

Searching for the Origin(al)

On the Photographic Portrait of the Mouride Sufi Saint Amadou Bamba

À la recherche de l'Origin(al). Le portrait photographique du Mouride saint sufi Amadou Bamba.

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On the Photographic Portrait of the Mouride Sufi Saint Amadou Bamba*

The portrait of Amadou Bamba¹—the founder and leader of the Mouride Sufi brotherhood² from 1883 to 1927—is possibly the most popular and widely reproduced image in the history of art and photography in Senegal. It can be found virtually everywhere across Senegal and its diaspora, from Dakar to New York, from Touba to Beijing. Replicated in a variety of mediums, it resurfaces in unsuspecting and improbable spaces: taxis, street walls, home interiors, barbershops, art galleries and elsewhere. This single black and white photograph is ubiquitous, continuously copied and visually quoted. The dissemination of this image makes it the perfect example of the reproducibility of photography,³ one of its signature features that unsettles any preoccupation

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1. Amadou Bamba is also called *Seriñ* Touba (*Seriñ* or *Serigne* in Wolof is equivalent to *Cheikh* in Arabic, or teacher), *Seriñ* Bamba and *Borom* Touba (*Borom* from Wolof: owner or founder of Touba).
2. Mouridism is a Sufi brotherhood or *tarīqah* founded by Bamba in 1883. The term *murīd* can be translated as disciple, and refers to the status of the Sufi faithful or *talibé* who follows a spiritual guide. For a discussion on the relationship between student and *marabout*, see MONTEIL (1966: 160, 177) and O'BRIEN (1970). For a discussion on the definition of Mouridism, see also MONTEIL (1966: 178), DUMONT (1975, 1977), MBACKÉ & HUNWICK (2005: 45-66), DOZON (2010).
3. BATCHEN (2013: 12-13) describes this process as “a continual splicing of real and copy, here and there, us and them, time and space.”

with medium purity.⁴ And yet, the origin(al) of this photograph is surprisingly shrouded in mystery. Who took it? In which circumstances was it produced and what can it tell us about early photographic practices in Senegal? These are the gaps this article seeks to address.

Since the 1960s, scholars have extensively written on Senegalese Sufi brotherhoods and Amadou Bamba's *Murīdiyya* in particular, making the topic one of the most studied subjects of Senegal's history (Babou 1997: 5).⁵ Within this vast literature, very little has been published on the portrait of *Seriñ* Touba.⁶ At least since Vincent Monteil's article on Mouridism (Monteil 1962), it has become clear that this iconic photograph first appeared in Paul Marty's two-tome publication *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal* in 1917 (Marty 1917a: n. p.; Monteil 1962: 84). A French colonial administrator, Paul Marty worked in the Muslim Affairs section in Dakar from 1912 to 1921.⁷ During his time in Afrique occidentale française (AOF), he wrote extensively on African Islam, documenting in real time the emergence of brotherhoods like the Mouride *tariqa*.⁸ Within his large corpus, the 1917 publication is the one that later scholars have described as a "classic" and "irreplaceable" monographic work on

4. Here I am referring respectively to scholarship by BATCHEN (2013) and CADAVA (2013) on alternative modes of writing the history of photography in order to focus on the dispersal and multiplication, rather than the production of a unique object.
5. Following the first publication on Bamba by MARTY (1913), the literature has grown, especially since the 1960s, with American and European scholars combining new critical readings of archival sources and fieldwork research. Among these, MONTEIL (1966), COPANS (1988), COULON (1988a) and O'BRIEN (1970) were the most prolific writers. Since the 1980s, a more robust body of work has been produced by Senegalese scholars adding new perspectives. See SY (1969), BA (1982), MBACKÉ & HUNWICK (2005), BABOU (1997), SYLLA (2015). More recently, scholars have studied the Mouride diaspora in Europe and the United States. See *inter alia* CARTER (1997), DIOUF (2000), and GEMMEKE (2011).
6. The first reference to Bamba's photograph in the academic literature was in Monteil's 1962 article on Mouridism (MONTEIL 1962: 84-85). More extended discussions on Bamba's portrait emerge in the 1980s with the first studies of Senegal's glass painting traditions. In what became a hot topic for scholars and curators until the late 1990s, M. Strobel's 1982 dissertation on religious imagery in Senegal remains a groundbreaking project although it only briefly mentions Bamba's image's history in relation to Monteil's description (STROBEL 1982: 121). What acted as a watershed was Allen and Mary Roberts's 1998 article, which became the first of a long string of publications on this topic that they continued to research for the next two decades (ROBERTS & ROBERTS 1998: 15). Since the late 1990s, the literature on Mouride visual devotion has expanded significantly but not specifically in relation to the genesis of Bamba's photograph (BUGGENHAGEN 2011).
7. Marty reached the top rank of military interpreters becoming the most eminent authority on Islam in West Africa and a key player in the implementation of policies on this subject both in North and West Africa (COPANS 1988; HARRISON 1988: 105-106; SHINAR 2006: 33).
8. Just on Senegal, within five years after his arrival in Dakar, MARTY (1913, 1915-1916, 1917a, 1917b) published four major studies: *Les Mourides d'Amadou Bamba*, *L'Islam en Mauritanie et au Sénégal*, and the two volumes of *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal*.

African Islam (Monteil 1966: 171). It also served as a reference for generations of administrators until Senegal's independence in 1960 (Grandhomme 2009: 180). If this publication played such a crucial role in both defining African Islam and shaping France's response to it, its inclusion of Bamba's portrait incontrovertibly situates the latter in the "colonial library."⁹

It was during my first year of research in 2011 that I visited the Archives nationales du Sénégal (ANS) in Dakar to consult Marty's volumes—the closest source to the alleged origin(al) of Bamba's photograph. When I went to the archives, the chapter devoted to the Mourides was indeed there, but the iconic photograph had been taken out and carefully replaced with a photocopy of the same image (fig. 1). The effect was uncanny: the printed portrait of Bamba, one that would have been serially produced in France, had been removed and exchanged with another mechanically manufactured image. The richly illustrated volumes included dozens of images that had remained untouched with the exception of Bamba's likeness and that of a few other *cheikhs*.¹⁰ The copy had been swapped with another copy, a "photo-copy": but why? That gesture did not seem either vandalistic or iconoclastic in intent as the images had been carefully cut, replaced and rebound. The removal of the printed portrait seems to have been triggered by a desire to own and maybe even safeguard an icon that, as Allen and Mary Roberts have powerfully argued, is imbued with *baraka*¹¹ regardless of where it was produced or who made it. The removal of the image created a gap, a void that pushed me to search for what was missing.

This article will not be about the uses of Bamba's portrait in Senegal's visual culture and religious practices—a topic that Allen and Mary Roberts have magisterially developed in their academic and curatorial practice spanning over two decades—nor will it seek to re-trace the intricate chain of reproduction of the photographic image.¹² This article will move in the

9. A term Mudimbe coined to denote "an abstraction for the immense body of texts and systems of representation that has over the centuries collectively invented, and continues to invent Africa as a paradigm of difference and alterity" (MUDIMBE 1988; WAI 2012: 10).

10. The other photographs that had been replaced included those of Ibra Fall and El-Hadj Malick Sy.

11. FLOOD (2014: 461) defines *baraka* as "the immaterial blessing that radiates from the bodies of prophets or saints in life or death or from objects associated with them. Typically, *baraka* is absorbed through kissing, touching, or rubbing," ROBERTS & ROBERTS (2002: 46) write that the *baraka* of Bamba's image "exists not only despite but in some sense because of infinite mechanical reproductions."

12. The recent literature on the histories of photography, and that of African photography more specifically, has focused on the reproduction of images across media, seeking to account for their itinerancy. In their contributions, scholars such as BATCHEN (2013), FÖRSTER (2013) and WENDL (2001) have pointed to the absurdity of striving for an "original"

opposite direction towards this photograph's origin(al). Despite this image's endless and kaleidoscopic multiplication, my analysis will strive to remain focused on the beginning of the chain. While the photograph and its history keep pointing and pulling towards its infinite dissemination, this essay seeks to concentrate if not on an *original* image, at least at its *origin*. In order to understand how the portrait has come to function today, we need to go back and study the moment—the precise instant and historical time—when it was snapped. Concentrating exclusively on the contemporary dispersal of the portrait may efface the initial conditions of production and the materiality of an object that was so deeply imbricated in the colonial moment. In providing an account of the genesis of this photo, information collected at the ANS will be juxtaposed to original fieldwork conducted in Senegal to integrate other narratives and voices, in this case those of Mouride *talibés* who generously shared their understandings of the history and significance of the image.¹³ Their responses will not only challenge monolithic interpretations of this portrait as an image of surveillance, produced by the colonial administration for the colonial archive, but of photography as a medium that exclusively captures and documents traces of the “real.”¹⁴

Back to the Sources: Texts and Images in Marty's 1917 Publication

Let us begin with Paul Marty's 1917 *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal*, where Bamba's portrait seems to have surfaced for the first time. The image appears in the fourth chapter of the first volume devoted to the Mouride brotherhood. Bamba's portrait (fig. 2) is printed full-page at the very beginning of the section because as Marty (Marty 1917a: 221) explains, “the whole Mouride sect rests on his founder and master Amadou Bamba.”

The black and white photograph shows a man standing in front of the wooden building. In the blinding daylight, Bamba squints in an effort to look at the photographer, whilst we too struggle to see his gaze enveloped in a dark

“unique” object in photography, a medium that is naturally and inevitably tied to image reproduction.

13. As MUDIMBE (1988) reminds us, unsettling the colonial archive is a powerful act to decolonize knowledge. This approach of decolonizing the colonial archive has also been explored by DE JONG (2016) in reconstructing the Mouride history.
14. KRAUSS (1985: 110) interprets photography as an “imprint of the real,” an interpretation that has dominated the Western discourse, but may not be applicable to all contexts (PAOLETTI 2015). KRAUSS (1985: 110) writes: “For photography is an imprint or transfer of the real; it is a photo-chemically processed trace causally connected to that thing in the world to which it refers in a manner parallel to that of fingerprints or footprints or the rings of water that cold glasses leave on table.”

shadow surrounding his eye sockets. As the Saint strains his eyes, his cheeks come up and his forehead crimps creating across his face strong shadows that alternate with achromatic areas reflecting the bright sunshine.¹⁵ A radiant white scarf covers his head, with one end falling at knee-height, and the other arranged across the face and over his shoulder concealing his mouth and chin. Made with the same immaculate textile, his abundant *boubou* reaches his ankles revealing one foot on a leather sandal. Echoing the garment's flared shape, the bell sleeves are wide and hide both of Bamba's hands. Alongside his hands, eyes, and mouth, the Saint's right foot also disappears into an indistinct shadow of his full body on the uneven surface of the fine white sand. The dense dark shadow—evidence of his physical presence—becomes a visual counterpoint to his whitely-dressed body that, against the strong sunlight, is flattened—devoid of any fold—reflexive and ethereal, as if it was the light source itself.

As the volume's *avant-propos* reveals, the content of the chapter was originally produced as an administrative report for William Merlaud-Ponty, the Governor General of French West Africa between 1908 and 1915. The report was then published in 1913 as an article, without illustrations, in the *Revue du monde musulman*.¹⁶ As such, the text was composed to “address the colonial authorities on the actual state of Mouridism and [...] research the best methods to reconcile this confessional movement with peace-keeping at a political and religious level in these countries” (Marty 1913: xxv). The main frame for his research, the writer clarifies, is France's “*politique indigène*” that is, the politics to administer the “*indigènes*” and transform them into Frenchmen, as this was one of the most distinctive features of the *Métropole*'s imperial assimilationist ambition.¹⁷

In his analysis of the Saint's origins, character and teaching, Marty (1917a: 230) hardly hides a dismissive stance towards a man he believes is only a pseudo-prophet, explaining that: “everyone agrees that he is a holy man, pious, charitable, with pure mores, convinced of the Islamic reformation in which he is invested.” Yet, he continues, Bamba had political ambitions¹⁸

15. As ROBERTS & ROBERTS (1998: 17) have pointed out, the blurred contours and indistinct features are possibly a trace of the photographer's technical inability in adjusting the camera's focus, which seems pointing to the background instead of standing figure.

16. First issued in 1906-1907, the *Revue du monde musulman* was published by the Mission scientifique du Maroc and, as the first volume explained, it sought to offer its readers general documentation and bibliographic references that could be utilitarian in scope.

17. For a more detailed discussion on France's *politique indigène*, see CONKLIN (1997) and BRUSCHI (2005).

18. MARTY (1913: 33) writes: “this religious chief, friend and *marabout* of the ancient *damels* [king of Kayoor] and visibly aspiring to their succession, has been raised in some way to representing a sentiment of the ancient independence.”

and produced subversive writings (*ibid.*: 231). Marty's personal sense of superiority regularly reemerges in his prose as he states that in the main urban centers the number of Mouride followers remains small: "Dakar is in effect a city too industrious to lend itself to the work of religious propaganda; and Saint Louis is a Muslim center too enlightened to accept the Mourides' doctrinal fantasies" (Marty 1913: 39).

Marty's engagement with Bamba's *Murīdiyya* emerged at a watershed moment in France's politics towards what has been defined as "*Islam noir*" (Harrison 1988: 114; Thioub 2005: 83; Grandhomme 2009: 182). In the early history of the colony under the tenure of Louis César Faïdherbe, Colonial Governor between 1854 and 1865, the political strategy towards Islam was one of diplomacy and accommodation (Marty 1913: 121-2; Harrison 1988: 7-11). At the turn of the century, a growing fear of and hostility towards Muslims living in the AOF emerged. This new sentiment inspired a series of new policies aimed at controlling local Islamic leaders and limiting external Orthodox influences that were seen as compromising "the natives" and challenging French domination. Marty's prolific writing should be situated within this new political stance, as an assessment of each brotherhood in relation to the French colonial project.¹⁹ In the case of Bamba's Mouridism, the colonial officer at once dismisses it as a distorted, and therefore lesser form of Islam—"Mouridism [...] should be considered as a new sort religion born of Islam" (Marty 1913: 42)—and at the same time, one that should be controlled as "under the covers of the religion, the followers of Amadou Bamba absolutely live as in the old kingdoms" (*ibid.*: 59).²⁰

As historian Ahmadou Khadim Sylla (2015: 22) reminds us, while Marty presents his as a definitive assessment of Mouridism, his research was produced when Bamba was still alive, and only thirty years since the foundation of the brotherhood. As the bibliography shows, Marty's reports were based on interviews with French administrators, colonial archives, and a few publications that did not include the extensive written corpus that the Sufi Saint had produced (Marty 1917a: 439). At that time, Fernand Dumont (1969: 20; 1975: 17-32) explains, Marty had access to no more than a dozen written

19. As AOF Governor General Ponty—who brought Marty to Dakar in 1912 to gather information, head the new unit, and conduct fieldwork on Islamic brotherhoods, their influence, teaching and leadership—wrote in his 1909 text on the *politique indigène*, the latter derived from "a deep knowledge of our subjects' psychology" (Ponty quoted in MARTY 1915-1916: 4). See also DIOUF & LEICHTMAN (2009: 1-2).

20. In another passage, MARTY (1913: 112-113) argues that if among the colonial circles, some perceive Mouridism as a "large and dangerous association" and others as an "insignificant religious brotherhood or a vulgar *marabout*," the "truth seems to be somewhere between these two extreme opinions."

works within the 30,000 Arabic verses that Bamba composed during his lifetime. And if, at times, Marty's descriptions sounded benevolent and even laudatory,²¹ the list of political actions with which he concluded his report leaves little space for ambiguity. The four strategies he recommends, moving forward, for France's relationship with Mouridism are: surveillance, isolation, repression and the study of indigenous land systems (Marty 1913: 128-132).

Considering the impact that Marty's publications had, not only in his lifetime but also in the decades that followed, within colonial and academic circles alike, it seems particularly significant to study them closely as emblematic of French attitudes towards its colonial subjects and Islamic *marabouts*, in particular.²² Indeed, what may be emblematic about Marty is not only confined to the content and methodology, but also in his use of photographs.

The publication is richly illustrated with photographs of a variety of subjects. Within Marty's Senegalese corpus, the 1917 volumes are the most illustrated, with fifty-six images, while the 1913 article does not feature any image, and the 1915-1916 book, *L'Islam en Mauritanie et au Sénégal*, has only thirty-two. In the former, photos of Islamic notables such as Bamba are seen alongside shots of buildings, group portraits of *talibés* and Senegalese sitters. These secular portraits stand in stark contrast to those of religious leaders, that are all taken outdoors, often in urban spaces, surrounded by their followers (fig. 3). Many of these shots are out of focus, some visibly manipulated, suggesting that non-professional photographers might have taken them. Conversely, the Senegalese sitters (fig. 4) are meticulously arranged as they pose in front of painted backdrops and adopt some of the classical postures seen in early West African photographic portraiture (Paoletti 2015).

Despite the lavish use of images, Marty does not directly analyze them. In the case of Bamba's portrait, the photograph only comes with a succinct label that reads, "Amadou Bamba (Djourbel)" (Marty 1917a: 222). While the caption does not include a date, the location—Djourbel—situates the photographic event within a specific timeframe, when following his exiles to Gabon (1895-1902) and Mauritania (1903-1907), the Mouride leader was placed under house arrest by the colonial authorities in Djourbel, not far from Touba, between 1912 and 1927.²³ The fact that the portrait was taken in Djourbel is

21. For example: "Amadou Bamba is evidently a cultivated Muslim who draws from the canonic books the doctrines of orthodox Islam. But he is also an enlightened (one)" (MARTY 1913: 42).

22. Marty's publication was already reviewed positively in 1921 in the *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (BASSET 1921).

23. Following two periods of exile in Gabon and then in Mauritania, the administration chose to have the Saint assigned to house arrest in Djourbel to better control his movements and limit his growing popularity. Indeed, his two previous exiles seemed to have multiplied

also underscored by the inclusion in the background of the town's wooden mosque, an edifice whose photo was featured in the 1917 publication and is still accessible today as an important pilgrimage site.

Marty does not provide any indication of who the photographer might have been.²⁴ In other images, such as the Djourbel cityscapes, Marty acknowledges Antoine J. M. A. Lasselves, Colonial Administrator of Djourbel as the author. Among the remaining unattributed shots, one portrait of two young Fulani women (fig. 5) can be credited to the French Noal Brothers, who had previously published an image from the same series in an atlas under their name (Atlas 1903: 90). The practice of producing photographs that would then circulate, with or without attribution, in a variety of media was common in *la Grande France* since at least the 1880s.²⁵ The Noal brothers, who had established a solid business in Senegal by the 1880s, worked for different clientele, both local and foreign, producing photos that also circulated in popular and scientific publications, such as the magazine *Le Monde Illustré* and volumes for the Exposition universelle (Lasnet 1900: 93; David 2006; Hickling 2007, 2014).

The fact that the images included in Marty's publication were authored by at least one colonial officer, Lasselves, and a commercial studio, the Noal Brothers, indicate that they were obtained through different procedures and within a complex network of image making, patronage and consumption. The distinctive aesthetics of the photos taken in the open air, so unlike those carefully arranged inside studio settings indicate a variety of methods and intents in obtaining and disseminating images through institutional and commercial channels. Within this range of practices, where can we situate Bamba's portrait and what can it tell us about early uses of the photographic apparatus?

On Photography and Colonial Surveillance

In the study of photography's histories, the rhetoric of colonial subjects' first encounter with the camera as one defined by coercion is a recurring one.²⁶

his followers who compared the Saint's experience to the Prophet Muhammad's 622 CE "flight" from Mecca to the city of Yathrib to escape persecution.

24. In their footnotes, following the indication of historian P. ROBINSON (1999: 209), ROBERTS & ROBERTS (1998: 15; 2000a: 248; 2007: 70) suggest that Jean-Baptiste Théveniaut, a colonial officer who was Bamba's keeper in Djourbel, was the author of the portrait, but in my archival research I have not found any evidence of it.
25. See Chapter One in PAOLETTI (2015). On the question of authorship and attribution of early photography in West Africa, see GEARY (1998).
26. APPADURAI (1997: 5) argues: "all colonial photography is in some sense part of a project of archiving and documentation, whether the eye of the particular photographer is part

Anthropologist Christopher Pinney argues, for instance, that the early history of this medium in India went hand in hand with Britain's rising anxiety regarding the identity of its colonial subjects. British distress was only mitigated by their attempts to fix Indian subjects photographically, as accomplished in the colossal eight-volume publication *The People of India* (Pinney 1997: 37-46). In recovering institutional practices, anthropologists accounted for the oppressiveness of the colonial system (Wendl 2001: 81; Werner 2001: 252). Against these Foucauldian scenarios whereby "colonial administrators forced African subjects to sit for humiliating portraits as an exercise of surveillance," scholars have shown that, more generally across the continent, photography was used more systematically by the postcolonial, rather than the colonial state, as in the case of Mali and Zaïre (Keller 2008: 402; Strother 2013: 190; Nimis 2014: 395).²⁷ This data opens up new questions as to how the status of the colonial versus the postcolonial subject shifted within the local jurisdiction and through the implementation of photo identification (ID) systems.²⁸

In the specific case of French West Africa, archival and field research reveals that the camera was not immediately employed within an organized system of surveillance through systematic ethnographic classification or the imposition of photo IDs.²⁹ Photographic identification was required only for foreigners entering the AOF³⁰ and for residents of the *Quatre Communes*³¹ as

of the gaze of curiosity, of horror, of conversation or of criminology" and discusses "taxonomizing and coercive techniques of colonial observers and the colonial state."

27. One of the few exceptions to this general trend has been documented in Madagascar (BOETSCH & SAVARESE 2000). Email to Z.S. Strother, June 2010. I thank Z. S. Strother for sharing her correspondence with Jewsiewicki and these references with me.
28. Photo historian McCAULEY (1985: 27) maintains that by 1853 in France, using photography for passport identification had already been suggested. This initiative, which relied on the science of physiognomy, including measurements and biographical data, materialized later, in 1874, yet it was only in 1940 that all French citizens were required to carry an identification card with the owner's photo and fingerprints.
29. The earliest use of the camera by the colonial administration in Senegal goes back to 1857 with Captain Dérème, who sought but failed to document the colony (CHAPUIS 1998: 51; PAOLETTI 2015: 39). While in Senegal, there had been an interest in cataloguing racial and ethnic groups, at least since Louis Faidherbe (GLASMAN 2004) in FAIDHERBE (1856, 1859), the theoretical discourse is not accompanied by images of physiognomic profiling.
30. In 1911, Ponty established that no foreigner would be let into the region without an identity card featuring a photo (ANS May 1st 1911, Folder 21G36). While it is difficult to assess the extent to which the colonial administration managed to implement this policy, in the 1920s, the colonial archives kept files with photos of Anglophone Africans residing in Senegal (ANS 21G126, 108).
31. The Four Communes, were four cities—Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque and Dakar—that by the late nineteenth century, were granted municipal status, meaning that their inhabitants had privileges (and duties) comparable to French residents and citizens.

a means to distinguish the inhabitants of these four cities, *les originaires*, from colonial subjects.³² In Senegal, the selective collection of photo IDs since the early 1900s shifts our understanding of photography from a tool of surveillance to an instrument for targeted documentation of powerful groups, such as *originaires* and Islamic leaders.

As mentioned, at the turn of the century, a major shift took place in France's colonial politics towards Islam. As part of a new political directive, in 1906, the Ministry of the Colonies created a special section of Islamic Information (Thioub 2005: 79). This institution was given specialized personnel, well versed in Islam and the Arabic language. With his previous experience in North Africa, Marty had the perfect profile to monitor the spread of Islam in the AOF. In a 1913 letter, Governor Ponty wrote to the respective Lieutenants-Governors in the AOF explaining the new policy, which included *inter alia* the creation of a repertoire of "Islamic proselytisms" (ANS 19 G1). In the letter, Ponty requests "for each of these personalities, an individual bulletin that follows the instructions included in the model [provided]" (*ibid.*). In emphasizing the importance of compiling these reports with precision, Ponty explains that "it is impossible in fact to exercise real surveillance on Islam, [...] and to take [...] all the appropriate preventive measures if we do not dispose of a service of minute documentation [...] The political surveillance of Islam is above all a surveillance of Muslim personalities" (*ibid.*).

As part of its mission, this new bureau established procedures to follow and document local *marabouts*, including individually named files. At the ANS (fig. 6), we can still find at least one of these multi-page documents. On the first page, a rhythmic handwriting diligently follows the instructions describing the *marabout's* family history, place of birth, age, character, intelligence, morality, aptitudes, manners with representatives of the French authority, accomplishments, personal wealth, etc. (ANS 15G103). Next to this extended list and inside a delineated squared space, we read the instructions: "photograph: when possible, take secretly." Each document was then supposed to

32. The *originaires*, as the residents of the four communes, had specific rights such as that of voting and sending their elected representative to the French National Assembly. In this sense, they may have needed a document with an identifying photograph to differentiate them from other colonial subjects. The distinction between *originaires* and *sujets français* was not only experienced during elections, but also in daily life. This issue emerged in several interviews conducted in Senegal in May 2014. Furthermore, this dynamic was confirmed by historian M. Diouf and philosopher S. B. Diagne, New York, 2014. The discriminatory implementation of photo IDs could have associated the medium not so much with surveillance of the degenerate or the deviant, but rather with the privilege that distinguished elite classes of citizens.

include the subject's portrait that was to be obtained discreetly, that is, without the subject's knowledge or consent.

Documents such as this show that, by the 1910s, photography had become a technology used regularly in the surveillance of religious figures in the AOF. Even if this particular file does not include a photograph, I have found that images were indeed produced and archived. For instance, on March 10, 1906, the Governor General of AOF, Ernest Roume writes to the Governor General in Mauritania where Bamba was in forced exile, requesting two copies of the Saint's photo (ANS 19 G). This letter is of great importance because it attests to the fact that there were indeed other photos of the Mouride leader in the colonial filing system, as Roberts and Roberts (2000a: 248, 2007: 54) had presumed (see also Coulon 1988b: 127).

But the question remains, even within the AOF targeted employment of photography, under which circumstances was Bamba's photo produced? At the ANS, I found that on May 12, 1916, the acting Governor General Joseph Clozel wrote to the *Service des affaires civiles* stating that the new Governor of Senegal, Raphaël Antonetti, had put forward 100 francs for Marty to establish a "photographic documentation concerning the principal Islamic personalities and buildings in the colony" (ANS 13 G 67 letter n. 642). Each photo had been developed in three copies and he was including two collections of fifty-six photographs processed by the "young Chinese Wissini of Rufisque for 0,75 a piece" (*ibid.*) (fig. 7).³³ The colonial administration was then most likely responsible for the production of the shots, including Bamba's, that were then given to a professional studio, that of Wissin, for their development. Considering that Antonetti took his position as Governor on May 13, 1914, that Clozel wrote his letter on the 12th of May 1916, and that Bamba's photograph was published for the first time in 1917—as none of Marty's earlier publications included any photo of him—it is likely that Bamba's photo was taken sometime between May 1914 and May 1916. Most crucially, the photograph was possibly commissioned, alongside the other fifty-five, specifically for the publication, rather than for a general index-card. If we closely look at the portrait, we notice that while slightly out of focus, it foregrounds a sitter who had the time to pose in front of his mosque, aware of the photographer facing him. Within the range of Muslim notables' portraits included in Marty's publication, Bamba's is the most composed one, possibly indicating the sitter's relative sense of familiarity with both the photographer and the technological apparatus. With his facial features that conceal more than they reveal, the Mouride leader seems to be scrutinizing the photographer as much as the latter is trying to fix him on his negative. This

33. Rather than "Chinese," Victor Wissin Benehoane was a photographer originally from Taiwan working in Ivory Coast and Senegal in the 1910s (NIMIS 2005: 123).

portrait bears the traces of a tense power relation riddled with mutual suspicion. Historian David Robinson (1999: 195-196) describes the rapport between Bamba and the colonial authorities as a “*simultaneous* combination of close surveillance by the French, constant communication between the two sides and collaboration in the economic development of the peanut basin.”³⁴ The need to control but also cooperate may explain why Marty (1917: 327-331) included in his 1917 volume an annex titled, “A note by Cheikh Bamba, de M’baké, on the most brilliant of organized Governments, that is, on the French Government.” As suggested by Khadim Mbacké (Mbacké & Hunwick 2005: 49-50), this text was most likely inauthentic or at least heavily edited, yet it highlights France’s desperate measures to obtain Bamba’s loyalty and, ironically, his actual blessing. It also opens up the possibility that Bamba knew of Marty’s forthcoming volumes. Produced for a publication rather than a classified archive, Bamba’s photo does not frame him as an anonymous ethnographic type, but as a leader the French desperately sought to know, subdue, and lure to the point of honoring him in 1919 with the *La Croix de la Légion d’Honneur*, the highest French order of merit—one that Bamba never wore.

Accounting for the Next *Énoncé*: From Surveillance to Mysticism

In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay (2008: 138) analyzes a photograph, whose image she does not provide but which she substitutes with a diagram delineating the contours of the figures captured within its frame. The diagram features two armed soldiers standing behind the dead body of a Palestinian lying on the ground. They face a third soldier holding a camera to commemorate his colleagues and their trophy. The photo that this man snapped—together with the soldiers’ “action”—seem irreversible. What we do see, however, is different. We do not see through the lens of the soldier; we are witnessing the scene from another angle documented by a second photographer. Once we realize the chasm between the two frames—that of the soldier and ours—the “action” is suddenly, but inevitably, transformed. As Azoulay explains, in immortalizing that moment, the second photographer “restored the conditions of plurality to the space of action” by including an alternative perspective (*ibid.*: 141-142). She concludes that: “although plurality cannot erase structural inequalities and discrepancies between the different protagonists, the space of plurality undermines the apparently stable condition of domination” (*ibid.*: 142).

34. Emphasis is mine. On the resistance-collaboration dichotomy, see ROBINSON (1999: 203-206), THIOUB (2005: 94), HARRISON (1988: 166) and SEARING (2002: chap. 3).

In the study of the histories of photography in Africa, where the medium often arrived at the height of the colonial enterprise in a climate of political oppression, Azoulay's theoretical approach resonates powerfully. Amadou Bamba's iconic portrait, whose origin is deeply embedded in the creation of the colonial library, becomes a perfect example with which to test Azoulay's argument. What happens if our account of the image's origin and significance does not stop at the first "action" but includes the "next *énoncé*" or "utterance" (Azoulay 2008: 138)? What happens if we move beyond the colonial articulation and look for subsequent actions and accounts? If in the previous sections, I considered the French colonial motivations in producing and using this image, in this final part, I wish to move the spotlight to the next *énoncé*, that of Mouride *talibés*, the most attentive owners and avid users of the black and white portrait.

In this chronological account, the first *énoncé* involves the appropriation and circulation of Bamba's portrait beyond the colonial circles. I argue that it was Marty's publication that made the image accessible to a Senegalese audience. First, the 1917 volumes featured, alongside Bamba's portrait, two additional images: one of Ibra Fall, the leader of the Baay Fall, and another of El-Hadji Malick Sy, the founder of the Tijāniyya in Senegal. Just as with Bamba's image, those two portraits became master icons, which can presently be found virtually everywhere in Senegal, thus indicating Marty's volumes as the shared source.³⁵ Second, while Mouride disciples often describe Bamba's Djourbel image as the only existing portrait of their Cheikh,³⁶ archival documentation discussed herein shows that the colonial administration had in fact collected others as early as 1906.³⁷ If the portrait's negative had been the source of Bamba's infinitely reproduced icon, other images—besides those published by Marty—would have entered the public arena too. Although Bamba's black and white image was not the only existing photo in the colonial files, it was the only portrait that circulated—alongside that of Malick Sy and Ibra Fall—therefore pointing to Marty's book as the common and original source.

Historian Christopher Harrison (1988: 135) argues that it is difficult to ascertain how widely read Marty's book was. Nonetheless, he found that in April 1917, Ernest Leroux, who was responsible for publishing all of Marty's studies, offered the Governor-General 167 copies of *L'Islam au Sénégal* for 1,500 francs (*ibid.*). Harrison did not find evidence of the actual acquisition,

35. On portraits of other Senegalese leaders, see ROBERTS (2013) and ROBERTS & ROBERTS (2000a, 2000b).

36. Serigne Moudo Bousso Gueye, personal communication, Touba, Senegal, 2014.

37. ANS 19G circular 10 mars 1906. Researcher and librarian Gilles Le Ouzon argues that there was another postcard depicting Bamba on a horse taken by Pierre Tachet (G. Le Ouzon, personal communication, Saint Louis, Senegal, 2012).

but three months later the Governor-General Van Vollenhoven suggested to the Governor of Senegal that each *cercle* should have two copies of the book (*ibid*). Considering the popularity of such volumes, it is possible that they were also available in bookshops in the main urban centers where Syrians and Moroccans were selling chromolithographs and other religious material (Paoletti 2015: 93). In terms of date range, it is difficult to situate precisely the image's introduction into networks of mass distribution. If glass painting was the earliest and most popular medium used locally to reproduce religious icons, one of the oldest that has survived, a 1930s portrait of El Hadj Malick Sy (fig. 8), points to that decade as the possible time frame during which Marty's images had entered the public domain through private demand and consumption.

The act of circulating, reproducing and using Bamba's photograph as a devotional object is possibly one of the most powerful *énoncés*, where the image is used for a purpose other than surveillance. Yet, in recovering the archaeology of this image, I wish to consider Mourides' accounts of this portrait's genesis.

During my fieldwork, when I asked about the origin of the image, rarely was Paul Marty referenced as a source. In most cases, interviewees were either not familiar with the publication, or quickly mentioned it *en passant*. The guardian of the mosque of Djourbel, Serigne Teïba Gueye, explained that the photograph was taken when Bamba was praying at the mosque and was asked to be immortalized for posterity; the original photograph is one that the Saint kept himself.³⁸ Cheikh Samb, the archivist in Touba, instead maintained that the only reason why the photographer managed to fix Bamba's silhouette was because the latter had given his permission.³⁹

In the dozen interviews I conducted on this topic, Mouride *talibés* regularly stressed the photo's exceptionality. The image was never described as evidence of Bamba's submission; on the contrary, it was treasured as a powerful and empowering representation of their leader. In particular, the recurrent statement that Bamba had given his consent to the photographic event is an important reversal of the classic scenario whereby the colonial subject is a passive victim robbed of their likeness and dignity. If we return to the terms of Azoulay's civil contract of photography, these statements reinstate Bamba as an equal player in the negotiation, one where he and his spectators—have the power to re-act, and re-frame the image and its meaning.

Unlike other portraits of political martyrs and national heroes that have become icons of resistance—think of Patrice Lumumba or Samori Touré—Bamba's likeness primarily remains a religious image, one that is used by his

38. Serigne T. Gueye, personal communication, Djourbel, Senegal, 2014.

39. C. Samb, personal communication, Touba, Senegal, 2014.

followers within their daily devotional practices: it is touched, worn, caressed, studied and prayed upon. The pious Mouride—that is, someone who is used to meditating on the image of the Saint and is deeply invested in his icon—may distinguish “good” from “bad” reproductions. “The sandals have never been red!” *talibé* Cheikh Same Niang exclaimed, shocked in seeing Gora Mbengue’s libertine representation (fig. 9).⁴⁰ The glass painter not only reversed the way in which the Saint wore his scarf—he noticed—but represented both hands, both feet and added red sandals. To many interviewees in Touba, these departures from the photograph were not acceptable and generated some level of resentment. In this sense, the difference between a “good” and a “bad” representation is established in relation to the iconographic qualities of the master portrait. What may upset some followers does not hinge on who produced the image (Chinese factories *vs.* an enlightened Mouride artist) nor does it strictly rely on the nature of the medium—photography *vs.* painting—but rather, on its iconic accuracy.⁴¹ So, why are those details so precious?

In analyzing the portrait, Cheikh Samb explained that the missing hands and foot are signifiers of the sitter and portrait’s mystic nature. The presence of only one foot has been interpreted as Bamba’s ability to transverse the human and divine worlds (Roberts & Roberts 1998: 30). The eyes that “cannot and should not be seen” point to the interior vision of a Saint “who effaces himself in profound meditation” (*ibid.*: 31). The impenetrability of his facial details, alongside the radiance of his bodily presence, recall the rare representations of the Prophet Muhammad in his human attributes (Sylla 2001). Roberts and Roberts (1998: 29) discussed how within Sufi symbolism the wide *boubou* and sleeves introduce Bamba as a Saint, because “faith is seen as a cloak.” Similarly, the dark shadow on the floor is a trace of the path for his *talibés* to follow (*ibid.*: 30).

The fact that the photograph reveals as much as it conceals becomes an important factor in what is essentially a mystic religious practice, one where the leader’s visions and miracles are crucial traits of his charisma. If the photograph renders Bamba’s spiritual exceptionality visible, it is then understandable why each detail—the enveloped gaze, the missing hands and foot—is central to any representation of Bamba. Together these details constitute the traces of his sanctity and act as powerful symbols that will inspire the follower’s practice. In addition to the portrait’s unique formal qualities, the fact that it is the only surviving image of the Saint, the surprisingly missing negative, also further reinforces the mystical power of the

40. C. S. Niang, personal communication, Touba, Senegal, 2014.

41. For a more detailed discussion on the interpretation of Bamba’s portrait as icon rather than an index, see PAOLETTI (2015: 101-108).

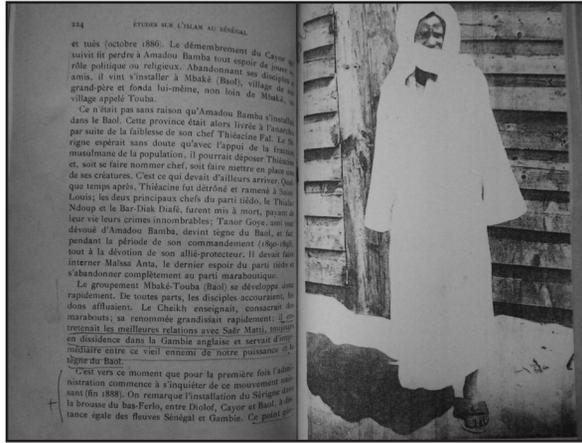
image and its protagonist. In looking at this image, many Mourides do not see it as a physical trace or document of Bamba as a man. What they see is a religious icon and a potent source of *baraka* that can guide his community of *talibés* around the world.⁴²

It is not a coincidence that the portrait became so popular: these qualities all fit within a Sufi Mouride worldview and, I would add, a larger Islamic aesthetic. By the time Marty published his 1917 volume, in Senegal there was a high demand for chromolithographs of Sufi Saints imported from the Middle East and carefully crafted to symbolically represent the sitter and his ideals (Paoletti 2015: 88). As art historian Griselda Pollock (1994: 14) has argued, “the efficacy of representation relies on a ceaseless exchange with other representations.” The desire for and use of Bamba’s image should not be seen as emerging from a void, but rather inserted in a larger “image world”⁴³ that thrived through devotional practices that regularly employed both photography and portraiture.⁴⁴ While it is crucial to unveil the intricacies of this portrait’s genesis in the construction of the colonial library, it is equally, if not more, important to consider the contradictory layering of attitudes, and sentiments surrounding its origin that make evident the instability of the photographic language—even when the colonizer is behind the camera. As anthropologist Deborah Poole (1997: 7) has argued, “it is necessary to abandon that theoretical discourse which sees ‘the gaze’—and hence the act of seeing—as a singular or one-sided instrument of domination and control.” Addressing the polysemy of an image does not amount to summarily or apologetically dismissing any colonial politics of domination. Rather, it means considering responses that unexpectedly, but profoundly, subvert the colonial order and even Western monolithic assumptions about the nature of photography.

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42. Here I am not suggesting that images can be *either* documentary *or* mystical. Rather, I wish to move the focus from the French’s use and interpretation of the photo as primarily indexical to a more holistic view that sees it as also iconic and symbolic. For a discussion of Mouride documents as both evidentiary and imbued with *baraka*, see DE JONG (2016).
43. POOLE (1997: 7) states that “it is a combination of these relationships of referral and exchange among images themselves, and the social and discursive relations connecting image-makers and consumers, that I think of as forming an ‘image world.’”
44. For a discussion on the relation between Senegalese Sufism and devotional portraiture, see PAOLETTI (2015).

FIG. 1. — DETAIL FROM ÉTUDES SUR L'ISLAM AU SÉNÉGAL (MARTY 1917A: 224NP)



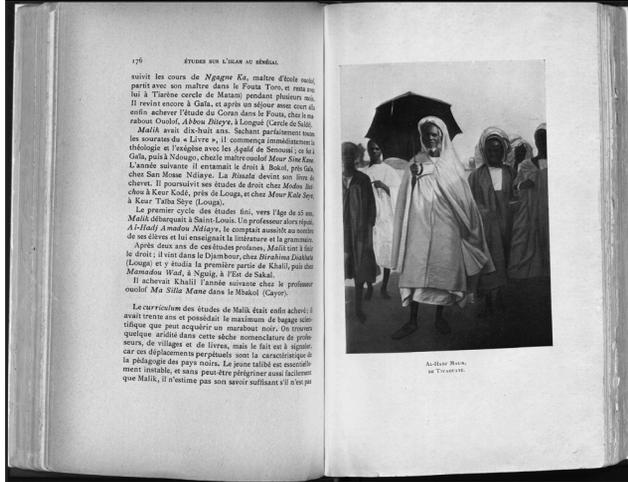
Photograph: G. Paoletti, Archives nationales du Sénégal, Dakar, June 3, 2013.

FIG. 2. — “AMADOU BAMBA (DIOURBEL),” ÉTUDES SUR L'ISLAM AU SÉNÉGAL (MARTY 1917A: 222NP)



Photograph: G. Paoletti, Columbia University, Butler Library, September 10, 2013.

FIG. 3. — UNIDENTIFIED PHOTOGRAPHER, PORTRAIT OF EL HADJ MALICK SY, CA. 1910S, FROM MARTY (1917A: 177)



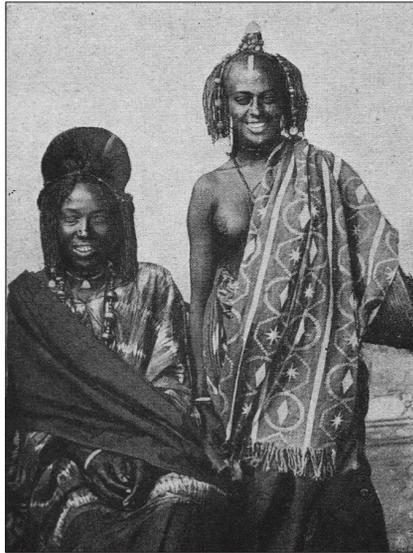
Photograph: G. Paoletti, September 10, 2013.

FIG. 4. — UNIDENTIFIED SITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER, CA. 1910S, FROM MARTY (1917A: 79)



Photograph: G. Paoletti, September 10, 2013.

FIG. 5. — ATTRIBUTED TO THE NOAL BROTHERS, "FEMMES PEUL DU FERLO," FROM MARTY (1917B: 249)



Photograph: G. Paoletti, September 10, 2013.

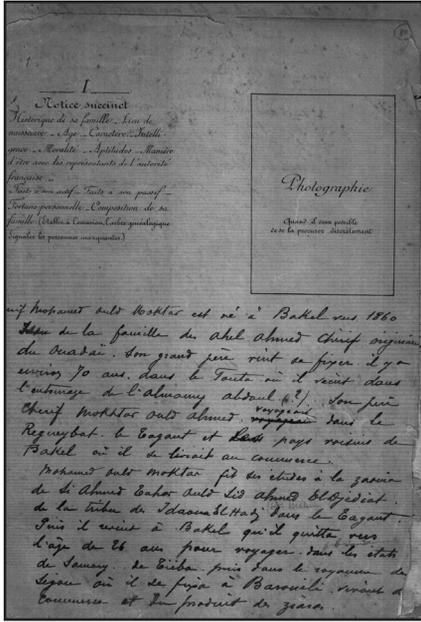


FIG. 6. — ACCESSION N° 15G103, ARCHIVES NATIONALES DU SÉNÉGAL

Photograph: G. Paoletti, June 3, 2013.

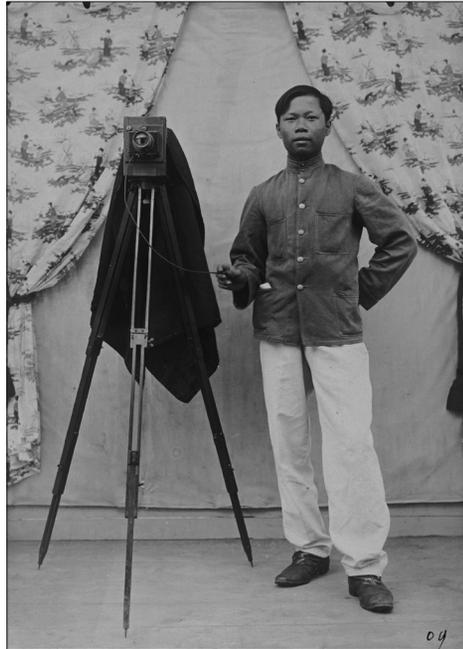


FIG. 7. — SELF PORTRAIT WISSIN PHOTOGRAPHER, RUFISQUE (SENEGAL), COLLECTION OF JEAN-PHILIPPE DEDIEU

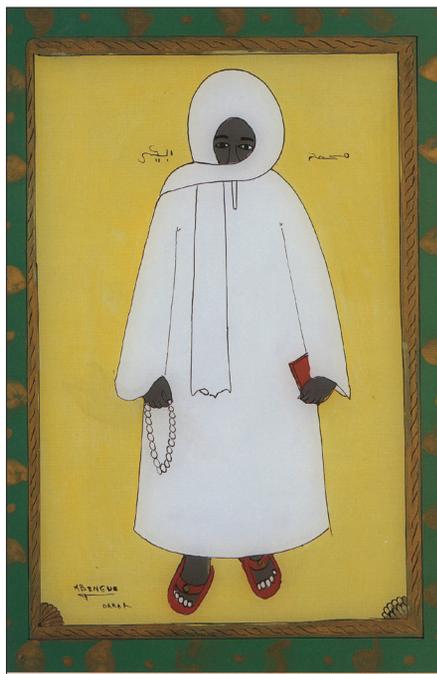
Retrieved: G. Paoletti, February 23, 2015.



FIG. 8. — UNIDENTIFIED ARTIST,
EL HADJ MALICK SY, CA. 1930S,
GLASS PAINTING, 50 X 40CM,
PRIVATE COLLECTION

From Bouttiaux (1994: 71).

FIG. 9. — GORA MBENGUE,
AMADOU BAMBA, CA. 1950S,
GLASS PAINTING, 48 X 33CM,
PRIVATE COLLECTION



From Bouttiaux (1994: 58).

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ABSTRACT

This article offers an archaeology of one of the most popular and widely reproduced images across Senegal and its diaspora: the portrait of Amadou Bamba (1853-1927), founder of the Mouride Sufi Brotherhood. Seen as a powerful source of *baraka* or blessing, the black and white portrait can be spotted virtually everywhere in Mouride spaces from Touba to New York, from Dakar to Beijing. Despite its physical ubiquity, the photograph's genesis remains shrouded in mystery. Building on two years of archival and field research in Senegal, this article seeks to reframe the significance of this iconic image by focusing on narratives of its origins. Taken between 1914 and 1916 to illustrate Paul Marty's 1917 *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal*, this portrait was one, among many others, that the colonial administration collected in an effort to monitor and document the activity of Senegal's local Muslim leaders. In an attempt to bypass a Foucauldian view of photography, which reveals mechanisms of control and yet mutes the "Other," this article also considers

Mouride disciples' accounts of this image's history. Their analyses subvert monolithic interpretations of the portrait as an image of surveillance and render the instability of the photographic language, even when the colonizer is behind the camera.

Keywords: Senegal, Amadou Bamba, Mouridism, icon, Islam, photography.

RÉSUMÉ

À la recherche de l'Origin(al). Le portrait photographique du Mouride saint sufi Amadou Bamba. — Cet article propose une archéologie de l'une des images les plus populaires et les plus largement reproduites au Sénégal et à travers sa diaspora: le portrait d'Amadou Bamba (1853-1927), le fondateur de la confrérie soufie mouride. Considéré comme une puissante source de *baraka* ou de bénédiction, ce portrait en noir et blanc peut être repéré pratiquement partout dans les espaces mourides de Touba à New York, de Dakar à Pékin. Malgré son omniprésence physique, la genèse de cette photographie reste mystérieuse. S'appuyant sur deux années de recherche d'archives et de terrain au Sénégal, cet article vise à recadrer la signification de cette image iconique en focalisant sur les récits de ses origines. Ce portrait, pris entre 1914 et 1916 pour illustrer les *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal* de Paul Marty publié en 1917, fut l'un parmi de nombreux autres recueillis par l'administration coloniale dans le cadre de la surveillance et de la documentation de l'activité des dirigeants musulmans sénégalais. En s'efforçant de contourner une vision foucauldienne de la photographie, qui révèle les mécanismes de contrôle tout en rendant l'« Autre » muet, cet article prend en considération les récits des disciples mourides sur l'histoire de cette image. L'analyse de ces sources essentielles va à l'encontre des interprétations monolithiques de ce portrait comme étant une image de surveillance, et met en évidence l'instabilité du langage photographique, même lorsque le colonisateur est derrière la caméra.

Mots-clés : Sénégal, Amadou Bamba, mouridisme, icône, islam, photographie.