

Africa (2023), 93, 435–454
doi:10.1017/S0001972023000426



Reviews of books

Cheikh Anta Babou, *The Muridiyya on the Move: Islam, Migration, and Place Making*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US\$80 – 978 0 8214 2437 7; pb US\$36.95 – 978 0 8214 2467 4). 2021, xvii + 318 pp.

Two-thirds of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa go to another African country, and whether travelling inside or outside the continent, a significant proportion are from Senegal. Until recently, most of these Senegalese migrants were disciples of the Muslim Sufi order, the Muridiyya. Cheikh Anta Babou presents a history of Murid migrations – first to Côte d'Ivoire, then to Gabon, and then to France and New York City, providing unique access to the actors' worldviews and internal arguments. Religious attitudes lie behind economic survival and struggles for social betterment, although young Murid tend to become more pious and observant after they leave Senegal. In their countries of immigration, the Murid have innovated in religious and economic practice. This book contributes to the scholarly literature on the Murid Sufi order and the thriving literature on migration studies.

As Babou recapitulates, the Murid order became a distinct Sufi way (*tariqa*) and a recognizable community in the final decade of the nineteenth century, as the saintly

¹ L. Lodwick and E. Rowan (2022) 'Archaeobotanical research in classical archaeology', *American Journal of Archaeology* 126 (4): 593–623, here p. 594.

figure Ahmadu Bamba was subjected to persecution by French administrators of the newly founded colony of Senegal. Unable to distinguish between politically rebellious and less troublesome mystical figures, they exiled Ahmadu outside Senegal. Yet his reputation for holiness and the indignation and number of his disciples only increased. In the early twentieth century, the Muridiyya separated from the older matrix of Qadiriyya where it had its roots. The colonial authorities changed their attitude towards the Muridiyya as the *tariqa* became an agricultural colonization movement, distinguishing itself in the production of peanuts as a cash crop, one of the rare successful revenue-generating exports in colonial French West Africa.

Murid transnational mobility has its origins in the decline of this system. The Murid population shifted to cities, where their means of subsistence became self-employment and commerce. The rural farm school disappeared. In its place, a periodical gathering, the prayer circle, was invented for the performance of Sufi ceremonies, the incantatory recitations (*dhikr*) and the chanting of *qasida* praise poems. The disciples took this institution with them to faraway foreign destinations. Babou underlines Murid attachment to their spiritual guides and the sacred geography of their religious order, elements that attenuated their bond to their birth-places, making them unlike prototypical villagers. This also facilitated the Muridiyya's transition to an urban and eventually international lifestyle. The city of Tuubaa (Touba) in Senegal speaks to these dynamics. Starting from nowhere, during the final years of Ahmadu Bamba's exile, Tuubaa became a sacred place after his death, a pilgrimage centre and a destination for return migrants over the course of the twentieth century, an expanding urban area with substantial state subsidies because of Murid political clout, and now the second largest city in Senegal.

Abidjan, the port city of Côte d'Ivoire, was the first cross-border destination for Murid international migration, which accelerated after political independence in 1960. It served as a staging ground for Murid international mobility, both within and outside the continent. Their ethos of migration was born there. Thanks to farmer-owned coffee and cocoa plantations, prosperity and demand for services, southern Côte d'Ivoire had attracted massive migration during the colonial period, mostly from the land-locked territories to its north. Murid migration came later. Not possessing formal school education – still something of a mark of Murid mobility – and unqualified and uninterested in civil service jobs or industrial wage work, they came as jewellers, petty traders, tailors, leather workers and mechanics. Abidjan also incubated large-scale business expansion, creating the wealthy Murid merchants who started ventures in Europe and North America.

The next step was the prosperous equatorial country of Gabon, which lacked skilled professionals. To construct its expanding capital, it contracted specialists from Senegal. The Murid arrived in the 1970s, as import/export traders, contractors, goldsmiths and car dealers. Gabon – a penal colony in colonial times – was where Ahmadu Bamba endured his long exile. Thus, it has a special place in Murid imagination. The mosque they built in Libreville is the most important Murid collective investment outside Senegal.

Murid migration to France and the USA takes up more than half of Babou's book. Until the 1970s, citizens of former colonies could enter France without a visa, but the Murid arrived late and, staying away from factory work and other salaried jobs, they became self-employed traders or street vendors. Traders, many of whom had prospered in selling wood carvings and other African curios to Europeans in Dakar and

then Abidjan, became the trailblazers in Europe. Others of more modest means followed. Wolof speakers soon surpassed in number Soninke- and Pulaar-speaking Senegalese in France. As their population expanded, internal discussions about faith and community grew. Two Murid houses in the remote suburbs of Paris display contrasting orientations between the more educated, who want to turn Muridiyya into a universalistic, missionizing movement addressing Europeans, and the majority, who are committed to internal community ties and the largely hereditary spiritual hierarchy. Another challenge comes from the Salafi-influenced new elite who possess an Arab Islamic education. They reject Sufi orientation and also disdain the parochial, uneducated social traits of the Murid disciples.

In New York City, a crucial new element was the African American community, including a large proportion of Muslims who had converted since the civil rights movement. As the Murid became implanted in Harlem, the Malcolm Shabazz mosque served as a key place to perform their *salat* prayers, but for Sufi practices they needed other spaces. In the imaginations of many African Americans, the Murid substantiated the fabled Muslim life of medieval West Africa. Yet mass adherence did not result, and the Murid ultimately created their own separate religious institutions. Illegal taxicab driving, a common occupation, made them suffer disproportionately from violence in dangerous neighbourhoods. They are now threatened by gentrification and by rising property values and rents in Harlem. But Murid women found a lucrative channel in hairstyling – West African braiding being popular with African Americans – and earned more money than their men.

Religious institutional innovations were not accepted without contention. Organizing public processions and social events, such as Qasida Day or Ahmadu Bamba Day, created dissent within the community and required connections with social and political forces outside.

Babou queries whether Murid organizational structures helped their migration success. The decision to migrate is inspired by an individual migrant's local circumstances. The institutions selected or invented in migration contexts are disciples' creations, not their sheikhs' initiatives. What does the examination of migration teach us about Muridiyya, Babou asks, and what insights does Muridiyya bring to the study of international migration? This excellent study offers a wealth of observations and thoughts for answering both questions.

Mahir Şaul

Independent scholar

Email: ayvesa12@gmail.com

doi: 10.1017/S0001972023000438

Amy Niang, *The Postcolonial African State in Transition: Stateness and Modes of Sovereignty*. London: Rowman and Littlefield (hb US\$138/£106 – 978 1 78660 652 5; pb US\$47/£36 – 978 1 78660 653 2). 2018, xi + 231 pp.

Amy Niang's ambitious, if not always conceptually and organizationally clear, book, *The Postcolonial African State in Transition*, sits within a refreshing and much-needed strand in international relations (IR) theory. This strand examines the theoretical