden, Bamba was a Pan-Africanist since he established with other African Muslim leaders and scholars strong ties that also laid the foundations of unity among blacks in Senegal and abroad. This ability to set the basis of a Pan-Africanism built around a religion and culture of tolerance and hard work would have been impossible without Bamba’s intrinsic cosmopolitanism which was founded on patience, respect, and negotiation with other people.

Bamba’s cosmopolitanism is also visible in his valuation of dialogue and reasonableness, which, also confirms Blyden’s positive vision of West African Islam. This cosmopolitanism is apparent in Bamba’s use of scientific rationality as a means to prove the importance of both relativity and complementarity. His respect for science is explicit in the importance he attaches to biology, land, and vegetation in his conceptualization of “the created existent.”<sup>90</sup> In this vein, Bamba recognizes the legacy of scientific inquiries when he writes:

The ultimate significance of the attribute of Science(‘Ilm) according to the ancient pious is the quality by which a known thing is unveiled,

In that which it is itself, through a disclosure which entails neither deficiency nor alteration,”

.....  
 Any attribute that does not possess a complementary existence has no relativity. Be a person of integrity!<sup>91</sup>

Therefore, despite his philosophical cosmopolitanism, Bamba remains firm in his spiritual faith which abhors violence against the other and represents all beings as

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*Senegal, 1853–1913*, 155, 156.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Alfred Stepan, “Stateness, Democracy, and Respect: Senegal in Comparative Perspective,” in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 212.

<sup>90</sup> See the reference to these elements i Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), *God’s Sacred Identity /Mawahibul Quddusi*, Verse 110-111, page 42.

<sup>91</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), Verse 112, 113, Page 42, and Verse 125, Page 46.

emanating from God. In his science, Bamba would disagree with Charles Darwin's theory of biological determinism since he does not perceive humans as the product of biological evolutions, but, rather, as the outcome of the work of the Divine. He writes: "The God-realized state of the Divine Speech is an intelligible truth intrinsic to the Essence of the Originator of the human species."<sup>92</sup> Yet Bamba is not dogmatic since he does not dismiss the importance of relativity even if he interprets human species as the products of the Divine rather than those of biological mutations. Likewise, Bamba does not reject complementarity and relativity even if he regards religion or the discovery of God as the way that has no doubt.<sup>93</sup> Revealing his positive fundamentalism, Bamba writes:

The Divine Speech transcends anything that is literal, resonant or conceptual, without any doubt.

It is devoid of any alteration, fragmentation, redundancy, globality and hesitation

Likewise, it is exempt of any epilogue, exordium, pause or declination.<sup>94</sup>

However, in verse 125, Bamba stresses his firm belief in the power of complementarity and relativity, distancing himself from the view of religion as a worship that does not provide flexibility. With a subtle irony, Bamba seems to mock at reckless dogmatism since he portrays it as part of the "different explanations" and "the opinion of the pious predecessors."<sup>95</sup> In this representation of dogmatism, Bamba suggests that his views of Islam were founded on love, respect, rather than impositions and violence.

Moreover, by the end of this second chapter of God's Sacred Identity, Bamba suggests that he also values "the conceptual" and particular levels of reality as much as their essential dimensions. Thus, one should not interpret Bamba's statements above as preclusions to rationality, discourse, and doubt, since he registers, at the end of this chapter, his devotion to the negotiation of meaning through dialogue and respect of particularity. He argues that, beside life which "does not require a complement in its manner of being in His Essence," all and "any attribute that does not possess a complementary existence has no relativity."<sup>96</sup> In this sense, Bamba was a cosmopolitan who challenged the narrowness of the Darwinian school which perceives humans as

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<sup>92</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), Verse 117, Page 44.

<sup>93</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), Verses 119 And 123 Page 44 And Verse 124 Page 46.

<sup>94</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), Verses 119, 120, 121, Page 44.

<sup>95</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), erse 118, Page 44.

<sup>96</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), Verse 124, Page 46.

coming from nothingness. But, in a similar stream, Bamba decried the limited purview of the religious doctrinarians who did not allow complementarity and relativity. In this sense, Bamba would oppose violent Jihadism since his philosophy of struggle is based on an internal and individual effort to find both the truth of the Divine realm (God) and those of human beings that must be unveiled through the exchange of ideas.

One also notes in Bamba's religious discourse a respect for both the universal and the specific that are key parts of cosmopolitanism. In agreement with the scholars he calls "the men of knowledge," Bamba writes: "[T]here exist[SIC] a link of particularity and generality among those attributes [of the Divine] by global and partial application on their respective domains. / Associate both the Will and Power to the possible non-existents and you will have followed the knower."<sup>97</sup> These statements further register Bamba's cosmopolitanism which is evident in his recognition of the importance of numerous dualities such as those between "particularity" and "generality," as well as those between "globality" and "individuality," which must accompany intellectual inquiry about the Divine. By acknowledging the importance of these numerous axes of knowing and unveiling truth, Bamba rejects any dogma such as, for instance, violent Jihadism, that precludes dialogue, tolerance, and negotiation of meaning with the other. In contrast to Bamba's cosmopolitanism, violent Jihadism preaches nihilism and hatred. Avoiding such reckless fundamentalism that dismisses argumentation, negotiation, and connections between human and spiritual realms, Bamba prefers a third, alternative, and cosmopolitan space in which societies and cultures evolve outside the control of violent Jihadism and other forms of dogmatism while recognizing the power of a loving and peaceful God.

## CONCLUSION

In the cultures of West African Muslims that he calls Mohammedans in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887), Blyden celebrates the cosmopolitanism of learned black clerics and leaders who valued literacy and reason and shows his deep respect for them. Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké would have been an ideal example of these Muslims that Blyden saw as perfect manifestations of black cosmopolitanism. This cosmopolitanism was founded on the negation of prejudice and violence and the reinforcement of understanding and peace among world populations. Bamba's valuation of reason and his celebration of blackness are reminiscent of Blyden whose cosmopolitanism and Pan-Africanism were also based on a conception of race or ethnicity as identities that should not prevent blacks from contributing to world civilizations. By valuing West African Muslims' cosmopolitanism, Blyden found a strong weapon against European racism and prejudices towards blacks. His

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<sup>97</sup> Shaykh Ahmad Al Baki (Bamba Mbacké), Verses 126 and 127, Page 50.

cosmopolitanism enabled him to oppose the tendency that many intellectuals of the late- nineteenth and early twentieth century had to misrepresent peoples of African descent. Conversely, Blyden's cosmopolitanism was intertwined with Pan-Africanism since, like Bamba's, it also attempted to restore the dignity and humanity of blacks that Western ethnocentrism and race prejudice could have turned into people who were perpetually devoid of respect, racial and cultural pride, and unity.

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