Sufis on Parade: The Performance of Black, African, and Muslim Identities

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For over twenty years, West African Muslims from the Murid Sufi Brotherhood have organized the annual Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day parade in New York City. It is a major site where they redefine the boundaries of their African identities, cope with the stigma of blackness, and counteract an anti-Muslim backlash. Rather than viewing religion as a subset of ethnicity, this study shows how African Murids interrogate the meanings of religion, race and ethnicity as intersecting constructs. National flags from Senegal, Islamic chants, and banners advocating Black solidarity all indicate a negotiation of terms. Clothes worn during the parade act as symbols and afford them another opportunity to work out these borderlands, especially in contradistinction to African American converts who follow a slightly different course. This article examines how their religious procession creates a Murid cosmopolitanism, allowing them a space in which to reconcile multiple belongings.

JULY 28TH SUMMONS THOUSANDS to "Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Day" in New York City. David Dinkins, as Borough of Manhattan President, issued the decree in 1988 for the "people of Harlem" to

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Journal of the American Academy of Religion, pp. 1–39
doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfp016
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"honour" Bamba's "outstanding achievement."[1] A Muslim cleric and mystic from Senegal, West Africa, Amadou Bamba Mbacké (1853–1927) founded the Murid Sufi Brotherhood in the late-nineteenth century. The Murids grew to over 400,000 by 1958 (Cruise O'Brien 1971: 76–77) and now boasts over three million in Senegal (Babou 2002: 153), a place where their holy city of Touba has been dubbed a Muslim "Vatican" (Onishi 2002). In New York, their presence is quickly growing among the 100,000 arrivals from West Africa (Waldman 1999), and most claim Murids number in the thousands.[2] While the proclamation designated a single day for the celebration, the annual event lasts just over two weeks and includes a series of rallies, prayers, Breakfast gatherings, exhibitions, theatrical performances, and lectures at several locations including the United Nations. The cornerstone of these activities, however, is the Bamba Day parade, a long procession of African men, women, and children marching up 7th Avenue from Central Park North (110th Street) to 125th Street. What makes this display so compelling is not the pomp and circumstance typically associated with these spectacles. There are no brass bands or sparkling floats; even the *djembe* or African Drum is missing. Girls dressed in bathing suits twirling batons are conspicuously absent. Celebrities and hand-waving beauty queens riding in convertibles are nowhere to be seen, and major elected officials are likewise not in attendance. Even observers in the audience could not explain the reason for it. Most speculated it was "something African" but were unable to figure it out. Why, then, would the Murids continue to plan and organize a police-escorted parade for over twenty years that no spectator understood?[3]

[1] After New York, proclamations have been declared in cities like Newark, NJ, Baltimore, Atlanta, and Washington, DC. For Newark, Baltimore, and Washington, see Malcomson (1996: 41) and see Salzbrunn (2004: 482, 483) to read the decrees of New York and Atlanta in their entirety.

[2] Figures vary for the number of Murid *taalibés* (disciples) living in New York City. The 2000 U.S. Census (including the *Current Population Survey* of 2000) recorded Senegalese at slightly above the 1990 count of 2,287. Informal estimates, however, place Senegalese in New York City anywhere between 10,000 and 20,000 (Perry 1997: 229). Other unofficial counts have tallied Murids at 4,000 to 6,000 nationally with nearly 2,500 in New York City (Malcomson 1996: 30; also see Salzbrunn 2004: 479). For an overview of West African migration to the US, see Abdullah (2001). Finally, a brief word is necessary about Arabic transliterations or English spellings for *Cheikh*, *Ahamdou*, and *Murid*. The word, "Cheikh," a venerable title given to a learned man (and rarely, a woman), leader, older man, or saint (marabout), is variously spelled, Shaykh, Shaikh, Sheikh, and Sheik. The name, "Ahmadou," is also rendered, Amadou, Ahmadu or Amadu. And "Murid" is often transliterated, Mouride or even Mourid. Unless quoting other sources, I will use the following spellings: Amadou, Cheikh, and Murid.

[3] For a more comprehensive look at West African Muslims (not just including Murids) in Harlem and their encounter with African Americans, see Abdullah's forthcoming book (Abdullah 2009b). Also, see his article, Abdullah (2009a).

Public performances have been important spaces where individuals dramatize all sorts of group concerns and faith issues. More than frivolous amusement, this street drama visualizes certain aspects of the social structure or cultural system, affording scholars a “window” (Kugelmass 1994: 25) from which to better understand religious behavior and sacred meaning. As their procession moves through space, Murid iconography etches new imaginative grids into the city streets. Among ritual items, a single 1913 photograph of Bamba is the only one in existence (Figure 1), and its ubiquitous image also appears on button pins, stitched on clothing, mounted on walls and moving vehicles, and painted onto glass surfaces. Amadou Bamba and the marabouts who have inherited his mantle are considered holy ones, saints—both living and deceased, women and men. Whether home or abroad, Murids seek their *baraka*, a term that can be simply translated as blessing, grace or divine favor. However, it extends well beyond this to encompass a whole host of meanings such as good luck, bounty, material prosperity, and other kinds of good fortune. It is believed that Murid saints possess the ability to bestow *baraka* in the same way people possess other human talents like wit and humor, physical prowess, or the gift of song. In this regard, some marabouts have more than others (Geertz 1968: 44; also, see Babou 2007: 8–9). The photographic posters of Bamba, other saints, the Touba Grand Mosque, along with hagiographical narratives illustrate an intimate fellowship Murids have with religious images and texts. This moving display engenders a sacred space paraders enter to gain divine favor, a *baraka* to help them manage the vagaries of life upon their return to a profane world. While this moving tableau clearly indexes important aspects of their religious sentiment, it also matches the social exigencies of the many worlds they inhabit in Harlem. As such, the Bamba Day parade is a major site for identity construction and a place where African Sufis navigate the contours of their racial, ethnic, and religious identities.

Despite Susan G. Davis’ lament that “[p]arades and public ceremonies have been neglected by scholars, few of whom have systematically investigated the relationship between social life and public enactments” (1986: 3), there appears to have been a growing interest, particularly in the United States, for what these ritual displays can tell us about our contemporary worlds. Some, for example, have examined how the Doo Dah and Rose parades in Pasadena, CA put forth competing ideologies of urban life and visualize local interests (Lawrence 1982). In New York City, Puerto Rican marchers demonstrate how they juxtapose the status of a Fifth Avenue parade with Island pride, as they embody a corporate identity for spectators to witness (Kasinitz &

FIGURE 1. CHEIKH AMADOU BAMBA.
Source: Murid Islamic Community in America (July 2002), p. 3.

Freidenberg-Herbstein 1987). By the same token, the West Indian Carnival transforms Brooklyn streets into public theatre, contesting their social identities and marginal status (ibid.). In the Polaski Day Parade, Jo Anne Schneider investigates how the Polish in Philadelphia animate both resistance and consent as markers of "self" and "other" (1990: 33). While religious life is implied in one or two of these earlier works, more recent studies have begun to look more evenly at the interplay between religious expression and everyday life.[4]

[4] In 1985, *The Drama Review* devoted an entire issue to processional performance in which several articles addressed some aspect of religious life. Two covered marches among the Shia of central and western Asia and Italian Catholics in Brooklyn, NY. Some of the more recent works on religious processions include articles by Tracey Heatherington (1999), Joseph Sciorra (1999), Wayne Ashley (1999), Timothy Lubin (2001), Marion Bowman (2004), and Anouska Komlosy (2004). For Islamic parades or processions, see Pnina Werber (1996, 2002), Vernon James Schubel (1996), and Susan Slyomovics (1996). Although it is somewhat dated, the work of Edward

Because parades necessarily "territorialize" public space, by which I mean the way these processions "attempt to control a geographic area and establish differential access to it" (O'Reilly and Crutcher 2006: 245), marchers can lay claim to a spiritual landscape by inscribing an indigenous piety onto these suspended moments, and by barring outsiders from entering. While the parading spectacle will invariably differ from one event to the next, a central theme in these marches is identity. As newcomers, parades allow immigrants to act out their presence and communicate their sensibilities to others. The few studies that have looked more generally at religion among immigrants, however, have invariably subsumed it under the broad category of ethnicity (Hirschman and Falcon 1985) or treated it as an extension or preserver of ethnic identity (Bankston III & Zhou 1995). Less studied is the process by which Black immigrants forge religious identities that are entirely nonethnic (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). Jessica Jacobson (1997, 1998), for example, has argued that Muslims living in western countries are creating identities based solely on their Islamic affiliation. Moreover, despite Fredrik Barth's (1969) classic work on ethnic boundaries and intergroup relations, he contends that "among Muslims throughout the world, the dominant discourse on identity is indeed increasingly cast in terms of religion, not ethnicity" (1994: 27). This argument challenges the assumption that religion and ethnicity must be coterminous, especially for Muslims in the United States where "Islam is becoming … one of the denominational alternatives of being religiously American" (Casanova 2002: 18). For Muslims in the West, these religious processions constitute a drastic shift from how they previously expressed their identities in public. Besides the display of Islamic business signs on *halal* (lawful) butcher shops and novelty stores, Muslim space had been relegated to the inner sanctum of home-style, Quranic study circles and masjids. Islamic practices, as Pnina Werbner writes of Muslim immigrants in the UK, "were thus confined within fortresses of privacy, … and these fortresses protected immigrants from external hostility" (2002: 117). In Harlem, the spectacle of the Bamba Day parade has thrust Murids onto the urban stage making their "bodies seem more public than private," in the language of Jack Kugelmass (1994: 23), and fully exposing themselves to the gaze of others.

C. Zaragoza (1995) is certainly worth noting, and a volume edited by Knut A. Jacobsen (2008) is promising as well. The material on Irish parading is significant; however, much of it marginalizes religion and focuses much more on politics, tradition, and other social identities. While the work on pilgrimage and religious tourism is quite extensive, this area of research is significantly different from the act of parading or contesting one's religious identities in the public arena. Studies on carnival are relatively substantial. Still, while spiritual themes are included in these public celebrations, religious expression generally remains on the periphery.

While religion or, more precisely, Islamic identity must be studied as an independent variable rather than subsumed under grand rubrics like ethnicity or race, this does not suggest that religious identity should be researched in isolation. In other words, religious actors do not only reside in one space or the other but move in and out of secular and sacred locales, and they frequently straddle both simultaneously as social issues are joined with spiritual matters. While Lily Kong is correct to say that "in the same breath that race, class and gender are invariably invoked and studied as ways in which societies are fractured, religion is forgotten or conflated with race" (2001: 212), her criticism works both ways. Scholars in religious studies must also consider how other master narratives like those associated with ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, and class influence the religious practices and spiritualities they are observing.

While only a few elements are selected from the totality of their cultural repertoire, West African Muslims at the parade rely heavily upon specific materials to define their presence in New York. One important way this is done is by using the group's own characteristics, which may constitute an array of items including racial imageries and visual hagiographies. National symbols like the Senegalese and American flags cast a much wider net, essentially redrawing old fault lines and linking their hometown past with an immigrant present. All of this is not necessarily new for the Murids. Many years ago, they worked out strategies for confronting Black inferiority and race-based policies under French colonialism. And they have always struggled to combine their own Islamic traditions and an African respectability under the weight of Arab cultural hegemony.[5] In the American context, though, new tactics are required forcing them to reconfigure new imaginaries and urban liturgies. While this article focuses on how African Sufis negotiate their Black, African, and Muslim identities, some mention of gender and class is inevitable. Clearly, men and women do not experience race, ethnicity, or religion in the same ways. And the socioeconomic position or class status of an individual will often determine one's access to religious resources or authority. That is, the process of identity formation is shot through with gendered sensibilities and class-based behavior. Still, these realities are not primary concerns in this essay, despite the fact that they will necessarily emerge from time to time. And while the topic of sacred space as a debate in the field of religious studies has some relevance for this discussion, it is most useful here as a reference to the spiritual territory where

[5] For a brief history, see Abdullah (2008).

Murids act out these multiple identities. In the end, Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day allows these Sufis on parade to perform what it means to be Black, African, and Muslim in New York City.

MURDISM AND THE BLACK IMAGINARY

The morning air crackles with anticipation as the courtyard swells with hundreds of men, women, and children dressed in their best *boubou* garb.[6] It is still early at the Harlem State Office Building, but one can hear prayers humming with the circular motion of *thikr* beads.[7] Others primp and tug on each other, the way a costume designer would prepare an actor before entering the stage. As people line up, the procession stretches for at least three blocks. Marchers move into military formation, with a section break between every seven lines, twenty to twenty-five abreast. The vibrancy of African clothing designs and colors, banners displaying Quranic verses and Black pride slogans, photographic posters of Cheikh Amadou Bamba along with other marabouts, and the presence of American and Senegalese flags all seem to momentarily rework the rhythm of the urban terrain. As "street theatre" (Davis 1986: 7), the Bamba Parade creates a "liminal"[8] space allowing performers to reinvent themselves in ways not possible under normal conditions.

[6] The *boubou* or Grand *boubou* is mostly worn in West Africa and, depending on the ethnic group, will be known by several different names like *agbada* among the Yoruba and Dagomba or the Hausa call it *babban riga*. The suit is characterized by its flowing fabric with a wide-sleeved top (which may include a large over garment like a shawl) and loose pants.

[7] *thikr* is also spelled *zikr* or *dhikr*, but I prefer the "th" as pronounced in the English word, "the," because it approximates the corresponding letter in Arabic. In any event, *thikr* beads are similar to rosary beads in traditional Roman Catholicism. Muslims use 99 or 100 beads, strung together by string or another type of cord, to keep an accurate count when reciting one of the divine attributes or a formulaic chant.

[8] The sociologist, Arnold van Gennep (1960 [org. 1908]), believed that ritual behavior or rites of passage occurred in three stages: (1) *separation* (from the group or society); (2) *liminality* (a transition into a new state); and (3) *incorporation* (or a reincorporation into society). Victor Turner, a British anthropologist, advanced Gennep's idea for his understanding of the ritual process, especially the liminal stage (1969: 94–113, 125–30). Influenced by the social process model of British social anthropologist and Africanist, Max Gluckman (1955, 1963), Turner argued that during the liminal state (anti-structure), the limitations of social structures are relaxed and allow practitioners to create new identities or alter old ones. The ritual behavior of carnival is an example of how masqueraders incorporate masks to invert identities (Tseëlon 2001). Once the liminal state is complete, members are strengthened by a new expression of solidarity, a concept Turner termed, *communitas*. In true Durkheimian form, the final stage of reincorporation describes the way society averts the revolutionary nature of the liminal state and maintains its own equilibrium. For Emile Durkheim's notion of social equilibrium, see Durkheim (1964). I borrow the concept of liminality as a way to describe the kind of space paraders enter during these public events.

For several hours, traffic gives way to a sensory mélange of sightly robes, sweet perfumes, and choral chants. In fact, sound, more than any other performative element, constituted a subversive act for Black Harlem paraders in the late 1920s. "The sound and noise that white New Yorkers heard as cacophonous and atavistic," Clare Corbould asserts, "were to Harlem's black residents a way to claim space as their own" (2007: 861). Moreover, making noise on the street in the Jim Crow South, for instance, was not always permitted and, as Zora Neale Hurston novelized the period, institutional racism attempted to relegate Black laborers "tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long" (ibid.: 862).[9] As recent Muslim immigrants from a French-speaking country, most Murids lack adequate competence in English and Protestant American culture, and, as Hurston described above, this casts an eerie shadow over their mouths, bodies, and collective gaze. During the parade, however, the piercing chants of Bamba's *khassaïd* (poetry) reverberate through the streets, granting them not only a dominant voice for the moment, but also a vernacular presence and a visual narrative to dramatize Muridism for themselves and others.[10]

Besides the power of the spoken word, their signs and banners create a "visual epistemology" (Roberts and Roberts 2003: 38) that interject new ways of seeing Blackness. It includes the kind of stories members are urged to remember, especially when it entails the reinterpretation of well-known historic events. Among the many banners at the parade, one was particularly interesting for how it advocated a Murid approach to racial equality. The wording was attributed to Cheikh Amadou Bamba, but it was clearly reminiscent of a familiar theme in Black American history (Figure 2). The words appeared as follows:

> OUR BLACKNESS SHOULD NOT BE AN OBSTACLE
> TO OUR KNOWLEDGE AND OUR PERFECTION.
> ALL MEN WERE CREATED EQUAL
> CHEIKH AHMADU BAMBA

The banner addresses a racial legitimacy with its reference to "Our Blackness," suggesting at the outset that Murid followers are to be

[9] Corbould uses this fictional account to describe how Black workers were treated under Jim Crow or America's legalized segregation laws, which lasted from 1876 to 1965. See Hurston (1986: 9).

[10] This statement is not to suggest that the Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day Parade is devoid of subaltern voices and without competing messages. Parades and processions give the appearance of uniformity due to their very structure and military style formation. However, because these public displays are composed of individuals and subgroups, each with their own agenda, internal differences generally go unnoticed by spectators.

FIGURE 2. BANNER ON BLACKNESS.
Source: Photo by author.

considered part of the Black world. Moreover, the idea of "Blackness" as a thing preventing one from having access to "Knowledge" and "Perfection," or a thing frustrating one's life chances, has been a struggle historically played out throughout the Black Diaspora. By attributing this saying to Bamba, however, a public dialogue is created linking their struggle to other Black resistance narratives. Not only does it incorporate their voice into New York's racial politics, but, more importantly, it affords them their own unique place in the overall fight against Black inferiority. Accrediting this statement to Bamba means that their *jihad* (struggle) against racial discrimination is sanctified as an Islamic act. For these African Muslims, then, one's Black identity is part and parcel of what it means to be a Murid.

Given the wording of this particular sign, Murids are not merely engaged in activism against racial oppression. Rather, the sign postulates that Bamba is a key architect in the shaping of civil rights. Amadou, a Jamaican-born convert and New York professor, related a bit of Murid folklore to illustrate this point:

> "Well, they're under the assumption," Amadou explains, "that there is a microfilm in England of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, and they are saying that Gandhi had access to some of those things.
>
> "And Gandhi may have been influenced by Cheikh Amadou Bamba's thinking.

> "So," he reasoned, "if Martin Luther King was influenced by Gandhi, you can see there's a cycle."

The belief that Bamba's words might have indirectly influenced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reveals their attempt to retell and, thus, lay claim to a crucial part of Black history. For African Americans, the saga of slavery and civil rights provides a very powerful story for determining the contours of a viable Black identity. The idea that a Black African Muslim saint, rather than an Indian sage, is responsible for important ideas held by Civil Rights leaders raises two points. First, such a proposition gives the modern Civil Rights struggle an African origin of sorts and, thus, makes a connection between a Black Christian-based movement and Muslim philosophical thought. Second, while some may believe the accusation is entirely untenable, what matters most is not its accuracy, but how Murids employ it to explain a new Black presence in Harlem. In this regard, their statement, on the one hand, proposes a process of indigenization that moves them from the margins of society to the center of Black America; on the other, Murids offer a counter discourse to the notion of a monolithic Black identity, especially when African Islam is a major component in redefining what it means to be Black. Moreover, this racial premise gives them a measure of belonging that non-Black Muslim immigrants cannot claim. In a post-9/11 world, many Arab Muslim immigrants, once considered honorary Whites (Morsy 1994), struggle to find a comfortable or, at least, acceptable place in U.S. society. While Arab Muslims with light complexions tried "passing" for White in America's homogeneous suburbs before September 11th, dark African Muslims in newly gentrified cities have attempted to fit in by "acting" Black; albeit, with little success.[11]

When asked to choose the most important part of the parade, Abdoulaye, a 63-year-old Senegalese tailor and event organizer, replied, "The Black people come together marching … . Africans and African Americans come together and walk from 125th to 110th streets."[12]

[11] The act of "passing" occurred mostly during the era of Jim Crow or legal segregation in America. When the skin color of an African American approximated that of a White American, the former could relocate to a White neighborhood, as long as the individual could not be recognized, and assume a totally different racial identity. See Williamson (1995). Whether "passing" for White or "acting" Black, both processes involve strategies for racial inclusion or incorporation. Of course, the social rewards or sanctions for either "passing" or "acting" are very different. For a discussion on Africans acting Black, see Stoller (2002) and his brilliant fictional account based on his ethnographic fieldwork (1999).

[12] Prior to 2003, the parade started at the plaza of the Harlem State Office Building on 125th Street and proceeded down 7th Avenue to Central Park North on 110th, where there would be a rally and prayers.

He continued to say, "All the Africans from Senegal come together that day; it is the Murid day for Cheikh Amadou Bamba in America." As such, Muridism situates Blackness between its wider appeal to the Black Diaspora and its mediation of African and Islamic identities. While African Americans experience Blackness through the prism of an imagined Africa and as diasporic populations living in the West, African immigrants essentially locate their Blackness through feelings of exile and against the backdrop of a postcolonial Africa. As such, each group shares a common link to Blackness, but each one experiences it quite differently. In this context, the parade is a cultural routine where two distinct notions of Blackness coexist as sinuous constructs. That is to say, Blackness is contextual when, on the one hand, Africans and African Americans can share a sense of racial solidarity when religious affiliations are suspended. Yet, African Sufis also work to restructure the parameters of Blackness based on Bamba's sayings, which is visually expressed through their exilic parading in Harlem. The next section explores this in more depth.

SUFI PARADING AND AFRICANITY IN MOTION

Because clothes are an important aspect of nonverbal communication, they can bring two or more people into dialogue (Rubinstein 1995). At the same time, processional clothing is not everyday wear. In this context, the wearing of African clothes constitutes a spectacle, a ceremonial act intentionally performed to dramatize the entire event. As such, Doran H. Ross remarked that the *kente* cloth of Ghana was "made for movement" and meant to be "danced" (1998: 9). At the Bamba parade, African clothes signify the ambit of Africanness not by "what" is worn but "how" it is worn. It is what the clothing "does" rather than what it "is" that makes it, essentially, "African." To be more precise, the festive wearing of African clothes signifies a bodily attachment to an African character. It also stages ritual practices like the *khassaïd* chants, as they are embodied in the spectacle of their sartorial performance. Still, the "spectacle," as Timothy Lubin has so astutely argued in his work on the public display of a Vedic ritual, "has the ability through ceremony to … [allow] explicit connections with local places and people and with contemporary events and ideologies" (2001: 370–80). The spectacle of wearing African clothing dramatizes a Murid discourse or ideology around the nature of an African identity in New York. At the same time, this fashion fair does not operate uniformly, and it can reveal a struggle over meaning between parties within the parade itself.

Balozi Harvey,[13] a prominent, African-American Murid convert in his early sixties, discussed his involvement.

> "Well," he began, "that particular day I knew a lot of the [African] brothers were going to be in white, and I decided Afro-Americans should be in a different color [black and green], so they could be seen by the people who were on the street."
>
> He paused to think and continued, "See, America is our village. We can never forget America as being our village. This is where our ancestors, those we know of, are from—those we've buried and struggled with."
>
> "We have African ancestors in Africa too. Unfortunately, most of us can't even tell you who they are, but we know they exist because we know how we got here."

As president of the Murid Islamic Community in America (MICA), the organization sponsoring the event each year, Harvey helps to organize the parade as well. In fact, he is reportedly the only American to head a predominantly African Sufi organization. As president, he primarily helps Murid officials make administrative decisions. In his role as a cultural broker, however, he instructed all participants to wear traditional African dress. "Cheikh Balozi said that anybody coming to be in the parade must wear African clothes," Mamadou, a Senegalese in his early sixties asserted, "you have to show that you are African." So, the majority of the African participants dressed in their "traditional" garb, a pants set with a one-piece, loose fitting robe almost reaching their feet. Since Blacks have "African ancestors in Africa too," as Harvey recounted, African-American Murids participated in the sartorial practice as well. This style of dress gave paraders a uniform appearance, which helped to reinforce the visual image of a single and undifferentiated African identity.

On the other hand, Harvey's decision to distinguish himself from his African "brothers" by wearing different colors linked him and other Black American Murids to another ancestral homeland altogether: his American "village." In essence, his ethnic determination, actualized by the alternative color of their African clothing, helped to construct a boundary that nuanced competing versions of Africanity. This identity work reflects what Judith Byfield (2000: 6) means when she says:

[13] I customarily use pseudonyms or first names to protect the identity of my respondents. However, since Balozi Harvey is a well-known figure in the New York metropolitan area, I decided to use his real name and that of other prominent figures.

> In the United States, cities like New York have become home to significant numbers of Nigerians, Ethiopians, and Senegalese as well as Jamaicans, Haitians, and Dominicans. All can be claimed as part of the African diaspora, but their relationship to Africa, to each other, and to black Americans is mediated by national and ethnic identities, gender, and class. Together they have forged multinational, multiethnic urban black communities of overlapping diasporas with both shared and competing interests."

As Byfield's essay suggests, this murky terrain is complicated further when we consider how opposing factions within communities unpack or embody multiple identities, especially when they extend across racial, ethnic, or religious lines. In other words, while Harvey and other Black Americans may share a spiritual affiliation with African Murids and join them in commemorating Bamba's achievements, they clearly demonstrate a need to differentiate their African diasporic identity from the Africanity of their Senegalese counterparts. By the same token, Harvey's strategy to recognize his Black American ancestry masks a divide between Black Muslims and African Americans with Christian leanings. In short, overlapping diasporas often means having a foot in one cultural field and a hand in another, revealing how bounded, corporate identities can be porous in ways that frustrate our intellectual maps. In his exploration of what this multivocality might mean for continental Africans, Ali Mazrui advanced the concept of a triple heritage. This tripartite model examines how many Africans are forced to navigate Islamic, traditional African, and western cultures (Mazrui 1986). The settlement of African Murids in global cities like New York, however, extends this three-way model or, at least, creates the need to rethink and rework previous identity constructions.

Besides the stunning display of vibrant African clothing, the most striking element in the parade is the ubiquitous presence of both Senegalese and American flags, which, for the latter, were even more conspicuous following the September 11th terrorist attacks. More than a mere attempt to celebrate their national allegiance, the inclusion of both national symbols marks them as true ethnics or hyphenated Americans, either "Senegalese-American" or simply "African-American." As Tibbett Speer notes in his essay, "The Newest African Americans Aren't Black" (1994), African immigrants are touted as the new model minorities, and they can now compete with American Blacks for available set asides and Affirmative Action opportunities. Some African immigrants view themselves as the "real" African Americans, since they were raised on the continent and have taken up

permanent residency in the United States. Further, most native born African Americans, they assert, have never set foot anywhere in Africa and, in fact, maintain skewed imaginings of life there. The presence of these national emblems, however, is not just to demarcate their ethnic affiliation or to demonstrate, on some intrinsic level, their willingness to disappear into the panoply of American multiculturalism. As international migrants in a global age, the bi-national presence of Senegalese and American flags amplifies the transnational fields they traverse daily.

While the Bamba parade receives much less attention in the American press, a Senegalese television crew arrives each year to record the entire event, which is subsequently aired for several weeks in places like Dakar and Touba. Moreover, the parade's cornucopia of sights and sounds circulate through the mediated worlds Murids inhabit in France, Italy, Germany, or Atlanta, Chicago, and Los Angeles and brings their localized identities into conversation with a global Muridism. As such, this transnational procedure gives rise to a Murid "glocalism," a linkage between the local and global spheres by way of their international movement, economic traffic, and telecommunications.[14] "It's important that people know we do it in America and not in France," Abdoulaye commented. "One day you do it in Japan," he continued, "maybe one day you do it in Paris." Thinking further, he murmured, "That is why we have the flag." On the one hand, the prominent display of flags from Senegal announces to Harlem and beyond the arrival of a new African presence. On the other hand, virtually all groups have internal conflicts, and the display of the national standard allows those with contending views a chance to transcend their differences, at least momentarily. National flags are more than colorful pieces of cloth waving in the wind. They capture, in a brief moment, the heritage of a homeland—historic victories, bitter defeats, popular dishes, the national anthem, and an idyllic landscape instantly conjured up in the mind's eye.

Ritual elements, at times, are often combined with other materials to convey a meaning that is a bit more textured. For this purpose, the Senegalese flag alone is insufficient, and the American flag is employed to localize place within the global circuits of a Murid ecumene. Space, however, is not static and narrating one's place within cities evokes all sorts of anxieties and reactions. This is especially true for Muslims profiled as part of a "suspect community" (Hillyard 1993) in a post-9/11 world. The inclusion of the American flag, then, represents an attitude

[14] For an early treatise on the concept of glocalization, see Robertson (1992).

of deference African Murids feel towards the host country, a gesture they hope would assuage an anti-Muslim backlash. Khady, a Senegalese Murid in her mid-thirties explained:

> "Thank God we are not doing anything bad," she asserted.
> "We are good people!
> "You have to love yourself, yes, it is good.
> "But also it's good for you to love the person who opens his arms to you in respect.
> "Because all of us here, today, have a passport, the right to work, the right to live. We bought a house, bought a car.
> "I mean, we don't know when we are going to leave, so the thing is for you to respect your own people and your own flag because we are African, Black people.
> "But when you pull out the Senegalese flag, it should be right there with the American flag, next to it, because that is a part of respect."

The incorporation of both emblems in the parade reflects the kind of respect one should have for both the country of origin and destination. It also suggests that African Murids embrace much of what the American flag represents, and assures the wider public that although they have an allegiance to Senegal, a predominantly Muslim country, they are "not doing anything bad" and "are good"—both as Black people and Muslims. As mentioned above, this representation is especially important for Muslim immigrants after the attack on September 11th. In fact, this was the first Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day Parade following the tragic event, and there were noticeably more American flags than in previous years. Immigrant and native-born Muslims felt extremely vulnerable following the attack (Esposito and Mogahed 2007), and Khady's agitation was evident when she admitted Senegalese do not know when they are either "going to leave" or, perhaps, be forced to go.

Her Muslim background, however, was not the only reason Khady and other West African Muslims in New York felt insecure. Black Africans are still haunted by the images of slain West Africans like Amadou Diallo, an innocent victim killed by New York City police in a hail of 41bullets. Being Muslim and Black doubly marginalizes these newcomers. Khady's contention that one must "respect your own people and your own flag" constitutes a safety mechanism allowing her to return home if things get too dangerous. In the African Diaspora, then, the Senegalese flag symbolizes a space of a different kind, a place where they feel Africanity is not hunted and Blackness

not criminalized. Much of the meaning inherent in this symbolism may be lost on New York spectators. Still, the blinding imagery of thousands of Black bodies clad in elaborate African clothing, interspersed with Senegalese flags twirling in the wind, interjects an African sensibility onto the urban landscape. The Bamba Day parade, then, affords Murids the opportunity to dramatize their African Muslim identity and offer their own hermeneutics on Islamic faith and African religiosity.

PARADING ISLAMIC PLURALISM

While the St. Patrick's Day and Puerto Rican Day parades march up Fifth Avenue, a throughway lining Manhattan's most prestigious commercial district, the Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day parade runs through what is arguably the center of Black America. Be that as it may, the location of parading routes speaks volumes about the nature of each spectacle. The St. Patrick's Day parade, for example, "draws on the history of Fifth Avenue to lend legitimacy and respectability to Irish American identity" (O'Reilly and Crutcher 2006: 251). As an upscale business and residential area, both the paraders and spectators are primarily visitors. The incising visual display of green street lines, rivers,[15] and painted bodies symbolizes a reversal of power between White ethnics and New York's ruling elite, as everything or everybody is Irish on "St. Paddy's."[16] With the pan-ethnicization of Irishness,[17] their hyphenated status as Irish Americans is symbolically erased. In this "carnivalesque" (Bakhtin 1984) state, ethnic differences are temporarily melded into a space where Irish ethnicity and Catholic religiosity (interspersed along the perambulatory route) are normalized. In contrast, sideliners and participants at the Bamba Day parade work or reside in the neighborhood, and their parading

[15] New York began painting the street lines green on Fifth Avenue in the 1940s (Kelton 1985: 97) with some discontinuation afterwards, and the Chicago River is well known for its green dye on St. Patrick's Day.

[16] I use the term "white ethnics" to refer to migrants of European descent in America who were deemed unassimilable and, thus, designated as hyphenated Americans (e.g., Irish Americans and Italian Americans). See Ignatiev (1995). For other works on Whiteness Studies, see, for example, Brodkin (1998) and Guglielmo (2003). For the reference that everybody is Irish on "St. Paddy's," see Nagle (2005: 563) and, for a similar passage, see Kelton (1985: 97).

[17] By using this idea of pan-ethnicization, I mean to draw attention to this global phenomenon in Irish parading where whole societies adopt symbols of Irish identity. What does this say, for example, about the scope, range, and politics of multiculturalism around the world, not to mention the parade's religious identity? John Nagle (2005) has explored these themes somewhat in the St. Patrick's Day parade in London.

vernacular invokes themes that resonate with the community more directly. As West African Muslims, they use the Sufi sources of Bamba's sayings to challenge New York's racial politics and ethnic meanings. It is, in certain respects, a conversation between "cousins," as African immigrants are wont to call their Black neighbors, and, thus, an airing of dirty laundry as it relates to the belongings of Blackness, African heritage, and Islamic interpretation and authenticity. Although the Bamba parade is replete with racial and ethnic imagery, the driving force behind this religious procession is a zealous effort to enact a new spiritual geography.

With the absence of typical fanfare, elaborate floats, vendors, and commercial grandstanding, the parade achieves a level of purity.[18] That is to say, a public performance without these dazzling, temporal elements dismantles Harlem's hectic streets, momentarily transforming them into simple places marked by religious yearning and divine images of beatitude. Moreover, the variety stores, fashion boutiques, and restaurants Murids operate on and around 116th Street provide an important silhouette. These businesses are often named after their holy city of Touba, Bamba, and other clerics, or a combination of the two. As one endowed with *baraka* (sanctity), Cheikh Amadou Bamba and, by extension, everything rightly associated with him, receives this divine grace. As a result, Murid businesses named after him are imbued with esoteric power. In fact, since Bamba founded Touba as a religious site, he and the city are viewed as one and the same, and he is customarily referred to as *serigne* Touba or "Sir Touba." The sacredness of Bamba and the city, therefore, is transferable to other clerics as well. So, when Murid leaders visit their *taalibés* (disciples) in New York or elsewhere, the announcement, "Touba is coming to town" (Ebin 1996: 100) is made repeatedly. Moreover, Touba orients their consciousness and helps the devout Murid navigate the social world. By hanging pictures of Bamba or the City's Great Mosque on shop walls, Touba appears. Touba, therefore, can be duplicated and transported around the globe (ibid.). Thus, the image of *serigne* Touba, along with its hagiographical narratives, signifies the presence of a different Islamic compass in Harlem.

[18] Any place where individuals come in contact with the divine can be considered pure. In Islam, for instance, not only must places of worship like masjids maintain a state of physical and ritual purity, but the devotee's body, as a sacred site of divine communication, must likewise be ritually pure as a prerequisite for formal prayer (*salah*). "As a place of communication with divinity," Joel P. Brereton asserts, "a sacred space is typically a place of purity because purity enables people to come into contact with the gods" (2005: 7981). For an ironic twist, see Kugelmass (1994: 21) for how New York's Halloween parade in the Village attains a similar purity, because it occurs at night and lacks many commercial and political features.

FIGURE 3. BANNER HELD BY CHILDREN ON ISLAM AND PEACE.
Source: Photo by author.

Unlike the Islamic aniconism of some Sunni Muslims, who ban the graphic representation of divine figures or attributes, Murids have developed a figural tradition allowing them to "live in intimate association with images of their religious leaders" (Roberts and Roberts 2003: 25).[19] During the parade, a combination of words and Murid iconography instigate an "ambulating sacred text" (Slyomovics 1996: 206), as a way to help spectators interpret these images. One sign was carried by several African children; yet it clearly spoke to the devotional regard Murids have for the Saint. It was written as follows (Figure 3):

> "Islam = Peaceful Progress in Submission to Allah.
> Bismillah = Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba – Servant of the Messenger Spiritual Pole for Our Time"

[19] While Islamic iconoclasm speaks to the act of destroying images or objects, especially those intended for worship within both secular and Muslim spaces, its significance in Muslim history is debatable and can just as well relate to political issues more than religious ones. However, my reference to aniconism in Islam relates to a prohibition of figurative images that represent God to the more extreme case of any depiction of living creatures in artwork. Rather than conveying the idea of demolishing objects intended for veneration, I am interested in how Murids mitigate a Muslim tendency to prohibit the use of figural images as symbols of divinity or the sacred realm. For an interesting discussion on similar issues, see Finbarr Barry Flood (2002) and, for aniconism in Islamic art, see, Terry Allen (1988).

By drawing public attention to Islam (with its dual connotation of peace and submission), two audiences are addressed simultaneously. Because the banner was held by Muslim children following 9/11, it challenged the notion that Islam is a violent religion that indoctrinates youngsters to hate the West. At the same time, the idea that their "Peaceful Progress" emanates from their obedience to Allah's will, a standard proposition in Islam, positions them squarely within the larger Muslim world. Still, the sign also reveals a religious tension between the indigenization of their Murid practice and the universalism of *sunni* Islam.

The next phrase, "Bismillah = Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba" maps out their *tariqa* (Sufi way) or religious path. The term, *bismillah* is a grammatical contraction combining three words to create the single phrase, "In the name of Allah." More importantly, not only does each Quranic chapter begin with it (with the possible exception of one), Muslims also repeat it prior to beginning any enterprise in order to gain divine acceptance. The equal sign joining the *bismillah* and Bamba, then, signifies a visual representation of the path toward God. In this way, Bamba's image embodies a timelessness viewers can reenact with a simple gaze (Roberts and Roberts 2003: 38). It clearly distinguishes Murids in Harlem as a Muslim community with its own religious imaginary and historical trajectory. Further, Bamba is frequently referred to as *khadimou rassoul* or servant of the Messenger of Allah, and the remaining phrase portrays him as a devout follower of the Prophet Muhammad. However, the next and final line proclaims that Bamba is the "Spiritual Pole for Our Time." This honorific not only speaks to his exemplary position among *taalibes* (disciples), but elevates him to the station of *qutb* (universal spiritual guide). This final point does more than situates Muridism within the mosaic of religious pluralism in America. As processions are "designed to compete with the existing environment around it, becoming for a time the dominant element" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and McNamara 1985: 2), this reference clearly allows Murids to stake their own claims for Islamic legitimacy and power.

Other banners in the parade advocate a standard Islamic message. However, this can be read with a double meaning. First, while Murids position themselves within the parameters of traditional Islamic faith and culture, the localization of their religious practice forces them to configure an "indigenous modernity" (Diouf 2003: 12), allowing them to respond to new and changing circumstances. The public display of the Muslim *shahada* (testimony of faith), then, is meant to be foundational but not restrictive. In other words, it is meant to illustrate their

FIGURE 4. BANNER ON *SHAHADA*.
Source: Photo by author.

membership in the larger *umma* (Muslim community), but, at the same time, it is not meant to direct their religious compass. As such, a Murid indigeneity challenges the cultural hegemony of Arabscapes in Islam.[20] A major banner in the parade was worded as follows (Figure 4):

> WE BEAR WITNESS THAT … .
> ALLAH
> IS THE ALMIGHTY CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE AND -
> MUHAMMAD IS HIS CHOSEN PROPHET AND MESSENGER

The wording of this banner was recited aloud in Arabic: “La Ilaaha Illa-llah, Muhammadur-Rassoulullah” (There is no god except Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah). This Islamic code speaks to a long tradition in Muslim history. Known as the *shahada* (declaration of

[20] I coin the term, “Arabscape” based on Arjun Appadurai’s notion of ethnoscape and other similar formulations (1996: 33–36), which refer to how people move around the globe in ways that create a transnational landscape, allowing them to ignore traditional boundaries. By Arabscapes in Islam, I mean to highlight this particular transnational field in terms of the various ways in which Arab culture, language, interpretative mechanisms, and other fabulations promote an Arabocentricism or hegemonic presence, as they move throughout the Islamic world and within Muslim communities in the West.

faith), it is a constant throughout a Muslim's life. It is whispered in the ear of the new born infant, and it is recited in daily prayers, during hard times, on special occasions, and at funerals. In fact, its recital is the sole requirement qualifying one's conversion to the faith. Consequently, the sacred "word" or, more exactly, Quranic script, has been used to mark Islamic space as inscriptions on buildings, as bumper stickers on cars, and, in terms of public events, as messages on banners and verbal incantations recited aloud. For these African Muslims, it anchors their Murid practice within a religious tradition sanctioned and respected by Muslims worldwide. While the *shahada* provides a broad canvas for positioning their Murid identity, other symbols are employed to help distinguish them from Muslims more generally.

West African Muslims in Harlem use the parade to attract and convert other West Africans and Black Americans. Some believe Islamic propagation is an essential part of the faith, and the sheer size of the Murid Order matters a great deal. If the group's vanguard can attract more members and particularly influential supporters, their position will be strengthened against dissidents within the Murid group. Of course, uniformity does not always result from increased membership. A larger community usually brings new ideas that often conflict with those of existing members. Ousmane, a Senegalese man and parade organizer in his late forties, discussed these conflicts over the proper presentation of Islam during the parade:

> "We [the committee] sat down and talked about different purposes for the parade," Ousmane asserted.
>
> "One key theme for our parade was the propagation of Islam. Period!
>
> "We are not a political organization, although we have some interest in politics as it relates to New York, because ultimately it affects our quality of life. To let people know about Islam, that we are not terrorists … .
>
> "Other people wanted to make political statements, but we try to shy away from that …
>
> "Some people wanted to mention the Palestine incident; some people wanted to mention the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan—all these different situations we're faced with.
>
> "Someone mentioned something about Bosnia and African countries like Sudan … .
>
> "Of course, they're concerned, and you have to be concerned about your Muslim brother no matter where he is in the world …
>
> "But, let's make a statement about Islam."

West African and African-American Muslims hold different notions about the meaning of Islamic unity. At the very least, Islam constitutes both a faith community and a civilization. At times, however, Muslims may view the two as one and the same. At other times, they see them as separate and uncompromising entities. It was not that Ousmane did not see the necessity of making a stand on political issues. He believed that a Muslim must be "concerned" about another Muslim "no matter where he is in the world." In spite of this, he had assumed it was safe to suggest that Muslim paraders could collectively be represented as propagators of "Islam"—"Period!" He argued that Islam (ostensibly, as a faith community) could be separated from politics, and that the parade would serve as a symbol of the faith. Nonetheless, members of the committee had their own understanding of what amounted to unity under the banner of Islam. In their mind, the politics of these "different situations" facing Muslims worldwide were central aspects of the religion. In fact, many believed these politically charged issues are exactly what unite Muslims. Not unlike other processions, the Bamba Day parade necessarily masks divergent views, and a major task of the committee has been to reconcile the fault lines between faith and politics.

Language can be used for much more than routine communication. It can also be employed to reinforce a feeling of belonging, exclude outsiders, or indicate a shift in a group's social or political orientation. While the posters were of modest size and written in English, there was one sign that incorporated several languages and nearly spanned the entire width of the street. It read (Figure 5):

> "Visite annuelle du Serigne Mourtalla Mbacke – Ibn Khadimou Rassoul aux Etats Unis du 25 juillet au 03 aout 2001 sous l'égide de Murid Islamic Community avec la participation de la Assurances CNART - assistance et Taxa Wu – des Garanties Adaptées a vos besoins – avec CNART Assurances - vous pouvey courir le monde".[21]

While most banners were about two-and-a-half feet wide and held by an average of seven people, this sign was at least three-feet wide and was carried by no less than fifteen. It was obviously designed to be the most visible banner in the parade. Mostly in French, it also included

[21] While the words are the same, it's graphic style was a bit different. An English rendition would be: "The Annual Visit of the Honorable Mourtalla Mbacke, Son of [Bamba] the Disciple of the Messenger to the United States from July 25 through August 3, 2001/Hosted by the Murid Islamic Community with the participation of Assurances CNART – the assistance of Taxa Wu – Garanties Adaptees [underwriting] For All Your Needs / With Assurances CNART, You Can Navigate the World."

FIGURE 5. BANNER ON MURID COSMOPOLITANISM.
Source: Photo by author.

English, Wolof, and Arabic transliteration. Because of its multilingual character, the sign could not simply be a message to French speakers alone, and certainly not to the English (or Spanish) speaking community of Harlem. As a colossal centerpiece, it clearly addressed those who share their ability to navigate these polyglot worlds. Even for those Murids steeped in Wolof society and not particularly well versed in postcolonial French, the culture is still very much a part of their tradition, and they know how to navigate its overtones. In many respects, it embodies what it means to be Murid. Its hybridity not only reflects their multivocal character, but it distinguishes them by way of their African heritages, Islamic postures, postcolonial musings, and, now, American realities. In the end, the sign embodies Murid identity as an Islamic and African cosmopolitanism in the modern world, and it is obviously a membership few can claim.

REFLECTIONS: THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE OF MURID PARADING

While this article focuses on the mixing of racial, ethnic, and religious identities, parades certainly reveal other aspects of the self, and the gendered composition of the Bamba parade bears some mentioning. As reflections of the social arrangements in the larger society, these

perambulatory events are not gender-neutral (Racioppi and See 2000), especially as it relates to faith-based marches. Women, however, play different roles and occupy various positions. For British Muslims of Pakistani descent, for example, only men march in the Urs procession, while women come to witness the *zikr* (chants), prayers, and other festivities (Werbner 1996: 169). In fact, this exclusion mirrors the absence of women marchers in Pakistan. Still, Pakistani women do participate in the Shi'i Karbala procession in Canada, but they are stationed in the rear (Schubel 1996: 198). At other fairly religious parades like for St. Patrick's Day in New York, gender separation has been common with the men's contingent preceding the women's group, each with "its own marshal and set of aides" (Kelton 1985: 95). Moreover, Joseph Sciorra reveals that "these processions are also public representations of the family, with separate marching units consisting of men, women, and children on display" (1999: 520). Yet, while the processional structure may be representative of a familial hierarchy, these works ignore how women like Murids manipulate these constraints through their engagement with "living" hagiographies.

Murid women began making temporary visits to New York in the late 1980s (Babou 2002: 161), when many Senegalese men were arriving. As urban dwellers, most came from Dakar and have brought with them their religious sensibilities and devotional practices. Assatou, a woman in her mid-forties, discusses her early experience at the parade:

> "Really, the first march, I cried for the whole day," she explained.
> "People say, 'Why are you crying?'
> "I say, 'I never thought this day would come. I want this parade because I don't have it back home .... and you don't see the cheikhs [saints] in Touba.'
> She continued, "When you go there, and if you are not close to them, and you don't really know the leaders, you don't see them.
> "You just hear the leaders' voice or you hear that the leader said this and that.
> "But in this country, you sit with them, you eat with them.
> "It is a blessing [*baraka*] to sit next to them.
> "Something good must be in this country because we do not have it back home ... .
> "Today, when he [the cheikh] came, I fixed breakfast for him, we ate lunch together, talked together.
> "I never had it until I come to this country."

The Bamba Day events not only link Murids in the Diaspora with their leadership in Senegal, but they also alter the nature of their religious

interaction, which includes a change in gender relations. While African women in Sufi brotherhoods tend to be less restricted than in orthodox Islam, there are still constraints on when and under what conditions they will be granted opportunities (Bop 2005). The fact that Assatou had extremely limited access to marabouts does not suggest that men are given free reign either. Still, African women are generally more disadvantaged in this regard (Dunbar 2000). The "religious capital"[22] Assatou gained abroad, however, afforded her life chances that were unimaginable in Senegal. Similar to Arjun Appadurai's anecdote about his family's trip to India to visit a Hindu priest, who (for months) had already been performing rites in Houston, TX (1996: 55–58), African saints regularly travel all over the world to maintain good relations with their *taalibés*. Because Touba receives thousands of dollars of *addiya* (annual tithes or monthly remittances) from their diasporic followers, many of whom belong to a new class of wealthy businesswomen, Murid cheikhs try to uphold particularly high levels of allegiance and group solidarity. Granting them greater access to their cheikhs, then, endears the laity to the leadership and heightens religious fervor.

Some Murid women maintain a great emotional attachment to their saints, who they believe can grant them *baraka* and a path to God. Like the tears Assatou "cried for the whole day," many women enter a state of *daanu leer*, a Wolof word for the spiritual ecstasy they experience from intense devotion (Piga 2002: 238). For Assatou, the Bamba Day festivities created an extraordinary setting in which to "bring the saints … down to earth" (Kugelmass 1994: 21)—to care for them, to live in fellowship with them, to be completely transformed by them. This religious commitment does not mean Murid women merely submit to patriarchy. On the contrary, "social life is set up and animated in reference to women" in Senegal (Roberts and Roberts 2003: 161), especially in urban areas where they have established powerful associations, earned sole proprietorship of multiple businesses, and they customarily control the economics of the household. Religiously, many belong to *dahiras* (Murid circles), which handle both religious and social needs of the Murid community. They have also joined mixed-gendered *dahiras* where they may hold high offices (Callaway and Creevey 1994: 48), although most are members of all female circles (Bop 2005: 1108).

[22] Like social and other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986), I include "religious capital" to mean the ways in which sacred beliefs and practices create networks that not only have value but, also, produce resources influencing one's real or imagined life chances.

Each *dahira* is devoted to a saint, and the *taalibés* are committed to supporting the marabout with *addiya* (tithes) during his or her annual visit. The aim of this economic support is to allow the marabout more time to increase spiritual power and influence (ibid.). While men have traditionally controlled the leadership within Sufi *tariqas*, the Murid have acknowledged woman saints like Sokhna Magatte Diop, who, as a marabout, has several *dahiras* and bestows *baraka* on her followers (Coulon 1988). She was even declared a Murid caliph (supreme leader). Other women directly related to Bamba have been revered as saints like Sokhna Maïmouna Mbacké (1925–1999), and she has both male and female disciples (Roberts and Roberts 2003: 159). The most important saintly figure for Murid women, however, is Mame Diarra Bousso (1833–1866), Bamba's mother (Figure 6). While photographs of her do not exist, her image has been portrayed in various ways and a *dahira* has been formed for her in New York.[23] Mame Diarra is a source of hope and inspiration for Murid women, and her hagiographical narratives serve to guide them in all aspects of life including their businesses (ibid.: 162). What makes the life of Bamba, his mother, Mame Diarra Bouso, and early Murid figures so exemplary is their effort to be religious in a mundane world, a core value expressed by Murid women in New York.

As sacred portraits meander up Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard (7th Avenue), a Murid gaze connects with the images and enacts a visual piety. There is a mystical encounter, a transmission of divine energy that moves from icon to observer. They walk, chant, wave signs, and they embody the stories of the saints in a reenactment that releases a religious aura, a feeling collapsing time and space into a hagiographical present. Assatou explains this view:

> "The parade is very special," she said.
>
> "I heard Cheikh Amadou Bamba used to go all over the world searching, trying to find someone who wanted Islam, someone who would read one of his books, and so we march … .
>
> "It is a blessing [*baraka*] because, in those days, Cheikh Amadou Bamba didn't have cars, no buses or nothing.
>
> "He was walking.
>
> "So he walked to teach people to do the right thing, to teach them what the Lord wants us to do.

[23] Babou claims that there were perhaps thirty *dahiras* in New York City in 2001, which was an increase from fourteen in 1996 (2002: 164–5).

FIGURE 6. POSTERS OF MAME DIARRA BOUSSO & BAMBA.
Source: Photo by author.

> "We get a blessing [*baraka*] from walking—to help people … .
> "So we walk to represent him [Bamba] on his day."

According to Assatou, the actual "walking" of paraders resurrects Bamba's struggles, as they simulate his trek from one town to the next to propagate Islam and serve humanity. More importantly, by moving saintly portraits from the privacy of their masjid, homes or businesses to the street, Murids create a "symbolic dislocation" (Zaragoza 1995: 80), a concept Edward C. Zaragoza borrowed from Roberto DaMatta (1984: 213–14) to describe a liminal space in the fiesta of Santiago Apóstol. Removing a sacred image from its house of worship (or places designated for sanctification) magnifies the saint and forces participants and spectators to renew their relationship with it. Because the religious symbol enters a domain "where it does not normally belong" (Zaragoza 1995: 80), it exaggerates their association with it and disrupts their temporal and spatial borders. As Murid women carry Bamba's mysterious

portrait, they are walking with him, caring for him during his struggles. In fact, they are supporting him, as Mame Diarra Bousso did when, according to legend, she would miraculously appear after her death to console and encourage him in times of great need (Babou 2007: 9).

For Murid women in the procession, the acquisition of *baraka* is paramount. The parade is “special,” Assatou announced above, because “we get a blessing [*baraka*] from walking.” Much of their performance, however, is positioned at the end of the parade. Children, on the other hand, walk in the front or in the middle, depending on the parading year. We cannot assume, though, that the women’s station at the back is an indication of their apathy. In fact, despite their marginalization within Sufi tariqas generally, some find it curious that Murid women have become extremely active (Bop 2005). Considering the growing relevance of religion around the world (Berger 1999), and especially in Africa, their high visibility has transformed the nature of the order itself. The “Islam of the brotherhoods and *marabouts*,” Coulon Christian asserts, “has become primarily the religion of women” (1988: 118). Some would argue that the religious dynamism of Senegalese women in particular constitutes an “Islam au féminin” or a woman’s Islam (Piga 2002: 241). With a Muslim population of over 90%, Senegal is still a secular state and their first president, Léopold Senghor, was a Christian. These facts make researchers like Codou Bop (2005) believe that a secular system has allowed Senegalese women greater upward mobility. Even so, Bop also admits that they still desire to benefit from the fellowship, spirituality, and professional networking *dahiras* can provide (2005: 1109). Consequently, it appears Murid women in New York and elsewhere will continue to employ Murid hagiographies to meet their social and religious needs.

Although Linda Racioppi and Katherine O’sullivan See make the crucial point that these public displays very often underscore gender inequalities and even reveal multiple masculinities at work, we should be reminded that gender constructions (along with race, class, sexuality, or age and their intersections) are experienced differently across cultures.[24] While the distribution of *baraka* and religious authority may be disproportionate between men and women in Muridiyya (Bop 2005: 1112–6), Murid women at the Bamba Day parade manipulate these categories to gain the greatest benefit or the highest religious experience. In other words, while the possession of *baraka* has traditionally been

[24] Although brief, Kecia Ali (2002) quite perceptively points out how a single interpretive lens (or a single heuristic concept like *hijab* or veiling) cannot be used to understand the marginalization of Muslim women across societies.

male dominated, Murid women in New York have much more earning potential and can challenge the constraints of conventional gender roles. As such, they have used their economic position and religious networks to support marabouts, both male and female, who uphold them and address their concerns. This increased capital empowers their chosen saints, and strengthens the religious and social status of these women. As far as the acquisition of *baraka* is concerned, Murid women engage in these gendered crossings, dedicating themselves to either male or female saints, in ways that speak to their unique circumstances and empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Religious performance at the Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day parade reveals a particular dynamic involving numerous sociocultural and political elements. It does not reflect future changes, however, that will inevitably occur and impact the range and scope of their Islamic practice and parading tradition. The authority of the cheikhs, for example, appears to be under considerable attack by a growing contingent of middle class Murids, who criticize, among other things, hereditary leadership limiting succession to Bamba's descendents.[25] Since their migration to France long predates their U.S. presence, Murids in places like Paris have had much more time to work out their integration in that society. Educated under a French colonial system, many have relocated to attain graduate degrees in France, and a formidable corps of Murid professionals is already established there. As the Senegalese scholar, Mamadou Diouf, has explained, he sees Bamba's message as an "unfinished prophecy" (2003: 12). While direct clashes have been avoided, he believes class divisions within Muridiyya might force important changes in its hierarchical structure and impact how Bamba's teachings are understood. Unlike its French counterpart, Muridism in America is still new, and the community mostly consists of street

[25] In his discussion of this ongoing dissension, Mamadou Diouf writes: "The triumph of the *modu-modu* [non-western educated, merchants and traders] as representative of the Murid community took place in the second half of the 1980s at the expense of another group much more active in the 1970s, the Murid intellectual—students and Senegalese professionals living in Western countries, particularly in France. While there has never been any direct confrontation between the two groups, a competition between them is at the heart of tensions and conflicts that afflict the Murid brotherhood. The stakes are the management and supervision of Touba, on one hand, and questions of how to interpret, dramatize, and act out the Murid heritage and the founder's message, on the other" (2000: 697).

merchants and local business owners. While few have managed to finish college and enter graduate school, most are working class.

This class distinction, I would argue, has a direct impact on how Muridiyya is practiced and realized in America. Because a Murid intelligentsia in the United States is not yet consequential (although it has begun to emerge), a working class contingent from the Brotherhood has struggled to maintain and promote traditional interpretations of Muridism. Under current conditions, it appears West African Murids will continue to be guided by the conventional wisdom they have inherited from Touba. At the same time, they will obviously be forced to translate these practices and beliefs into new forms that fit an American context. The invention of a parading tradition is certainly one of these conventions. As this article has argued, this type of public innovation is not simple, involving a complex process that necessitates all sorts of negotiations between the self and other. While the Bamba parade is mainly a religious commemoration, it also reflects their struggle as Black people situated at the bottom rung of America's racial hierarchy. As Muslim immigrants from West Africa, they are doubly marginalized, because their faith is openly associated with terrorism and their homeland is commonly viewed as a disease-ridden jungle. The spectacle of their vivacious sartorial performance, however, is a major attempt to bring both stereotypes sharply into question.

In short, the Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day parade and other religious processions present a crucial stage where scholars can understand how religious identities intersect with race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, nationality, age (e.g., for second generation immigrants), or class. If we are to grasp something of the meaning of religion or understand how it operates in today's world, it must not be isolated as an independent variable and studied on its own terms only. Rather, religion, in many respects, can constitute the feelings, imaginings, and behavior people act out (Warner 2000) and, often, negotiate with other affiliations of the self. This view would suggest that religious identities are performed, as others have considered for constructs like race (Rahier 1999). This means religious meaning might not always emerge in places or under circumstances traditionally designated as sacred—churches, mosques, temples, praise houses. Some would even argue that a sense of the sacred could occur at the most incredible places like a shopping mall (Pahl 2003). Others would say that sacred space as a heuristic tool has lost its relevance, because of its tendency to be employed or described completely out of context (Williams 2002). Still, research areas like where the Bamba parade occurs challenges our sense of what the sacred means, what religion means, and what it means to

grasp how these concepts will be applied to new and changing conditions, particularly in a growing and religiously pluralistic America (Eck 2007). If nothing else, it is certainly a world that promises to call our intellectual moorings into question.

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