

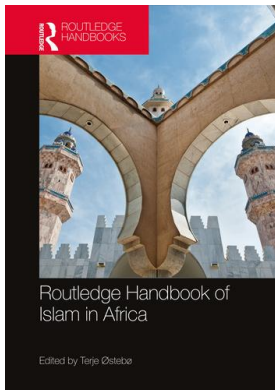
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BEYOND THE INVISIBLE MUSLIMS LABEL

The building of African Muslim diasporic communities in the West

Abdoulaye Kane

Introduction

There has been a growing scholarly interest in Islam and Muslim immigrants in Europe and North America in the post-9/11 era (Grillo 2004; Mbengue 2008; Kane 2011; Buggenhagen 2012). Most studies about Muslim diasporas have been dedicated to immigrant communities from the Arab world (North Africa and Middle East), Turkey, and Southeast Asia (Pakistan/India) living in Europe, North America, and Australia (Cesari 1994; Fredette 2014; Silverstein 2004). Few studies have examined the experience of Sub-Saharan African Muslim immigrants in Western contexts (D'Alisera 2004; Buggenhagen 2012; Carter 1997; Keaton 2006; Diouf 2004; Kane 2010). The vast majority of these studies tend to focus on the organized transnational Sufi Networks, such as the Muridiyya and the Tijaniyya, highlighting their commitment to home rather than their daily effort to integrate in Western countries (Grillo 2004; Kane 2008, 2011; Riccio 2011). This chapter will survey the few studies focusing on this small but rapidly growing minority within the Muslim minority in the West. It addresses its diversity and its positioning vis-à-vis the host contexts and other Muslim diasporas (Diouf 2000; Babou 2021; Mbengue 2008; D'Alisera 2004). The chapter looks at particular ways African Muslims are made invisible in the political and media discourses shaping popular representations of Islam and Muslims in Europe and America. Because of race, their relatively small numbers in immigration contexts are compared to other Muslim groups and are subject to prejudices related to colonial perception of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa as syncretic and therefore inauthentic. The chapter also examines how African Muslims paradoxically are very visible in the public square of countries like France and the United States through their place-making practices, their clothing, and their engagement with local authorities to celebrate and share their religious holidays. It looks at the influence of a set of religious entrepreneurs who are traveling back and forth between home and host countries while spreading their particular religious traditions of Sufism to a wider audience in the African black diaspora and beyond.

The make-up of the African Muslim diaspora

The great majority of Sub-Saharan African Muslims in the West come from West Africa and Somalia. Among the West African Muslim immigrants, the predominant communities come from the Senegal River Valley, a border region of Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania. The Followers of Muridiyya in Senegal who are coming from the central western part of the country have also become very important in numbers and influence. Other West African countries with small diasporas in Europe and America include Niger, Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire (Stoller 2002; Abdullah 2010). The presence of West African Muslims in the northern hemisphere is not new. West African Muslims were brought to the New World early in the eighteenth century as slaves alongside their black brothers and sisters from different ethnic groups and creeds (Diouf 1998; 2004). In Europe, the presence of African Muslims can be dated back to the First World War with an important contingent of Muslim soldiers from both Algeria and French West Africa (Cesari 1994). Some African Muslim soldiers who participated in the First World War decided to stay in Europe, planting the seeds of the West African presence that was to be reinforced by the arrival of African Muslim students from the French, British, and Portuguese colonies who came to pursue their high school and college education before and after the Second World War. However, in this chapter, I am more interested in the new African diasporas that are the result of mostly postcolonial labor migration to Europe and North America.

The first wave of these African Muslims that came to Europe arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1970s and 1980s were marked by a continuous process of family reunification that led to the arrival of African Muslim women and their young sons and daughters, resulting in the emergence over time of distinct ethno-national communities in the suburbs of industrial cities in France, Britain, and Belgium (MacGaffey and Bazzinguinssa-Ganga 2000; Quiminal 1986; Timera 1996). The African Muslim student population was also increasing rapidly due primarily to the value of European education and the declining quality of African higher education institutions. The growing sentiments of anti-immigration across Europe that went hand in hand with the integration of Europe resulted in the redrawing of European borders and the adoption of very restrictive immigration policies. In the mid-1990s, several civil wars broke out in West Africa and in Somalia, bringing hundreds of thousands of African Muslim refugees to countries across Europe. Meanwhile, African Muslim migrants illegally crossed the southern European borders, taking enormous risk and increasing the numbers of African Muslim immigrants in Spain, Italy, and Greece. In 2005, another wave of clandestine crossings was registered in Italy, Spain, and Greece, pushing the European Union to engage in bilateral agreements with sending- and transit-countries, designed to reinforce the control of border crossings while building an unprecedented number of detention centers along their southern borders.

If the early wave of labor migration was primarily composed of single males working in factories in major industrial cities in France and Britain, Belgium, and to a lesser extent in Germany, the new African Muslim migrants arriving in southern Europe were overwhelmingly engaged in trade and street vending. Some were employed in construction, agriculture, and chemical industries, offering the three "D jobs" (Demanding, Dangerous, and Damaging). Both political refugees and economic migrants did similar jobs that nationals were not interested in doing.

In the United States, African Muslim immigrants from West Africa came to explore new destinations after the tightening of European immigration policies and the reinforced control of Europe's southern borders. Senegalese traders took the lead arriving in New York in

the middle of the 1980s. They were soon followed by a wave of African Muslim immigrants from Mali, Niger, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire. The large wave of African Muslim migrants arrived in the decade of the 1990s, rapidly building their presence in New York City with Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx as major ethno-national hubs (Diouf 2004; Abdullah 2010). Here too, the traders and street vendors were predominant, with the African market in Harlem in the mid-1990s a powerful symbol of their mark on the city (Stoller 2002). Most of the African Muslims were coming from Francophone West Africa (with the exception of some Somali refugees). At the end of the 1990s, with the saturation of New York City and the restrictions imposed on trade and street vending in Harlem and Brooklyn, many of these African Muslims ventured to other states where they were employed in food processing factories in Ohio, in casinos in Mississippi, and in entertainment industries in Memphis, Colorado, and North Carolina.

These different waves of arrivals of African Muslims resulted in the creation of ethnic enclaves in many cities and neighborhoods within cities that led some to talk about the Africanization of specific urban spaces in New York (Stoller 2002). Similar processes were taking place in the Paris Suburbs of Les Mureaux, Mantes-La-Jolie, where West African Muslim communities were taking roots. The same phenomenon was visible in Minneapolis, Columbus, London, and Toronto for the Somali population (McGown 1999). Both in Europe and in North America, African Muslims shared with their Muslim brothers from North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia communal prayers on Fridays, Eid prayers, and Sunday schools for their kids. However, wherever they found themselves in great numbers, they have created nationally or ethnically dominant African places of worship and Quranic schools. These include Somali mosques and Quranic schools in Toronto and in Minneapolis; Fulani mosques in Columbus, Ohio, and in Memphis, Tennessee, as well as Wolof or Senegalese mosques in Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. These mosques operate as central places in the life of African Muslims in their daily religious activities.

Despite the overall dependence on the North Africans, West African Muslim places of worship and Quranic schools have also increased in Europe. Like the other Muslim diasporas, the birth of a second and third generation has pushed African Muslims to demand religious accommodations of local authorities. Their demands tend to focus especially on the acquisition of proper places of worship, the accommodation of Muslim students' dietary restrictions in school cafeterias, and having slaughtering houses for the ritual practices of animal sacrifice for their meat consumption and during the celebration of Muslim holidays like Eid.

Invisibility and remnants of “*Islam noir*”

The presence of Sub-Saharan African Muslims in the Western countries is often analyzed through the trope of invisibility. Sylviane Diouf in her analysis of West African Muslims in America talked about the paradox of their invisibility/visibility (Diouf 2004). The paradox is that they were the first to bring Islam to the Americas but they are the least associated group with Islam in today's Americas. They are made invisible historically by the silence of their presence and contribution in the historiography of slavery in America. Diouf attributes the lack of interest in Muslim slaves to the ignorance of American historians about the presence of Islam in West Africa for centuries before the start of transatlantic slave trade. It is remarkable that some of the famous cases of African slaves with the ability to write in Arabic were viewed as not being really from West Africa. In the film *Prince Among Slaves*, Abdul Rahman Ibrahim, the main character, was believed to be from Morocco because people could not envision a literate black African.

Another way West African Muslims are made invisible is in the political discourse of the authorities who associate Islam with terrorism and fundamentalism, which are presented as Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian problems. This representation of Islam is also present in Western media and cinema portrayals of Muslims. West African Muslims in Europe are faced with similar ways of being made invisible in the political discourse and in the media for the same reason of not being perceived of as a problem. The third way in which African Muslims in both Europe and America are made invisible has to do with popular representation of Islam and the association of certain appearances, like the wearing of hijab by women and beards, turbans, and white skullcaps by men as clear indications of religious belonging. The lack of embodiment of these symbols of belonging contributes in making Africans to be viewed as not Muslims in both Europe and America. However, through clothing and specific styles of head covering, African Muslim men and women do convey their sense of religious identity as Muslims, which is not captured by the popular views and representations of Islam among Americans and Europeans.

Other reasons for the invisibility of African Muslim in Europe have to do with their relatively small numbers compared to other Muslims from the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey. This explains their lack of representation in the institutions and associations speaking in the name of Islam. In America, black African Muslims are the second largest group of Muslims (second to South Asian Muslims) but they encounter here too a lack of visibility as Muslims because, as mentioned, they do not look like Muslims in terms of their adoption or lack thereof of symbols and clothing typically associated with Islam and Muslims in America.

In the French political context, colonial prejudices can be a factor in the lack of consideration of African Muslims in the political and media discourses about Islam. This is a continuity of the French colonial views on “Black Islam” (*Islam noir*), seen as syncretic and therefore not to be taken seriously. The Islam of North Africa and the Arabs was, on the contrary, to be confronted because it was viewed as dangerous in its political ambition and opposition to the colonial project. Today because African Muslims are not perceived as a problem in the way Arab Muslims are, they do not attract much interest in French media and political discourse. The common representations of black Muslims in France, for example, often tend to insist on their cultural practices such as the female genital mutilation or polygamy rather than their religious identity. Therefore, the way the Muslim presence in France is framed in the political discourse continues to tie Islam to North Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey despite a long and growing presence of Muslims from West Africa. A relevant reflection of this view is the lack of representation of African Muslims in the *Haut Conseil pour le Culte Musulman* (High Council of the Muslim Religion), which is a body representing Muslims in their relations with the French state. African Muslim organizations have expressed their frustrations about the noninclusiveness of the Council but have so far been ignored.

The predominantly West African Muslim communities in France have, at the same time, been more interested in building connections with their home countries’ religious leaders and have actively participated in the conceptualization of an “Islam of France” rather than an “Islam in France” as the French authorities are envisioning the role of the representative body they created. The French authorities have been fighting against the influence of the “sending countries” on French Muslim associations and mosques since the middle of the 1990s with the rise of terrorist attacks on their soil. They advocate an Islam of France, meaning an Islam open to the assimilation and respect of the republican values. The Islam in France is viewed as an Islam standing in isolation and controlled by the political or religious authorities of the Muslim immigrants’ sending countries. Morocco, for example, used to support religious associations in France controlled by Moroccan immigrants. The Moroccan government appointed and paid

imams for leading mosques controlled by its diaspora. Many Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Morocco were also involved in funding the construction of mosques. The Islam of France vision went against these types of interventions of foreign countries in the funding of Muslim activities in the country.

Malian, Senegalese, and Mauritanian Muslim immigrants in France usually organize along ethnic lines in the host countries. For example, the *Haalpulaaren* (Pulaar speakers) from Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania have created religious associations called *Dental* that are found in all the places where there is significant presence of the group. The *Dental* is associated with the mosque both in its social and religious dimensions. It is found across the communities of origin of *Haalpulaaren* immigrants. It makes decisions regarding religious and social affairs.

In France, *Dente* (plural of *Dental*) of the *Haalpulaaren* are found across the Ile de France region and in small- to medium-sized industrial cities in several regions. They tend to regroup first as generations of both single and married *Haalpulaaren* immigrants, either living with their families in France or having left their families in the country of origin. Members of the *Dental* pray together, hold regular meetings, pay monthly dues. They are also called upon to contribute financially to fund religious events such as hosting a religious scholar during Ramadan and for translating the Qur'an into *Pulaar* for the *Dental* members. There is a loose network of the *Dente* in France and across Europe that helps organize and fund major religious events such as the Tijani spiritual retreat in Mantes-La-Jolie (Soares 2004; Kane 2008).

Despite the lack of integration in the conception of the Muslim voice in France, African Muslims have been working like their counterparts elsewhere in the West to create the conditions for practicing and perpetuating their religious identity by negotiating their presence with local authorities. Religious leaders' travel between the home countries and the African ethnic or national diasporas across the West has been crucial in advancing their goals of establishing satellite communities that remain true to their religious traditions as they are practiced at home. This focus on maintaining ties to home countries and religious authorities is what made Ousmane Kane (2011) talk about "home" as being the arena for the African Muslims in both Europe and America. He highlighted the important role of religious authorities in the home countries in Africa in the deployment of religious activities and identities among African Muslims in the diaspora (Kane 2011).

In the American context, the invisibility is analyzed as it relates to race. The African Muslim community in the United States comes out of two major waves of arrival of black Africans. The first was the forced removal during slavery, which brought an important number of Muslims to the Americas; under the social conditions of the plantations, they were forced to silence their religious identity, which was then lost over generations and revived later through the reappropriation by black nationalists who viewed in Islam a means to advance their liberation cause. The Nation of Islam was born out of these forms of reappropriation in the 1930s.

The second wave was, as noted above, the recent arrival of African Muslims from Africa as labor migrants, traders, and businesspersons that started in the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s. The invisibility is often applied to the second wave since the Nation of Islam as well as the mainstream African American Muslim groups are viewed as indigenous to America. What makes the Muslims arriving from the continent invisible is often related to their identification by Americans as blacks first and foremost. Paul Stoller talks about Nigerian, Senegalese, and Malian migrants and traders in the Africa Market in Harlem, New York, as being viewed only as black by their customers who do not realize their national, ethnic, and religious identities (Stoller 2002). The idea of becoming black for African Muslims in America derives from how they are viewed by Americans. The killing of Amadou Diallo, a young African Muslim from Guinea, is a good example of how African Muslims in America are perceived, at least from the

police perspective, as just black bodies. The New York City Police Department officers who were pursuing a black suspect killed Diallo. The police officers found him standing in front of his apartment and asked him to raise his hands. When he tried to reach into his pocket to show them his ID, they opened fire and shot him 41 times. Because of the racial profiling so prevalent among American police forces, African Muslims come to learn tragically how blackness is a critical component of their identity in America even if it is not a chosen one. Blackness therefore becomes a veil that hides the religious, ethnic, or national identities that might be more meaningful to their self-identity.

Sylviane Diouf (1998) addresses the theme of Muslim invisibility in America by advancing the preeminence of racial identity in the American context and the common American association of Islam and Muslims with those of Arab and Middle Eastern origin in the post-9/11 political discourse and policies on counterterrorism. However, the analyses referring to the invisibility trope share the characteristic of being focused on an assigned identity by the host country rather than on the self-identification of African Muslims. On closer look at local dynamics, not at the individual level (as Stoller is doing in his ethnography), but at the communal or collective level, there is a process of place-making or setting up roots for a distinctively African Islam in American urban centers. Be it French-speaking West Africans in New York, Columbus, Chicago, Montreal, or Memphis; or Somalis in Toronto or London; or Sierra Leoneans in the Washington DC metropolitan area, African Muslims are everywhere engaged in integrating in host societies while preserving and perpetuating their religious identities.

Zain Abdullah (2010) offers a more nuanced approach of African Muslims integrating in black America by pointing to the negative prejudices that African immigrants and African Americans have towards one another, deriving from media portrayals and framing of Africa and black criminality in inner cities in urban America. African Muslims are – regarding their self-representation – hesitant to identify as black because they do not want to be confused with the native African Americans. The case of Somali Muslims in America who claim descentance from an Arab ancestry that they see as being white and different from black Africans is a telling one. Despite becoming blacks in the American context, the Somali continue to hold their racial categories and tend not to mix with other African Muslims in America the way they mix easily with middle Easterners and North Africans. In Columbus, Ohio, the Somali and the Senegalese mosques and Quranic schools are separate despite the fact the two groups live in the same areas. This avoidance of being identified as black in America is not just something specific to African Muslims. The Haitians belonging to the middle categories in their racial structure, the so-called Mulatto (people of mixed black African white European ancestry), did not want to be identified as blacks reserved to the darker phenotype. They are like the Somali who also do not want to be identified as black despite being perceived in America as such.

In both Europe and America, the invisibility is also related to the politics of representation by Muslim elites and public intellectuals who tend to hail from the Arab World or from South Asia. The institutions that speak in the name of Islam rarely include black African Muslims whose small organizations tend to be present in specific local settings where there is a concentration of their constituents. In America, African American Muslims are indeed an exception because of their long history of using Islam to preach racial equality and justice in response to racial discrimination. African American Muslim preachers were, like their Christian counterparts, the most visible figures of the American public sphere in the 1950s and 1960s. The Nation of Islam with Elijah Muhammad and Malcom X was one of the most audible organizations among Muslim Americans up to the end of the 1960s, alongside the civil rights movement activists like Martin Luther King Jr.

African Muslim voices in global Islam

I want to argue here that, despite their limited number and their status as a minority within a minority, Sub-Saharan Muslims have been relevant and influential in defining an alternative discourse against Salafism, which is predominantly Sufi and distinctively African. I will employ several examples of Sufi sheikhs and disciples who have been successful in organizing their African religious diasporas through the formations of transnational networks going beyond the usual destination countries to incorporate places across the globe. The transnational character of Muslim Sufi orders such as the Tijaniyya, the Qadriyya, and the Muridiyya and the involvement of their disciples in international migration have facilitated the building of transnational networks and circuits of trade and travel. The leaders, scholars, and disciples of these Sufi orders all have busy annual travel agendas and schedules touring their diasporic communities across Europe, North America, and Asia, as well as organizing pilgrimage to holy places in Africa and Saudi Arabia. Along these travel circuits, both leaders and scholars are catering not just to their home countries' disciples but also to other Muslims from across the globe, creating new connections and opportunities to expand the reach of the Sufi orders in new places.

One can name Sheikh Abdoulaye Dieye and his organization the *Khidmatul Khadim*, founded in France and which later extended to North America, the French Islands of Reunion, the Seychelles, and to the Comoros (Babou 2011). The success of Sheikh Dieye, as analyzed by Cheikh Anta Babou, is related to his modern training as an engineer, his use of French, and his dedication in spreading the Murid teachings of Ahmadu Bamba Mbacke to a global audience. The goal of Sheikh Dieye was not just limited to preaching to the growing Murid disciples in Europe and North America as he also had a clear agenda of spreading the teachings of his master to a wider global audience both in the diaspora as well as in other Muslim countries. His encounters with Muslims from other Islamic tradition in France and in America were seen as opportunities to share Amadou Bamba's teaching and love for Prophet Mohammed in hopes of gaining new disciples who would in turn spread the word in their communities of origin. Sheikh Dieye was quite successful among the Muslim communities belonging to the old African diasporas in French territories and in North America. The figure of Ahmadu Bamba as a black Islamic scholar and saint is very appealing to the blacks in the diaspora. He is, on the one hand, presented as a hero who fought against colonization, and, on the other hand, as black saint who founded his own Sufi order, becoming a model for black pride and consideration in a context dominated by Arab and European forms of domination of Africa. In the same vein, Sheikh Murtala Mbacke, Serigne Modu Kara Mbacke, and many other grandsons of Ahmadu Bamba were involved in visiting and fashioning Murid communities in the diaspora. In the 1980s and early 1990s, most Murid followers traveled home to attend the major religious celebration of Magal of Touba (the holy city for the Murid). At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, Murid in the diaspora started to celebrate the *Magal* in their host countries; the *Magal* of Touba was duplicated from Paris, to Los Angeles, from Turin to Madrid, and from New York to Montreal.

Another leader who was known for his travels and who was a great influence in the Muslim diasporic communities was Sheikh Hassan Cisse, the grandson of Sheikh Ibrahim Niassé. Trained in Egypt and in the United States, Sheikh Cisse was, like his grandfather, involved in spreading the Tijaniyya in the West. He was quite successful in converting both black and white British and Americans, and in bringing many African American Muslims into the Tijaniyya order. By the time of his death in 2008, Sheikh Cisse had created an important network of disciples in Britain and the United States – beyond just the usual Senegalese immigrants to include African Americans, Nigerians, and Ghanaians.

After the death of Sheikh Cisse, his brother Sheikh Mahi took the helm and started to travel around the world to expand the network of their disciples. Every year he comes to the United States to tour American cities such as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and Seattle where Tijani of the Niassen (who are followers of Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse) branch are present in important numbers. He is credited for expanding the transnational network created by his brother to Asia with his constant travel to Singapore, where he holds annually conferences attended by converts, African immigrants, as well as other Muslims from Malaysia and Indonesia. He continues to nurture the North American network of centers and disciples that were created and attracted by his brother. Each year Sheikh Mahi holds conferences in several American cities such as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and Seattle. These conferences are attended by disciples from many African countries in the diaspora as well as by a loyal group of African Americans who follow the sheikh to all his conferences. He also organizes collective pilgrimages to Mecca with his disciples from across the globe, many of whom are in the diaspora.

Another Senegalese sheikh with a great influence in the Tijani networks in the diaspora is Sheikh Muhammad Mansur Baro. He was based in Mbour, a small city on the Atlantic Coast about 40 miles from Dakar. He is affiliated to the Medina Gounass Tijani branch created by Muhammad Saydu Ba, who was a disciple of Sheikh Mansur's father (who initiated Sheikh Muhammad Saydu Ba into the Tijani order). Muhammad Saydu Ba gave Sheikh Mansur the mission in the 1970s to take care of *Haapulaaren* Tijani diasporas in West and Central Africa as well as in France, which was then the most important hub of *Haalpulaaren* labor workers from the Senegal River Valley.

Sheikh Mansur took his mission at heart and traveled on a yearly basis to West and Central Africa and Europe to make sure the young *Haalpulaaren* workers in these non-Muslim countries would not lose their religious identity and fall into the trap of the Western secular lifestyles that religious leaders back home perceived as corrupting the faith. For decades, Sheikh Mansur preached to young migrants the need to keep their Islamic faith while inviting them to join the Tijani Sufi order. If the 1970s and early 1980s were a little difficult for him to convince a predominantly *Haalpulaaren* youth constituency among the migrants, he was by the end of the 1990s, with help of an ageing diasporic population that has become more pious over time, very successful in bringing thousands of disciples each year to his talks and spiritual retreats. The *Daha* of Mantes-La-Jolie is one the largest Tijani yearly event in France, rallying thousands of disciples who from Wednesday to Sunday stay in communion in a large concert room provided by the city of Mantes-La-Jolie for the occasion. Participants pray, perform *dhikr*, sleep, and eat together in this place for the duration of the retreat. Only men attend the *Daha*; the women stay in several apartments and houses cooking for the sheikh and his large delegation, including his family members and his close deputies. Up to his death in 2007, Sheikh Mansur enjoyed the status of a very popular religious figure, devoutly listened to by Muslims in France, beyond the limited circle of his Tijani disciples. His inclusive discourse has also attracted several North Africans to the Tijani Sufi order – becoming his loyal deputies.

Sheikh Mansur was one of the religious leaders who articulated best what should be the posture of French Muslims vis-à-vis the French republic. He clearly exhorted his disciples and all Muslims to follow the laws of their host country, reminding them that they are in the same boat as the French people and that they should care for its safety. However, he was also one of the first African Muslim leaders to formulate demands to French local authorities and businesses to allow the building of places of worship and to allow employees to have short breaks to make their daily prayers at their workplaces. He was successful in convincing businesses like Renault and small towns like Mantes-la-Jolie to accommodate the needs of their Muslim employees and constituents. His interviews in Arabic, in which he exposed his ideas of what should be the

behavior of Muslim immigrants in non-Muslim countries, went viral due to the clarity and wisdom of his position. He did not see any contradiction in living in France and respecting the French laws while living fully one's Muslim faith. His only request was for the French local and national authorities to provide Muslims with decent places of worship.

After the death of Sheikh Mansur, his brother Cheikh Baro took over and continued the yearly celebration of the spiritual retreat, the *Daha*, in Mantes-La-Jolie with the same devotion. Currently, the *Daha* attracts Tijani disciples across Europe particularly from Belgium, Italy, Germany, and Spain. As in the case of Sheikh Mahi, Cheikh Baro has also extended his brother's transnational network of disciples. Cheikh Baro's brother al-Hajj Malik has been traveling to South Asia where he, like Sheikh Mahi, was successful in recruiting a growing number of disciples, particularly in Indonesia. All these leaders and their expanding networks both in the diaspora and in other Muslim countries are a testament to the growing influence of African Muslims leaders in diasporas and across the world, undermining the common perception of invisibility and marginality when it comes to defining Muslim identity in Western contexts.

Place making and the building of satellite communities

I contend in this chapter that African Muslims have indeed managed to become visible in a set of local contexts where they have been able to build and sustain religious communities around mosques and establish extended transnational connections across several countries. A number of recent publications on African Muslim immigrants in Europe and America have pointed to the emerging African Muslim communities (Kane 2011; Stoller 2002; Riccio 2011; Carter 1997; Buggenhagen 2012). In France, places like Mantes-La-Jolie, Les Mureaux, Trappes, and St. Quentin en Yveline in the Ile de France region are identified as distinctively Muslim and African despite the fact that they are inhabited by various migrant groups and a good number of French working-class families. It is here that one sees the presence of African Muslim mosques, makeshift mosques, as well Sufi *zawiyas* (lodges). It is also here that most of the annual religious events such as the *Daha* take place (Soares 2004; Kane 2008).

In Italy, the Senegalese Muslims immigrants belonging to both the Tijani and Murid Sufi orders have established a remarkable presence in the urban landscapes of several cities, including Florence, Bergamo, Milan, and Naples (Carter 1997). The Gambian, Senegalese, and Guineans are also changing the landscapes of working-class neighborhoods in Madrid, Málaga, and Barcelona. These places have become anchoring places where the religious practices and celebrations by the Tijani and Murid Sufi orders are being replicated and where disciples are consciously engaged in place making by establishing religious and ethnic/national enclaves. West African religious scholars and family members of major Sufi sheikhs are often invited to organize religious conferences, spiritual retreats, and evenings of Sufi chanting, praising the Prophet of Islam and the founders of Sufi orders.

In each of these places, Islamic education is being organized by setting up Sunday Quranic schools. Some of the immigrants who arrived with their credentials of teaching the Qur'an and the different subjects comprising the curriculum of traditional Islamic instruction in West Africa are setting up Quranic schools as well as private tutoring of kids on weekends. These Islamic scholars are involved in all aspects of religious rituals in the communities. They are the imams who lead the prayers in prayer rooms and mosques. They also preside over funerals, marriages, and naming ceremonies. Most of the imams came to their host country as labor migrants. They were not necessarily expecting to become imam in newly built ethnic mosques. The growing needs of the communities have created new opportunities around religious services. The most

learned ones among the labor migrants and traders are taking up these positions by becoming Quranic teachers and imams.

Contrary to their North Africa counterparts, the West African Muslim communities established in France in the 1970s and 1980s were often organized around ethnic belonging rather than national origin. The *Haalpulaaren* and the *Soninke* who come from different countries (Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania) would reproduce the village/neighborhood organization of the mosques in the places of residence in France. The hostels known as *Foyer* which are designed to host single male labor migrants have prayer rooms where a multiethnic and multi-national congregation meets for the five daily prayers. The leadership of the prayer rooms tends to be informal and in the hands of the ethnic group that is predominant or the first to settle in the locality. In some places, the imam and his associate come from two different ethnic groups. For the communal prayers, the West African Muslims tend in many places to depend on the North African mosques.

The ethnic organization of religious life is apparent during the month of Ramadan when the different ethnic groups in different localities in France hire someone who can translate the Qur'an into their mother tongue and lead the nightly prayers for the community. The *Dental* among the *Haalpulaaren* is very involved in sponsoring and organizing annual religious events during which all the *Haalpulaaren Dente* come together to host religious scholars from the sending countries. The 1990s saw the emergence of religious organizations in both Spain and Italy that are more based on the belonging to Sufi religious groups. Most of the participants in these Sufi organizations are Wolof immigrants belonging to the Muridiyya order. The Bamba houses in the two countries and the annual celebration of the *Magal* of Touba as well as the hosting of Ahmadu Bamba's sons and grandsons for conferences are all manifestations of the new forms of place making by Senegalese Sufi orders (Babou 2021). This phenomenon is also true for the Tijani with several preeminent Senegalese Tijani families and their connections with disciples in the diaspora.

Similar trends are also visible in the North American context where the connections to religious leaders in Africa are crucial in the way African Muslim immigrants organize themselves in their host country. We find the same model of Bamba or Tijani host houses receiving newcomers and expressing a sense of common purpose and solidarity. However, more than in France, the construction of mosques is often tied to ethnic groups (like the Umar Tall mosque in Columbus Ohio) and to specific Sufi orders, with mosques tied to Muridiyya or Tijaniyya orders that tend to be connected to some religious families in Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania.

The *Haalpulaaren* community in Memphis opened its first mosque in 2007, close to ten years after their arrival in the city. The inauguration of the mosque was seen by many followers as a starting point of a more visible and permanent presence in the city. The imam of the mosque told the congregants in his opening remarks that "it is only now that we arrived in America" (Fieldwork note 2007). For him, the opening of the mosque marked the starting point of the existence of the *Haalpulaaren* Muslim community in Memphis. The mosque is a symbolic place that represents the presence of African Muslim in the urban landscape. It is also a sign that the *Haalpulaaren* Muslims are planting their roots in the city for generations to come. Similar cases of new mosques across urban America and Canada indicate the ongoing process of claiming space by African Muslim immigrants in their respective host countries. It echoes the growth of African Pentecostal churches in places like New York, Brussels, and Amsterdam that have often been analyzed as reverse religious mission work.

In many ways, America is a more fertile ground for African Muslim communities to take root, compared to Europe. The African Muslims seem to be more at ease in their building of religious communities and initiatives of place making. Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx in

New York City have, since the 1990s, been urban landscapes where African Muslim immigrants have inscribed their indelible marks by setting up mosques, community centers, and ethnic businesses such as grocery stores and restaurants serving halal food.

Both the Murid of Senegal and the transnational Tijani Sufi order whose followers are coming from several African countries are aggressively engaged in making homes away from home in several American cities. The predominant presence of Senegalese Murids on 116 street in Harlem has led the place to be called “little Senegal”. Along the street, stores, restaurants, hair braiding salons, and a host of other businesses are owned by the Senegalese Murids. Pictures of Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba and his name are ubiquitous along the street, posted in front of many of these businesses’ entrance doors. The celebration of the Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba day in New York has become an official event marked by a procession from Harlem to Central Park. The Murids, with their large colorful *boubous* (robes worn by men), present a fascinating display of cultural and religious symbols in New York City’s urban landscape. For a day, the Murid paint the city with their colors and a sense of the city as theirs.

The Tijanis have occupied portions of Brooklyn, particularly along Fulton Street, which the dominant Tijani group – which happened to be Fulani – named after their place of origin, *Fuuta* Street. Early on, they bought a three-bedroom apartment that they transformed into a mosque and guesthouse for visiting religious scholars and authorities. Named Galle Cheikh Tijan, or the house of Sheikh Tijani, it became a *zawiya* and a place where the followers of the *Medina Gounass* branch of Tijaniyya were performing their daily prayers and *Zikr*. The Niassen branch had a mosque in New York City connected to a network of *Dahiras* (religious associations) across North America, and the followers of Tijaniyya connected to Tivaoune inaugurated a new *zawiya* in Harlem in 2018.

These African Muslim enclaves can also be found among Somali refugees in Europe and North America. In Canada, the Dixon neighborhood in Toronto has been identified as one of the major Somali cultural and religious enclaves in the country. Mosques doubling as community centers are central in the way the Somali refugees are rebuilding their life in Canada and America (McGown 1999). In America, Minneapolis is the city with the largest concentration of Somalis. Mosques and a community center have been put in place to facilitate the reconstitution of a Muslim identity in this American city, and the mosques provide social services for families in need while also dispensing religious education to children on Sundays. The same process of building a Somali Muslim community took place in Columbus, Ohio, where one also finds an important number of Somali refugees.

The presence of the numerous “little Africas” in American and European urban landscapes dominated in most part by African Muslim traders, workers, and refugees are what led Paul Stoller talk about as the “Africanization of New York City” (Stoller 2002). “Little Senegal” on 113th Street in Harlem; “Little Niger” in Greensboro, North Carolina; “Fuuta” (rather than Fulton) Street in New York city; and the “Little Fuutas” in Columbus, Ohio, Memphis, Tennessee, and Silverstein, Colorado, have all come to represent small African Muslim islands in urban America. These are mirrored by African Muslim communities in the suburbs of Paris, Brussels, Barcelona, Florence, Bergamo, and Milan (Riccio 2011; Sinatti 2006).

Conclusion

The African Muslim diasporas in Europe and North America are in a process of creating communities in which their religious identity could be expressed and preserved over time. The communities being built are clearly very eclectic, based often on nationality if not on ethnicity.

They tend to be controlled and strongly connected to religious authorities in Africa. For that reason, there are several religious transnational networks facilitating the circulation of people, ideas, and resources with the goal of establishing satellite communities of particular religious groups connected to particular religious sites, families, and authorities back in Africa. The constant travel of religious leaders and scholars to preach to their disciples in the diaspora has become a common phenomenon integrated in annual calendars of religious activities developed in the diaspora. The emergence of these satellite communities with their distinctive places of worship and their regular activities are making African Muslims more visible in a set of locations across urban landscapes in Europe and North America. As usual, one of the questions that will be important to address is how these satellite communities in the diaspora are going to survive the first generation of migrants who are their principal designers. Are the upcoming second and third generations going to follow the example of their parents in upholding their religious identity and maintaining the strong connections with religious authority in Africa? Future research should pay more attention to the roles of youth and women in fashioning African Muslim diasporic identities. Are African Muslim youth in the diaspora going to be secularized at the same rate as their Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist counterparts? Are African Muslim women going to continue to endorse gender roles associated with Islam and their patriarchal societies of origin in a Western context marked by increasing demand of gender equality? Finally, is class playing a role on how African Muslims express their religious identity in the diaspora?

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