

Introduction

“THEY COME by trainloads, cars, trucks, horse- and donkey-drawn carts, and some by foot. They are all headed to Tuubaa.”¹ This is how, in 1949, French administrator Paul Merle Des Isles described the Great Māggal (annual pilgrimage) of Tuubaa held annually on the forty-seventh day of the Muslim calendar.² The same scene can be witnessed today, but pilgrims now come from the four corners of the earth (some by chartered flights), and over the years their numbers have soared. When Des Isles submitted his report, there were a hundred thousand visitors that year; now the Māggal attracts four million people on average to this annual pilgrimage.³ The story told in this book is about these pilgrims: a story about the dispersal of a Muslim immigrant community across Africa, Europe, and the United States. It is also a story about the connections that members of this wayward community still have to one another.

The Muridiyya on the Move contributes to emerging scholarship on transnational Muslim migration by exploring the religious life of Murids, a community of Senegalese Muslims that has been migrating across West Africa, Europe, and the United States for over half a century. More precisely, the book traces the history of Murid migrations and settlement to selected cities in Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, France, and the United States from the end of World War II to the first decade of the twenty-first century. By focusing on Murid use of space, the book uncovers the relationships between place making, religious identity, and the politics of belonging. I argue that for Murid immigrants, the appropriation of space and the public performance of piety serve as instruments for the construction of a diasporic collective identity. This collective identity, in turn, facilitates

Murid immigrants' insertion into the cultural matrix of host societies and their acceptance as members of the citizenry. I explore the contradictions and tensions involved in the construction of a transnational, collective Murid identity and reveal how this process of identity making generates conflicting understandings of the role of Murid ideology and institutions abroad, reframing the relationships between immigrants and the Murid leadership back in Senegal.

The Muridiyya on the Move investigates the transformative power of Murid disciples in the diaspora. In African studies, the word "diaspora" often evokes people of African descent in the New World who share an experience of enslavement and forced displacement. The diaspora I am interested in here is the product of European imperial rule in Africa and postcolonial migration. It is better conceived as a transnational diaspora, which Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron define as a diaspora consisting of "migrants who are fully encapsulated neither in the host-society nor in their native land but who nonetheless remain active participants in the social settings of both locations."⁴ As we will see, while Murids share some characteristics of the transnational migrant as described by Schiller and Fouron, Murid immigrants present some of their own unique traits. They are simultaneously present at home and abroad. This double embeddedness is made possible, on the one hand, by the building of networks that allow for continuous movement, back and forth, of people, goods, memories, and ideas between the diaspora and the Muridiyya's holy city of Tuubaa in Senegal. On the other hand, this relation is strengthened by the symbolic transformation of the Muridiyya holy city into a portable sacred site that can be relocated across the diaspora.

Most scholars insist on the "rigid hierarchy" of the Murid order (*tariqa*, or "way," in Arabic); they emphasize the unidirectionality of the flow of power and authority from the leadership in Tuubaa, which is construed as shaping culture and behavior. I argue that Murid migrants have had an equally important role. Migrants are agents of change, and they serve as the ties that bind Tuubaa to the diaspora. They have harnessed the transformative power of mobility and distance from the Shaykhs and holy cities of the Muridiyya in Senegal to put their own stamp on the order. Immigrants, for example, built the first modern hospital in Tuubaa at a time when the Murid leadership was mostly invested in building and refurbishing places of worship.⁵ For these migrants, the diaspora offers a discursive space where they articulate aspects of Murid culture that draw from the order's core tenets and rely upon their own interpretations to meet discrete spiritual and existential needs. Diasporic space

forms the canvas on which these reinterpretations and refabulations of Murid history, memory, and culture are inscribed. In this book, I use space as an entry point to demonstrate how Murid migrants transform the Muridiyya from the bottom up. By focusing on processes of space making in the diaspora, I document the innovative power, creativity, and influence of a community that scholars of the Muridiyya often portray as passive recipients of change.

The events of September 11, 2001, in New York City and the subsequent attacks in London, Madrid, and Paris have generated unprecedented interest in the study of Muslim immigrants, especially in Western countries. But these studies focus primarily on Muslims of North African, Middle Eastern, and Asian origin. They are mostly concerned with documenting an assumed incompatibility between Islam and “Western culture” or the danger of political Islam. This book offers fresh insight by focusing on an understudied immigrant community. My study is guided by several lines of inquiry: How do Murid immigrants make spaces where they can express their faith and identity? What are the inevitable compromises and concessions that these efforts entail? How are structures of power and authority within immigrant religious organizations affected by a vibrant diaspora? How do home communities and diasporic communities influence each other’s practices, identities, and aspirations?

The Muridiyya on the Move challenges three fundamental starting points of many existing histories of African migrations. First, this book deemphasizes the role of external stimulus (e.g., the state, capital) often portrayed as the driving force behind the migration. While recognizing the impact of material incentive to migration, it emphasizes the equally central role of social practices from below developed within the confines of family and religious networks in influencing decisions to migrate. I particularly highlight the role of the *dahira*, an urban prayer circle that for over half a century has functioned as a crucible for the socialization of Murid immigrants.

The *dahira* was instrumental in the expansion of the Muridiyya in urban areas across Senegal and around the world. It first emerged as an alternative to the *daara* (Murid rural working school), functioning as a site for identity formation and social action for recently urbanized Murid immigrants. Gradually, the *dahira* incorporated rituals that solidified Murid historical memory through religious commemorations such as pilgrimages and processions. More recently, the *dahira* has moved beyond mere performance of memory to inscribing this memory in urban space by appropriating and suffusing this space with Murid culture.

Second, the book underscores the role of internal African migration, which is often overlooked in the literature, and scrutinizes the popular media that tend to overdramatize the journey of African refugees and migrants struggling to cross the Mediterranean into Europe. While much emphasis is put on migration out of Africa, two-thirds of African migrants remain on the continent.⁶ This is reflected among disciples of the Muridiyya Sufi order in Europe and the United States, most of whom have sojourned in cities in West and central Africa before moving on to their European and North American destinations.

Third, *The Muridiyya on the Move* documents the centrality of space making in Muslim immigrants' strategy for integration with host societies. While some Muslim intellectuals such as Taha Jabir al-Alwani emphasize the role of judicial adjustment by reconfiguring sharia law to adapt to the Western context (*fiqh* of minority Muslims in the West),⁷ among the Murids, accommodation is sought through localized efforts at place making that include the appropriation of space and public performance of piety through urban pilgrimages and processions. By appropriation of space, I do not mean taking space that belongs to others. I am pointing to cultural practices that Murids participate in to give meaning to a space they already consider their home. I look at appropriation not as an act of subtraction but as one of addition: a contribution to cultural diversity. To make the countries they settle their own, Murids strive to inscribe their own culture into their living space.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE MURIDIYYA

The founding and development of the Muridiyya was intimately associated with the spiritual growth of Ahmadu Bamba and the socioeconomic and political context in the Wolof (Wolof are the majority ethnic group in Senegal and most Murids are Wolof) states of Senegal in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ahmadu Bamba was born in the early 1850s to a family of Muslim clerics, and like his forebears, he devoted his life to earning the credentials that would make him worthy of his ancestry. However, in contrast to the family tradition that advocated cultural conformism, political neutrality, and accommodation of rulers, Bamba had a different vision of the cleric's role in society. He grew up in a period of turmoil in the Wolof states marked by the intensification and then suppression of the slave trade, civil wars, and French colonial conquest. Bamba noted the failure of the Muslim establishment to remedy the situation, whether through jihad or through collaboration with secular rulers.

The solution he offered was rooted in Sufi tradition that emphasizes social and geographical distance from temporal power holders, education of the soul, hard work, and strict submission to the shaykh (spiritual guide). He was convinced that the best way to heal society's sicknesses was to transform the people that composed the society. And for him, the best way to transform the people was religious and social renewal through education.

The Muridiyya that Bamba founded in the late nineteenth century was the educational tool to bring about this renewal. It was a response both to the contemporary sociopolitical situation he detested and to the classical system of education he blamed for its inadequate response to the challenges of the time. For Bamba, the seeds of change had to be sown in peoples' hearts and souls if an enduring impact was to be achieved. The type of education he initiated encompassed body, mind, and soul: he called for a new pedagogy that differed from that of the classical Qur'anic schools, which primarily focused on the transmission of knowledge. The new system was centered on the *daara tarbiyya* (rural working school). It accommodated atypical disciples (grownups), used unconventional teaching methods (work and meditation), and focused on holistic transformation of the disciples.

In the context of aggressive French encroachment and pressure on Wolof economic, political, and social institutions, the Muridiyya became a rallying point for those of different social strata who joined the organization. By 1889, Ahmadu Bamba had attracted a large following, and his increasing popularity in the newly conquered provinces of Bawol and Kajor made the French and their African auxiliaries increasingly nervous. Between 1895 and 1912, suspected of preparing to wage jihad, Bamba was the target of increasing French repression that eventually sent him into exile in central Africa and Mauritania and kept him under house arrest in Senegal until his death in 1927. The Muridiyya grew dramatically during this period of political conflict, and its popularity was further enhanced when its leader was sent back to his native land of Bawol in 1912.

Furthermore, Murid farmers soon became pillars of the colony's economy as they made substantial contributions to the production of peanuts, which was the only colonial cash crop produced in Senegal. By 1912, the French had worked out a policy of accommodation with the Murids: the cost of suppressing the Muridiyya far outweighed the trust they could earn by establishing stable and peaceful relationships with Bamba and his disciples.⁸ By the eve of World War I, the Muridiyya had gained a modicum of recognition from the French, although Muridiyya leaders would

remain under close surveillance.⁹ Despite French pressure, the order's following continued to grow. After the establishment of Ahmadu Bamba in Diourbel, French sources estimated Murid disciples at over seventy thousand—in the early 1950s colonial estimations put the number of Ahmadu Bamba's followers at three hundred thousand. As of 2019, the Muridiyya had over five million disciples, many of them immigrant workers, scattered across Africa, Europe, and North America.¹⁰

THE MURIDIYYA AND MIGRATION

Although the history of colonial-era labor migration in Africa has attracted much scholarly interest over the years, postcolonial internal African migration—particularly the cultural dimension of this migration—has been largely overlooked by scholars.¹¹ Bruce Whitehouse rightly observes, “South-South migration in general and intra-African migration in particular, has been all but invisible to officials, policy makers and researchers.”¹² The literature on Murid migration reflects this trend. While there is extensive scholarship on Murid immigrants in France, Italy, Spain, and the United States, we know very little about Murid migration and immigration within the continent of Africa, including Senegal. Here I explore dynamics of rural-rural migration in the Murid heartland of western-central Senegal, the circumstances for the transition to rural-urban migration, and finally the migration out of Senegal. The continuities, discontinuities, similarities, and differences between Murid migration and broader Senegalese migration will be investigated.

Migration is foundational to the Muridiyya. Its role in the development of the Murid order took different forms, which were influenced by changing economic, political, and social circumstances. Some of these transformations were induced by external forces; others were internal to the Murid organization. Before World War II, the Muridiyya was mostly made up of rural peanut farmers, and migrants were often confined to rural areas. Their movement followed the rhythm of the agricultural cycle and the vagaries of rain patterns.¹³ Rural-urban migration began in earnest in the postwar era and accelerated in the 1960s after Senegal acquired national sovereignty. The successive droughts of the late 1970s, the drastic structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, and a transformative Murid leadership stimulated migration outside Senegal. Murid migrants headed to countries across West Africa, central Africa, then Europe: and by the mid-1980s, a community of Murid migrants had formed in the United States.

From the Muridiyya's inception, the Murid leadership has used mobility as a political and organizational device. Facing an administration wary

of any community with the potential to challenge its authority, Ahmadu Bamba adopted migration as a means to placate colonial rulers, constantly changing his residence to avoid having large gatherings of disciples around him. Between 1884, the year of the Muridiyya's founding, and 1895, the year he was tried and deported to Gabon, Ahmadu Bamba had settled three villages: Daaru Salaam, the Muridiyya holy city of Tuubaa, and Mbakke Jolof. He also elevated many of his senior disciples to the status of shaykhs and encouraged them to form their own communities. Before his exile to Gabon, Bamba had appointed dozens of shaykhs, and many among these were founders of one or more villages. The French administrator, Lieutenant Lucien Nekkach, estimated that in 1952 the Muridiyya had two hundred shaykhs.¹⁴ The actual number might have been larger.

Historians suggest that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Murid villages became refuges for freed slaves and defeated Wolof warriors for whom joining the Muridiyya represented a form of passive resistance to colonial rule.¹⁵ There is certainly some truth to these assumptions, but there were also other forces at work that contributed to Murid migration and dispersal.

Guy Rocheteau, who conducted research on Murid migration in the early 1970s, offers insightful analysis of the causes of mobility in Wolof society.¹⁶ Among the Wolof, Rocheteau argues, migration was throughout history a strategy to cope with household dysfunctions and conflicts. These dysfunctions were the result of discordances between the structure of household authority and land management. In polygamous Wolof families, young unmarried males subjected to the authority of their father and older brothers were often torn between their obligation to work on the family farm to support their extended family and the aspiration to achieve economic independence and establish their own household. Tension became particularly intense after the death of the father, and young males became subordinate to an older brother who might have had a different birth mother (and lacked the father's authority). In this situation, migration is often the solution. The older brother would sometimes move out and settle in another village where land was available, or young bachelors might emigrate to start a family elsewhere. Rocheteau argues that Murid villages were particularly attractive to these migrants. These villages were located in newly colonized and sparsely populated areas where access to land was easier for unmarried immigrants who could wed and achieve head-of-household status. The Muridiyya then offered alternative ways to resolve household conflicts caused by demographic pressure, land scarcity, and social dysfunctions.

The transfer of Ahmadu Bamba to Diourbel in 1912 marked an important turning point in Murid migration. Bamba was assigned permanent residence in this colonial town after years of exile and house arrest in and out of Senegal. Diourbel is located in the province of Bawol, Ahmadu Bamba's native land and the heartland of the Muridiyya. Murids understood that their shaykh's settlement in Diourbel marked the dawn of a new era that at least promised peace and stability in the shaykh's relations with the French. Ahmadu Bamba also realized that he might never recover his freedom of movement, but the détente in his relationship with the colonial administration provided an opportunity to build up his organization. Migration and space making were central to the expansion of the Muridiyya. As soon as Bamba was authorized to build his house outside of the colonial quarter where he was initially interned, he invited his senior disciples to join him and build their own houses near his. He also instructed his devotees to create new villages in eastern Bawol, the heartland of the Mbakke clan. Responding to their leader's appeal, Murid shaykhs founded a string of new villages and reoccupied formerly abandoned ones to provide structure and leadership to the growing number of disciples joining them.¹⁷ By 1926, colonial administrators reported, "The Murids had conquered the whole province of Bawol."¹⁸ Murids continued to found new villages, even after the passing of Ahmadu Bamba in 1927.

After Ahmadu Bamba's death, the migration slowed down because of succession disputes. But it picked up again quickly after those disputes were resolved. Murid migration expanded to central and eastern Senegal and took a new form under the guidance of shaykhs engaged in the cultivation of peanuts. Migrants were mostly school age, and the more mature young males (*takder*)¹⁹ confided in Murid shaykhs when it came to their acquisition of a spiritual education (*tarbiyya*), although families, including non-Murids, compelled by droughts, demographic pressure, and soil depletion also joined the movement. Mamadu Mustafa, Ahmadu Bamba's eldest son and first successor—along with some of his brothers and uncles—led the effort by founding a number of new villages in the eastern region of the former precolonial kingdom of Bawol.²⁰ This migratory movement started what scholars have termed the *front pionnier Murid* (Murid migration frontiers).²¹

French geographer Paul Pélissier notes that from its inception, the migration to eastern Senegal was an initiative of the Murid shaykhs. The colonial administration adopted a hands-off posture, appreciating the contribution that Murid migrant farmers were making to the production of peanuts, which were the backbone of Senegal's economy.²² This wave of

migration was not initiated by Ahmadu Bamba, although he gave his blessings for the creation of the new settlements; the sites targeted were on the margins or outside of the Mbakke's original heartland and most of the time close to the railroad linking Dakar to Bamako in French Soudan.²³ Villages built near train stations along the railroad served as launching pads from which Murid migrants expanded inland. The settlements functioned as *daaras tarbiyya* (working schools) rather than villages; peanut and millet cultivation instead of Qur'anic education occupied the central place in the life of the communities, which were led by ordinary disciples commissioned by their religious guides, not prestigious and learned shaykhs who led during the first phase described earlier.

There is continuity between Murid rural-rural migration and the rural-urban migration that began in earnest in the aftermath of World War II. The first Murids to settle in town were the takder, the young males that populated the rural daara tarbiyya of the front pionnier. During the idle season after the harvest from November to December, many among these disciples moved to cities where they performed menial jobs, returning to their villages before the first rains in June. Their gradual settlement in town as permanent residents was due to three things. First, powerful Murid families established fiefdoms on the frontier zones that other families respected to avoid frictions, limiting possibilities for further expansion. Second, the colonial administration abandoned its laissez-faire policy, encouraging the sedentarization of Murid farmers and enacting environmental policies to protect forested areas.²⁴ Third, and more significantly, the overhaul of the relationship between France and its colonies brought about transformations that facilitated mobility.

In 1944, at the Conference of Brazzaville, France, under pressure from its colonial subjects (especially the educated elite), enacted a number of reforms to respond to demands for greater freedom and the end of oppressive colonial policies. These reforms removed some of the obstacles that stifled population movement within and between colonies. The mobility of French colonial subjects within and outside Africa was severely constrained by the Indigénat Law of 1887 and the edict of April 24, 1928. The edict mandated that French subjects of the empire obtain official permission to travel even a short distance from their residence. Both laws were rescinded in 1946 when citizenship status was formally granted to all of France's subjects in Africa within the framework of the newly established French Union.²⁵ Forced labor was also banned the same year. Now, people desiring to travel across the empire needed only an identity card. The impact of these reforms on migration was clearly on display in a memo that

the governor general sent to the lieutenant governors throughout French West Africa: "The law of 7 May 1946 which granted citizenship status to all French subjects of overseas France has rendered obsolete all regulations discriminating between French of European extraction and Frenchmen of African roots. . . . For obvious social and economic reasons, everybody should be able to move freely within the borders of each territory of the federation, and freely offers his service without hindrance as he wishes."²⁶

Among the Murids, seasonal migration to cities gradually led to permanent settlement in urban areas by a growing number of disciples, some of whom were new local converts. Nekkach estimated that the population of Murids living in the cities of Dakar and Saint-Louis grew from 140 and 150 to 15,000 and 4,000, respectively, between 1916 and 1952.²⁷ Other medium-sized Senegalese cities such as Thiès, Kaolack, and Rufisque had Murid populations of 15,000, 8,000, and 7,000, respectively, in 1952.²⁸

By the 1950s, Murids had started to migrate across Africa, using cities in Senegal as stepping-stones. They headed to cities in West Africa and central Africa, following in the footsteps of the colonial soldiers, civil servants, and professionals that preceded them there. Being the first French colony in West Africa with an advanced educational system, Senegal contributed significantly to the administration of other colonies. Colonially driven migration was clearly behind the subsequent waves of voluntary migration by ordinary Senegalese, including Murids. These voluntary migrants learned from the experience of their predecessors and seized on the opportunity their presence abroad offered.²⁹

Although also partly colonially induced, Murid international migration was also different from earlier waves of migration from the Senegal River Valley that mostly involved Haal Pulaar and Soninke speaking people. Mass Murid outmigration began in the postcolonial era at a time when earlier migration streams had slowed or ended. Unlike their predecessors, Murid migrants were not interested in government work or salaried jobs. They created their own economic niches in host countries, working as self-employed merchants, taxi drivers, hair braiders, restaurant owners, and artisans but rarely as wage earners. Among the Murid immigrants, the ubiquitous daira served as a crucible for brotherhood solidarity. It displaced ethnic affinities and hometown associations, which were central to the lives of sub-Saharan migrants, especially Soninke and Haal Pulaar. Murid immigrants' ties to their villages of origin were more tenuous; emphasis was instead on cultivating relationships with shaykhs and holy cities in Senegal. Additionally, Murid migrants showed great versatility in their destination choices, step migrating from country to country and city to city

in an incessant cycle, beautifully captured by scholar Mamadou Diouf: “He [the Murid migrant] is constantly in movement. His stopover points are hotel rooms or overcrowded apartments in the main cities of the world where merchandise is piled up. He is always just stopping off, always in transit, thus erasing the notion of a fixed residence. But a center nonetheless remains: Touba—the place of spiritual and economic investment and the desired last resting place for eternity.”³⁰

African cities were nodes in this expanding migratory movement that reached destinations in France in the first decades of the 1960s. With the “closing” of the French borders in the mid-1970s, Murid migrants moved to southern Europe and settled in Italy and Spain, where immigration policies were less restrictive. By the mid-1980s, Murid immigrants had found their way to the United States, landing in New York City. But for most of them, this American metropole was their second, third, or even fourth destination. After leaving their villages or small towns in Senegal, they would have transited through the Senegalese capital Dakar, then step migrated to cities in West Africa or central Africa and to one or more European countries before making the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. As scholar D. M. Carter noted, “The world of Mouridism in immigration is vast and extends from the holy city of Touba in Senegal to the major cities of Africa, Europe, the United States, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Australia: New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Turin, Livorno, Milan, Rome, Paris, Toulon, Lyon, Hong Kong, Berlin, London, Yaounde, and Madrid.”³¹ We will see that these migration trajectories and the experiences they offered were instrumental in shaping the lives of Murids in the diaspora.

SPACE AND PLACE MAKING

One goal of this book is to show the centrality of space making in the spiritual life of Murid disciples and to demonstrate how migrants use space as a canvas to articulate changing interpretations of the Muridiyya. My conception of space and place is informed by the work of cultural geographers, sociologists, historians, and specialists in religious studies who conceive of place as constructed reality.³² These scholars offer a heuristic definition of space and place that emphasizes the centrality of culture in the process of place making. While space is generally perceived as an abstract geometric entity primarily defined by variables such as size, shape, area, and direction, place appears as a site of “accumulated biographical experiences,”³³ a product of human agency. While space is detached from “material form and cultural interpretation,” place, by contrast, draws its significance from

infused meaning and value. It is the result of “an agglomeration of meaning.”³⁴ In sum, it is the transformative power of people, practices, objects and symbols that turns space into place. Place then embodies both physical and semiotic qualities. While the analytical distinction between space and place may not reflect the conscious intent of historical actors, it reveals the tangible impact of their culture on their living space.

The history of the Murid holy city of Tuubaa, settled by Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba, provides a good illustration of the power of culture as shaper of space. In “Matlabul Fawzayni” (Quest for happiness in the two worlds), a poem of supplication Bamba wrote soon after discovering in 1889 the site that would eventually become Tuubaa, he beseeched God to make it a sanctified city of light, peace, knowledge, and prosperity: “[God] make of my abode, the blessed city of Tuubaa, a center of knowledge, a place favorable to broadmindedness and healthy meditations that sanctifies Your name permanently. . . . Preserve the inhabitants of Tuubaa against perversion and bless them with an abundant supply of water. . . . Let all that is well-being and a benefit of the heritage from the six sides of the planet flow to my abode, the blessed city of Tuubaa.”³⁵

Bamba then ordered his disciples to dig a well that he named *ayn rahmati* (“the fountain,” or “well of mercy”). Murids believe that water from this well flows from the same source that alimets the spring of Zam-Zam in Mecca, which God made appear to save Hagar, the Prophet Ibrahim’s wife, and their son, Ishmael. Bamba envisioned building a mosque, a school to offer advanced Islamic training, and a library. His disciples built these infrastructures after his death. From a small village of a few dozen inhabitants at the close of the nineteenth century, it is now the second-largest city of Senegal after the capital, Dakar, and home to nearly a million people. The exponential growth of Tuubaa reflects its reputation as spatial embodiment of Ahmadu Bamba’s prayers.

For Sufis or followers of mystical Islam like the Murids, the effort at place making is intimately associated with the body of the shaykh, or “saint founder.” The latter is endowed with *baraka* (God-given gift of grace), which inhabits the shaykh’s words, clothes, bodily fluids, photographs, and everything he touches. Although there is disagreement about the meaning of the word, there is a consensus that *baraka* is a power that emanates from God, which He confers as He wishes but often on uncommonly pious people, on the family of the Prophet Muhammad and on His words enshrined in the Qur’an.³⁶ The potency of *baraka* continues even after the shaykh’s death. For Sufis, the soul of the dead saint remains alive in his inert but incorruptible body.³⁷ And it can escape to rush to the aide of disciples or

intercede before God in their favor. The shaykh's tomb becomes the focal point from which his baraka radiates and a privileged site of pilgrimage. This capacity to radiate indefinitely allows baraka to transcend space and time and touch the lives of disciples across generations and geographical locations.³⁸ Thus, Murid residences, businesses, and places of worship across Senegal and the diaspora are often named after Tuubaa and other sacred Murid sites and shaykhs. These names, along with Murid iconography, serve both as talismans and identity markers.

Tuubaa's connection to the diaspora is not, however, limited to its role of sacred space and source of baraka. The city benefits *de facto* from an extraterritorial status where the power of the state is restricted and authority vested in the caliph, who is Ahmadu Bamba's oldest male heir.³⁹ This administrative exceptionalism has played a significant role in the settlement and development of the city, as it affords its inhabitants unique advantages such as free water supply, lower taxes, and a relatively low cost of living.⁴⁰ Murids see Tuubaa as the perfect realization of Ahmadu's prayer enshrined in his poem "Matlabul Fawzayni." It embodies the morality, values, and ethics of the quintessential Sufi city (alcohol consumption, tobacco, and secular music are prohibited in Tuubaa).⁴¹ From a land of emigration, Tuubaa and its vicinity have become a land of immigration. Besides being a sanctified city, Tuubaa's attraction also stems from the role Murid immigrants ascribe to it. For many among the immigrants who originated from villages in the provinces of Bawol and Kajoor and have lived in Western cities for years, village life is no longer an option. Most have moved their families to the holy city. Tuubaa provides them with the amenities of urban life such as electricity, pipe water, internal plumbing, and modern health-care infrastructures while shielding them against the cultural corruption and high cost of living of Westernized metropolises.⁴²

MURID, MOBILITY, AND WORK

The Murids form a third of Senegal's population, yet according to various estimates they account for over half of Senegalese living abroad.⁴³ The disproportionate representation of Murid disciples among the Senegalese diaspora cannot be explained solely by a traditional macroeconomic approach to migration such as push-pull theory. By overemphasizing cost-benefit calculations, push-pull downplays the impact of migrants' complex circumstances, which cannot be reduced to a formula.⁴⁴ Murid migration, for example, does not concern the poor alone but involves disciples of all social statuses, especially the well-off, including shaykhs. Many among those who pioneered the migration were skilled artisans or experienced traders. It took

decades before the poor farmers in the Murid heartland of western-central Senegal followed their example. Murid migration intensified in the late 1970s and early 1980s at a time that coincided with economic contraction in the countries they settled in. Murid migrants are mostly self-employed and therefore cannot be counted as part of the “post-industrial migration” that has replaced labor and family reunion. In sum, the Murid migratory experience seems to escape the narrow supply and demand-based labor migration model that informs most theories of international migration.

Without neglecting the impact of global economic, political, ecological, and other factors associated with migration, I suggest that Murid migration and industriousness are better understood by exploring Murid cultural and religious values and some of the historical transformations that have marked the Murid order since its founding in the late nineteenth century. I contend that these values, along with specific historical circumstances, have fostered an ethos of mobility and a spirit of entrepreneurship responsible for Murid disciples’ predisposition to migration. I construe this ethos of mobility as a *habitus* that forms organically, shaped by common belonging in and continued exposure to everyday Murid culture.⁴⁵

The trajectory of Ahmadu Bamba’s life and his role as an exemplar reinforces the Murid ethos of mobility. During his many relocations and confinements by the French colonial administration of Senegal, at least from 1895, Bamba attracted a following of both young and old disciples who left their villages behind to congregate around him, thus triggering migratory waves that upset the colonial administration and disrupted traditional household power structures that bound people to the land.

But it was Bamba’s exile to Gabon that captured the imagination of Murid disciples and ingrained a culture of mobility symbolized by many of his trunks and suitcases kept as sacred relics in Murid holy places in Tubaa and Diourbel. Ahmadu Bamba’s written account of his exile, along with his hagiographers’ depictions of his deportation to Gabon, popularized the shaykh’s sacred journey, touting the spiritual rewards he garnered by braving strange and dangerous lands.⁴⁶ The most popular version of this narration reads like a vernacular geography of French West Africa and central Africa that later served as a travel guide to faithful Murid pilgrims following in their shaykh’s footsteps.⁴⁷ It narrates Bamba’s transfer from Saint-Louis, the capital of French West Africa (AOF, French acronym), to the port of Dakar. In Dakar he boarded a ship to Gabon, where he would live in exile for seven years.

After returning to Senegal in 1902, Ahmadu Bamba’s mobility was severely curtailed by colonial restrictions. But his forced sedentariness,

combined with his growing aura as a saint who overcame French machinations, turned Bamba into a magnet for disciples. Faithful Murids from all over Senegal converged to his places of detention in Mauritania and Senegal. I suggest that the waves of short- and long-term devotional migrations unleashed by Ahmadu Bamba's return to Senegal, along with the centrality of mobility in his biography, were instrumental in fostering a culture of migration among Murid disciples.

This culture of migration was wedded to a work ethic. Much has been written about the idea of work's sanctifying virtue among the Murids.⁴⁸ But when referring to work in his writings, Bamba often uses the Arabic word *khidma* (service), alongside the words *'amal* (*talabul halal*, "search for the licit"), which means "labor" or "action," and *kasb*, which means "earning," "gain," or "profit."⁴⁹

From the Murid perspective, *khidma* is a manifestation of the common attachment to the Muridiyya, a way of perpetuating and participating in Ahmadu Bamba's mission or, as Murid disciples put it, "working for Ahmadu Bamba." For Murids, prayer and other forms of worship are duties common to all Muslims; *khidma* constitutes their distinctive way of expressing love and fidelity to their shaykh, particularly by continuing his mission. The economic implication of *khidma* is important, as it results in the accumulation of wealth and prestige within the Murid organization. Economic prosperity, in turn, demonstrates the continuing potency of Ahmadu Bamba's *baraka* even after his death.

But for the disciples, even more important is their ability to contribute through their wealth, investments, and donations to the continuing manifestation of this potency. In other words, Murid disciples consider it their utmost duty to demonstrate through their labor and economic achievements the continuing efficacy of Ahmadu Bamba's prayers. Trust in Bamba's gift of grace and in the power of his prayers creates, in turn, a predisposition for risk taking. Shaykh's guidance has an impact on Murid mobility and economic resourcefulness, but it is not the most important factor.

ISLAM, RACE, GENDER, AND MIGRATION

"In France I was an African, in the United States I discovered that I was black."⁵⁰ This statement from one of Malian novelist Mammadou Mahmoud Ndongo's characters echoes certain utterances I have heard from African immigrants across Europe and the United States. It reveals the powerful impact of the racial politics of immigrants' host societies on the construction of their racial consciousness. In France, the Republic

purports to be colorblind (the word “race” was removed from the French constitution in June 2018); race is considered irrelevant to the ways the state does business. In the United States, because of a unique historical trajectory, race is central to governance, especially on issues of housing, education, and policing; all areas that have significantly impacted the lives of immigrants. Additionally, the presence of a large transplanted Black population creates a unique racial environment for African immigrants forced to navigate the treacherous and highly politicized terrain of race relations.⁵¹

In Muslim West Africa, constructions of race stem from the combination of ideas inspired by entrenched Arab racial prejudice against sub-Saharan Africans and European anti-Black racism. Bruce Hall argues that there are African histories of race that do not obey colonial logic. These histories are rooted in the encounter between Arabs who identified as Whites and referred to sub-Saharan Africans as Blacks.⁵² “When the Sahel was colonized by France beginning in the late nineteenth century, the colonial administration used these existing local conceptions of racial difference because they corresponded to European denigrations of people defined as black.”⁵³

In French West Africa, the influence of Arab racial prejudice on the colonial mind is most evident in the construction of sub-Saharan Muslims’ identity and the definition of Muslim policies.⁵⁴ The encounter between Arab and French race-making ideologies resulted in the formulation by French colonial administrators of the notion of “Islam noir” (Black Islam), of which the Muridiyya is purportedly the perfect representation. “Islam noir” is perceived as an inferior and heterodox form of Islam mired in mysticism that combines aspects of African “pagan religions” and Islam. It is predicated on the idea that because of their skin color and cultures, Black African Muslims cannot understand an abstract God and lack the intellectual capacity to apprehend the intricacies of Islamic theology and Arabic grammar.

Ahmadu Bamba’s trips to Mauritania from 1884 marked his first direct exposure to a racially diverse community and shaped his views on race and race relations expressed in his writings and practices.⁵⁵ The Mauritanian population is divided into people of Arab and Berber ancestry that identify as *bidan* (White) and a majority Black population.⁵⁶ These “Whites” form the religious elite and had many disciples in Senegal and across West Africa. But they harbored an attitude of intellectual and racial superiority and showed little respect for their darker-skinned fellow Muslims. Ahmadu Bamba’s family was affiliated with the Shaykh Sidiyya clan, a

prominent bidan clerical family, and Bamba paid them multiple visits (he also spent four years with them in exile). But the Sidiyya were not immune to the racial prejudice that affected their fellow bidan. Paul Marty quotes an unspecified work by Sidiyya Baba, Ahmadu Bamba's spiritual guide, in which Baba wrote, "The Blacks think of themselves as Muslims, however, the majority among them do not have the slightest correct notion of what Islam is really about, they ignore the Islamic ethic, its laws and principles. But we [the Moors in our capacity as teachers and spiritual guides] have a lot of responsibility to bear in this situation."⁵⁷ On another occasion, Baba expressed his scorn for the uncivilized "little black kinglets" of Senegal who did not deserve the attention the French gave them.⁵⁸

Ahmadu Bamba's biographer, Ahmad Lamine Diop, evokes two events that happened during the former's stay in Mauritania as an exile between 1903 and 1907. These events provide a window into the racial prejudice Bamba confronted. Diop indicates that when one Al-Haaj Ibrahim al-Baghadi [*sic*], an exceptionally learned scholar from Baghdad, submitted to Ahmadu Bamba and became one of his disciples, some highly regarded Mauritanian clerics (probably White) reproached him for choosing a Black person as his shaykh despite his renown and erudition.⁵⁹ When Bamba learned about this reproach, he wrote a poem touting his own status as servant of the Prophet Muhammad. He noted in the poem that no saint had ever suffered the kind of ordeal he experienced for the sake of his devotion to the prophet. He added that his sacrifices earned him the prophet's satisfaction, hinting that what mattered in God's eyes was not skin color but piety.⁶⁰ This poem was a polite rebuke to his racially prejudiced hosts. Diop also mentions that Ahmadu Bamba declined many requests from Mauritanians who wished to marry his daughters, arguing that the differences in cultures and customs should discourage such marriages. These events give some insight into the circumstances that shaped Ahmadu Bamba's own understanding of the politics of race and racial relations. He firmly believed that piety and erudition trumped all other considerations, including race, in a Muslim's quest for closeness to God.

In his magnum opus, *Masalik al-Jinan*, a book he wrote soon after returning from his first trip to Mauritania, Bamba criticized those who tied Blackness to intellectual inferiority. He wrote, "Blackness cannot be a sign of stupidity; the best among humans, without discrimination, are those who fear God the most."⁶¹ These two verses, in a book that contains several hundred, have had a disproportionate impact on Murid discourse on race, especially in the diaspora. The verses, some of which are prominently featured by Murid immigrants on posters during public

celebrations (especially in the United States), helped them build bridges with African American cultural nationalists and civil rights activists. In France, where immigrants confront the racial biases of fellow North African Muslims, Murid orthodoxy and Bamba's scholarly accomplishments are emphasized to dispel the notion of Black intellectual inferiority.

Just as life in the diaspora contributed to the reshaping of Murid racial consciousness, immigration also reframed the role of women within the Muridiyya. There is extensive scholarship on Muslim women in West Africa, but hardly any of it concerns Murid women.⁶² This literature mostly documents Muslim women's resistance to Islamic patriarchy. Reviewing the literature on the politics of Muslim women, and particularly the works of Janice Boddy and Lila Abu-Lughod, Saba Mahmood points to the analytical flaws of binary terms such as "resistance" and "subordination." She cautions against "ascription of feminist consciousness to those for whom it is not a meaningful category."⁶³ Drawing on her research on the women's mosque movement in Cairo, she emphasizes that it was critically important "to interrogate the practical and conceptual conditions under which different forms of desire emerge, including the desire for submission to recognized norm."⁶⁴ She perceptively observes that "agentival capacity is entailed not only on those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms."⁶⁵

Mahmood's insights are particularly helpful in examining the role of Murid migrant women. Exploring the experience of women in the diaspora provides insight into how Murid women are able to reconfigure and inhabit norms and chart their own path in the Murid order. I have argued that women are at the center of Murid sociability, especially in the diaspora. However, to better understand the changing roles of women as the Muridiyya transitions from a rural Sufi order of peanut farmers to an urban organization of traders and professionals, it is more productive to adopt a bottom-up approach to gender identity and roles. By a "bottom-up" approach I mean a conception of gender rooted in local constructions of masculinity and femininity (Mahmood's inhabited norms). Looking at gender from within rather than from without helps minimize the mistakes of ascribing meanings that do not always align with the historical actors' perceptions and intents.

The emergence of women as central players in the spiritual and economic life of the Muridiyya can be associated with the rise of Maam Jaara Buso (d. 1866), Ahmadu Bamba's mother, as an iconic figure and saint in the late 1950s. Maam Jaara first appeared on the scene in the context of a struggle for influence between two powerful Murid shaykhs, each of

them trying to control her shrine in the village of Poroxaan, where she was buried, and appropriate her memory.⁶⁶ But gradually these shaykhs were displaced by women who turned Bamba's mother into a symbol of feminine piety. By the 1990s, they had transformed the pilgrimage at her tomb, which attracts tens of thousands of (mostly women) worshippers annually, into the only religious celebration of its scale dedicated to a Muslim woman in all of Senegal and perhaps West Africa.⁶⁷ This event fostered a female consciousness of belonging rooted in Islamized, traditional Wolof family values that is best represented by the feminization of rituals.⁶⁸

Today, there is a global women-only daira named after Maam Jaara Buso with chapters found across Senegal and throughout the Murid diaspora. This daira makes their own agenda and holds their own events, sometimes in collaboration with male disciples and sometimes independently.⁶⁹ I suggest that the formation of this daira at a time when Murids were migrating in greater numbers to France and the United States partly explains the greater visibility of Murid women in these two countries. Other factors also helped transform the role of Murid women.⁷⁰ One can mention the increasing participation of women in the cash economy in the wake of the adoption of structural adjustment programs, immigration policies that facilitated family reunification, and employment opportunities abroad. These developments suggest that the changing meanings of gender roles within the Muridiyya are reflective of transformations beyond the confines of the order's theology and history in Senegal.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first investigates the transformation of the Muridiyya from a marginalized rural religious order of migrant peanut farmers to a powerful economic, political, and social force in the cities of Senegal.⁷¹ It focuses on Murid migration and communities in Saint-Louis and Dakar, both former capitals of French West Africa and Senegal. I then examine Murid efforts to enshrine their culture in the two cities' respective spaces and responses to their initiatives. The second chapter explores the history of Senegalese and Murid migration to Côte d'Ivoire. It documents the continuities and disjunctions between colonial and postcolonial migrations, focusing on the personal and collective experiences of Murid immigrants in Abidjan (capital city of Côte d'Ivoire) and their efforts to build a spiritually meaningful life in a foreign land. The following chapter moves the story to Gabon. I use two Murid projects in Libreville (the capital city of Gabon)—the building of the mosque of Montagne Sainte (Sacred Hill) and the creation of a Murid art market—to

explore Murid efforts to appropriate space in Gabon. I begin with an examination of the history of these two projects, and then I explain how Ahmadu Bamba's imagined biography provided a grid for a Murid sacred map of Libreville in the twenty-first century.

Chapters 4 and 5 are set in Paris. Chapter 4 offers a comprehensive reconstruction of the history of Murid migration to France, delineating the entanglement between this migration and earlier migration flows and its specificities. The chapter reveals how Murid institutions in France became contested sites where different perceptions of the Muridiyya competed. These diverging perceptions crystallized around differing conceptions of the Murid organization's vocation and the role of disciples in helping fulfill this vocation. In chapter 5, I use the Murid houses of Aulnay-sous-Bois and Taverny in the region of Ile de France as case studies to investigate Murid experiments at place making in Paris. In doing so, I explore Murid immigrants' motivations for owning property in France and how this affects their lives and specifically impacts their interactions with the French state and the Murid leadership in Senegal. I explain how geographical distance from the Murid heartland creates a discursive space where new ways of being Murid can be imagined.

The last two chapters of the book bring the story to the United States. Here I focus on Little Senegal in Harlem. I conceive of Little Senegal as an expression of the amalgamation of Murid profane and spiritual space. Unlike in France, where religion is mostly confined to the privacy of Murid communal houses, in New York, business and religion are performed in the public sphere, occupying the same space sometimes alternately, sometimes simultaneously. Chapter 6 is concerned with Murid migration and businesses. The chapter examines the unfolding of the postcolonial migration of Senegalese to the United States, focusing on Murid traders and how the entanglement between business practices, cultural performance, and spatial occupation gave birth to Little Senegal. The chapter ends with a discussion of gentrification and the slow death of the Senegalese enclave in Harlem. The last chapter of the book is an exploration of Murid place making in Harlem. It begins with an examination of the relationship between Murid disciples and the African American Muslim community. The last two sections of the chapter concentrate on the history of the Murid house in Harlem and the events surrounding Murid culture week, organized every summer and culminating in the manifestations marking Ahmadu Bamba Day on July 28.

The chapters in this book reconstruct over half a century of Murid history, focusing on mobility and cultural transformations in urban settings.

This reconstruction puts Murid migrants at center stage. By following the footsteps of Murid immigrants, we are able to document the centrality of intracontinental migration and the role of the African continent as primary destination of migrants. We are also able to trace patterns of overlapping migration streams connecting rural areas to cities across Africa and those areas beyond the continent in Europe and North America. In doing so, we are able to chart the continuities and ruptures between Murid migrations and earlier migration waves, delineating the economic, sociopolitical, and other forces that powered these population movements, including colonial rule, the economic crises of the postcolonial era, and natural disasters.

Looking at Murid history from the perspective of its diasporic periphery rather than its core in Tuubaa allows us to uncover the innovative power, creativity, and influence of ordinary disciples. Life abroad impels Murid immigrants to rethink their own positionality within the order to negotiate their adaptation to strange lands. Mobility and distance from Senegal provide space for Murids to reimagine the Muridiyya and refashion their collective identity as disciples. Murid institutions such as the *dahira* acquire new meanings to respond to the challenges of life in the diaspora. New rituals are invented, and old ones are transformed. Immigrants' creative use of space allows the embedding of Murid culture in the host societies' public sphere while building bridges with host communities. The construction of Murid collective identity abroad is a communal but contested endeavor. Differing conceptions of what should be the mission of Murid institutions in the diaspora spawn fissures that reveal disciples' conflicting politics, challenging the notion of Murid homogeneity. Some insist on the universal dimension of Bamba's calling and emphasize *dawa* (proselytizing), while others prioritize preserving Murid identity abroad by consolidating the linkages with the leadership in Senegal. Similarly, traditional bases of power and authority such as genealogy and affiliation with the Mbakke family are no longer uncontested. Diasporic reimaginings of the Muridiyya abroad, in turn, inspire cultural reconfigurations at home.

SOURCES AND METHOD

This study is based on multisited investigations in three continents: Africa, Europe, and the Americas. It is qualitative in its approach and interdisciplinary in its orientation. The immigrant experience is best understood when examined across disciplinary boundaries harnessing insights from different literatures that intersect but rarely speak to each other. This is particularly true for the study of transnational migrants that straddle different national boundaries and juggle multiple and conflicting identities.

The Muridiyya on the Move relies on a wide array of oral and written sources in multiple languages—Wolof (lingua franca of the Senegalese), French (official language), English, and Arabic—and in different media (written texts, novels). I have explored newspaper articles in Africa and abroad that chronicle important events in the life of Murid immigrants. I have also pored over pamphlets, brochures, hagiographies, films, and ephemeral materials produced by immigrants. These documents are available online or kept in private libraries by immigrant associations and provide invaluable insights into the everyday religious life of immigrants. If sentimental bonds to place reflect “accumulated biographical experiences” as some scholars argue, then an examination of internal sources, and especially oral history, becomes critical for understanding Murid immigrants’ effort at place making in the diaspora.

I have visited six archives in Senegal and France and have participated as speaker or observer in dozens of events organized by diasporic Murids in Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, France, Italy, Germany, and the United States. I have also drawn extensively from over 130 interviews recorded across Senegal, Abidjan, Libreville, New York City, Milan, Brescia, Berlin, and Paris. These face-to-face interviews were unscripted and semistructured. I often began with a few questions but generally let my interlocutors direct the interviews themselves, returning to questioning only after they had concluded their clarifying statements. The interviews, conducted in Wolof, French, and English, provided critical information for a reconstruction of the experience of Murid immigrants that takes their voices seriously.

I have been studying the Murids since I defended the first history master’s thesis on the Muridiyya at University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar in 1991. Since then, I have continued to research diverse aspects of Murid culture, including in the diaspora. As a native of Senegal who grew up in a Murid family, I have built strong connections within the Murid organization, including with members of the leadership. These connections have been vital in providing access to important sources that have allowed for the recovery of Murid voices that are critical for the reconstruction of the organization’s internal history. Because of my familiarity with these sources and the internal politics of the order, I was able to disentangle the layers of information and to fill in some of the lacunae. By comparing and contrasting a variety of sources and applying a rigorous internal and external critique to Murid oral reports and written documents, I hope to minimize some of the biases inherent in these types of sources.

The advantage of an insider’s view like this can make comprehensible many seemingly bizarre components and interrelations within the

Muridiyya. But one should also be aware of the drawbacks of this position. In effect, the empathy and open collaboration of informants who feel a bond with the researcher does not come without a cost, as the researcher may be subject to manipulations or subconsciously indulge in self-censorship to avoid social sanctions or preserve ties with the community. However, outsiders writing about the history of the Muridiyya face equally daunting challenges. The nature of the challenges may be different, but the struggle is the same: to objectively analyze and interpret a large body of written and oral materials produced by faithful disciples in esoteric religious languages—or by biased colonial administrators or outside observers.

In reality, any historian writing about his or her own culture or society will in some way have to confront the insider's challenge. When scholars write about people whose values they share or cherish, they tend to be less skeptical and more willing to listen to the stories they are told and convey them to others. I claim the position of the listener vis-à-vis the Muridiyya. But I believe that adopting the sympathetic attitude of the listener does not necessarily disable one's ability to write critically and objectively. In other words, the historian's ability to write a critical history of a people does not hinge upon one's position but rather on the scholar's capacity to effectively apply the historical method of inquiry and criticism to the historical sources.