The Muridiyya Diaspora

Muridiyya on the Move: Islam, Migration, and Place Making

By Cheikh Babou. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2021. Pp. 326. $80.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9780821424377); $36.95, paperback (ISBN: 9780821424674); e-book (ISBN: 9780821447291).

Shobana Shankar

Stony Brook University

Keywords: West Africa; Senegal; Atlantic World; Islam; pan-Africanism; migration

Cheikh Babou's expertise on the Senegalese-origin Muridiyya Muslim Sufi order is unparalleled. Following his first book, *Fighting the Greater Jihad*: *Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya* (2007), in *Muridiyya on the Move,* Babou has written an entirely fresh and innovative second book. Looking beyond Senegal, Babou uses a transnational lens and a historical ethnographic approach to explore the creation of the Muridiyya diaspora. He argues that Senegalese migrants belonging to this order are simultaneously 'home and abroad' (2), dispersed around the world while remaining rooted through their pilgrimage to and longing for Tuubaa, the Muridiyya holy city in west-central Senegal. Deeply researched and engrossing in its depiction of lived experiences of the Murid diaspora, Babou's book fundamentally transforms how we understand religion and migration. Mobility in Islam is far more than pilgrimage, his book shows, and African religion, more generally, has been a vital factor in modern globalization.

The book comprises seven chapters, with the first setting the scene in Senegal to establish the importance of Murid migration from Bawol Province — the natal land of Ahmadu Bamba (the Murid founder) and Murid heartland — into the cities of Saint-Louis and Dakar. This movement was not only linked to economic change. With rural to urban migration came new forms of religious activity, performances of piety, resource collection and distribution; in time, migration became a key feature of Muridiyya identity. Migrants came to understand migration as a pious act, a theological view that Babou suggests motivated the migrants themselves, rather than being dictated by the clerical elite. Subsequent chapters trace the Murid diaspora to Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, France, and the United States, and show how the Muridiyya became embedded in various far-flung societies, while maintaining ties through religious activities and symbolism and migrant and material flows to Senegal.

Babou's multi-sited analysis is built on migrant experiences; he weaves together socio-historical analysis of the founding and growth of the Muridiyya with an ethnography of Islamic beliefs and practices in migration. He explains in the introduction how Muridiyya beliefs and social organization created the ability and motivation to move. The Murid founder Ahmadu Bamba emphasized religious tenets such as jihad of the soul, distance from worldly power, and submission to shaykhs (spiritual teachers); these teachings fostered followers' immersion in activities such as the creation of rural working schools (*daara tarbiyya*) established by the Murids, which became the engine of peanut cultivation for the colonial economy. New villages using these collective strategies cropped up near railway stations on urban peripheries beginning around 1912. As migration to urban areas expanded, the Murids developed *daïra* (or *dahira*), prayer circles 'where disciples from the same town or neighborhood would meet on a weekly basis to read the Qur'an, chant Ahmadu Bamba's devotional poems, collect financial contributions, and socialize' (27). Murids recalled how these collectives helped to institutionalize their labor, while the French colonial administration attempted to curtail the devotional singing and other Murid activities, which were policed and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853722000706 Published online by Cambridge University Press

treated as public disturbances. The Murids also had to compete vigorously for space in the cities of Dakar and Saint-Louis, where neighbors worried that they were too independent and insistent on maintaining their cultural distinction. Indeed, Babou sees the creation of a Murid style, in part, as the erasure of competing versions of narratives and performances to enforce a unified portable identity.

Beginning in the late colonial period, Murid migrations went beyond Senegal, where their experiences were different, depending on their destinations. Murids who were successful businesspeople expanded their interests to Côte d'Ivoire from the 1950s. Economic incentives also drove migration in the 1960s to Gabon, where Murids cultivated a particular religious justification, recalling the memory of the French authorities forcing Ahmadu Bamba into exile there between 1895 and 1902. This kind of history did not, of course, exist in France, to where many Murids began to move when life in Senegal grew more difficult following environmental crises and economic difficulties in the Sahel in the 1970s. Given the challenges of shaping a public Muslim presence in an ostensibly secular France, the Murids managed to create a network of prayer spaces through private property ownership. Babou offers the fascinating observation that the ostensibly private orientation of religion in France led Muridiyya to focus at first on their cultural identity, rather than on political ambition or aspirations for citizenship. Yet some Murid activists in France began to position themselves more prominently and globally by defining themselves as Sufi Muslims (not as Senegalese or as French) and engaging in proselytism and public speaking to Western audiences about Islam, ecumenism, and other topics. Babou's final two chapters follow Murids to the United States, and to Harlem, New York City, in particular, where the community was established by undocumented people who overstayed their visas and worked in street vending. The first generations of Senegalese in New York weathered intense hostility because of their vending. In the 1990s more educated Senegalese followed the first wave of Murids to the United States; these newcomers, including new Murid migrants, became upwardly mobile through providing services and goods such as women's hair braiding, food, and fabrics that helped to build the Little Senegal section of Harlem. The community's success did not come easily, given the challenges brought by gentrification and tensions with African American residents. Yet there were also African Americans who were attracted by the figure of Ahmadu Bamba as a Black Muslim saint, a fact that reveals fascinating nuances that Babou could certainly have explored further, as he does in journal articles.[1]

I would have liked to learn more about how the relationship between Africans and African Americans shaped the rise of Senegalese community organizations in New York that depart somewhat from the older idea of daïras as religious organizations. Babou argues that these diaspora organizations have developed more social welfare orientations, through which young, educated, and professional Senegalese-Americans have begun to address the future prospects of their community. It would be good to know what specific problems these organizations seek to tackle, and how the plight of being Black in America affects their thinking. Babou indicates that daïras increasingly address the failures of the state, whether American or French, but what exactly these failures are in New York and Paris — as well as within Senegal itself — could use more exploration. Furthermore, I would have liked to learn more about how Senegalese communities in Senegal today respond to the growth and success of the Murid diaspora. Finally, an expansion of Babou's methodological discussion, especially reflections on how his insider status shaped his interviews, would have been fascinating. This feeling of wanting more is a testament to Babou's skill for storytelling that inspires curiosity and connection to the many characters who animate the book. *Muridiyya on the Move* is a rich and thoughtful book that is deeply satisfying for its sensitivity to the economic and cultural lives of migrants. Babou's balance of colorful local stories and

[1]C. A. Babou, 'Migration and cultural change: money, "caste", gender, and social status among Senegalese female hair braiders in the United States', *Africa Today*, 55:2 (2008); C. A. Babou, 'Brotherhood solidarity, education and migration: the role of the dahiras among the Murid Muslim community of New York', *African Affairs*, 101:403 (2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853722000706 Published online by Cambridge University Press

insightful wide-angled analyses sets a high bar for future research on African migration and migrant religions.

doi:10.1017/S0021853722000706

African Medicine in the Atlantic World

Healing Knowledge in Atlantic Africa: Medical Encounters, 1500-1850

By Kalle Kananoja. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 320. $99.99, hardcover (ISBN: 9781108491259); $80.00, e-book (ISBN: 9781108865302).

Philippa Hellawell

The National Archives, United Kingdom

Keywords: Angola; Congo; West Africa; Central Africa; Atlantic World; colonial; medicine; health: ritual

In the Kingdom of Kongo, the bark of the *enkasa* tree was a powerful antidote for spells and poisons, often used to detect witches in judicial trials. Frequently referred to as the 'tree of life', *enkasa* became the subject of a manuscript written by the Portuguese Sergeant-Major Francisco de Buitrago, who had used the bark as a remedy while stationed in Angola. *Enkasa* retained popularity among Central and West Africans and visiting Europeans, some of whom lauded the tree as the 'sister tree from which the cross of the crucified Christ has been made' (62, quoting Buitrago). Use of *enkasa* bark spoke simultaneously to the proliferation of Christianity in Kongo and to the blending of healing and harming across early modern African medicine. Returning to Lisbon, Buitrago used *enkasa* to exorcise bewitched patients, with further uses of the tree's bark recorded across eighteenth-century Portugal. Not only was it administered to evacuate poisons and the devil, it was also employed to treat common bodily ailments like the flux, colic, and fevers. Kalle Kananoja's *Healing Knowledge in Atlantic Africa* focuses on practices like those associated with the *enkasa* tree to weave a rich and engaging account of the continuous exchange between European and African medicine across three centuries.

Against much scholarship on the history of global health and medicine, Kananoja argues forcefully that Europeans borrowed more from indigenous Africans than they gave in return. Faced with a new climate and landscape, with accompanying high death rates, European colonists found limitations to their own classical medical models and had no alternative but to draw on the expertise of native medical practitioners, who knew both the land and its resources. After all, natural medicine in Africa was not significantly different from the botanical and mineral-based medicines dispensed in Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Medical knowledge was embedded in local experience and in Kananoja's words 'Europeans depended on other people's eyes and brains in Atlantic Africa' (3). *Enkasa* was just one of the many botanical products that Europeans incorporated into their medical practice across both Western Europe and Central and West Africa.

The book is organised thematically; first, it explores the plurality and materiality of medicine in West Central Africa (Chapters One and Two) and moves to a consideration of African botanical expertise on the Gold Coast and science and agricultural development in Sierra Leone (Chapters

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853722000706 Published online by Cambridge University Press