Black Muslimness Mobilized: A Study of West African Sufism in Diaspora

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Abstract

West African and American-born Muslims in the Mustafawi Tariqa have been impacted by a Senegalese Islamic pedagogical tradition, which places emphasis on the role of the body as a medium for religious and spiritual training. My research examines the tremendous labor required to produce Muslimness as an embodied reality and critical resource initially in two key sites of pilgrimage—Moncks Corner, South Carolina and Thiès, Senegal—by demonstrating the important role these sister cities play in a transatlantic Sufi network. I suggest that there exists a continuity seen in the interactions of West African Muslims and African-American Muslims—a solidarity emboldened through the sufi practices out of which a broader politics of "Black Muslimness" endure. African-American and Senegalese members of the Mustafawi Tariqa identify within a broader category of 'Black Muslim' in the mobilization of bodies oriented toward these two sites of pilgrimage. As my extensive research reveals, Moncks Corner is the central site in which access to the Sufi order's most charismatic living shaykh, Shaykh Arona Faye, has worked for the past two decades teaching and mentoring his students on their spiritual journeys. On the other hand, Thiès is the location where the order's founder is buried and travelers visit the town in order to pay homage to his memory. The processes of

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diasporic identification seen in both sites, I argue, are grounded in both physical mobility and the particular spiritual pedagogy of the Mustafawi. In order to further elaborate how local and international solidarities are framed from within the concept of diaspora, I unpack the manner in which religious genealogies, discourses of ancestry, and the transmission of esoteric knowledge reinforce such affinities.

O Allah, send blessings upon our master Muhammad, the one who precedes all others, the one whose brilliant lights radiate and fill the heavens. May Allah bless him and his family and companions in the amount of every grain of sand and every star in the sky. (*al-ṣalāt al-samawiyya*)[1]

Introduction

The *ṣalāt al-samawiyya* is a prayer for peace and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad that was bestowed upon Cheikh Mustafa Gueye Haydar (1926-1989) for the sake of honoring the blessed vessel of the Qur'an and raising the station of the one who utters this supplication. It was within that moment of spiritual arrival that Cheikh Mustafa initiated the Tariqa Mustafawi in 1966 in Thiès, Senegal. Upon his passing in 1989, his foremost protegé, Shaykh Arona Faye al-Faqir, took up the Mustafawi mission by directing Muslims to the path of heightened spiritual mastery in the United States and beyond. With the help of Umm Aisha Faye and other African-descended Muslims, Shaykh Faye has carried out that mission for more than two decades by founding a community in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. Since then, he has facilitated the spiritual care and physical travel of his students as they have journeyed back and forth to Senegal to study Qur'an, start families, and spread the message of Islam. The specific mode through which this has been achieved is via the esoteric sciences (*taṣawwuf*), which are widely practiced throughout West Africa and other parts of the Muslim world.

The web of interactions described here can be understood through what Ousmane Kane has called a "transnational spiritual network," which illustrates and defines the vital operations of transnational identities in each location through a network of hubs that disclose some shared, essential religious meaning for its members.[2] Kane's monograph outlines how Senegalese Muslims in Harlem, New York, created a sense of religious belonging in the United States away from Senegal. In addition to goods and

services catering to Senegalese customers in a Sufi brotherhood, a sense of heightened camaraderie developed to echo and align with the organic religious bonds between practitioners that extended far across the oceans. The *zāwiya* of Moncks Corner functions much in this way. What is vitally different, however, is the fact that most of the Muslims who inhabit the space are African-American converts who have taken Shaykh Arona Faye as their spiritual leader and guide. As well, it should be noted that the *zāwiya*-mosque is located on land where African-Americans labored and were enslaved 160 years prior.

American-born Muslims in the Tariqa have been impacted by the West African Islamic pedagogical tradition, which places emphasis on the role of the body as a medium for religious and spiritual training. The processes of *tarbiya*, which Muslims of African descent in Moncks Corner access via sufism, provides a strategy for addressing personal and collective cultural trauma caused by the presence and histories of structural discrimination and racial oppression. Participation in sufi modes of training, particularly a West African-derived configuration of *taṣawwuf* (sufism), has also culturally impacted African-American Mustafawi, as many view themselves as in the process of moving to Senegal or, alternatively, intent on bringing what they can of Senegal to Moncks Corner.

This analysis of Muslims of African descent in the southern United States shed lights upon an understudied subject—Black Atlantic Sufism—that carries import for the anthropology of religion, Muslim studies, and African diaspora scholarship. Academic studies have mainly understood African-American relationships to Islam as political or ideological. Less work has been done, however, on the way in which Black Muslim worshippers rely on their spirituality to negotiate real-world problems. Therefore, I have analyzed the manner in which American Muslims of African-descent are drawn into the Mustafawi network and what impact this has on their mobilities and spiritual growth. Taking Sufism as an ideational force and theological approach, this analysis views Sufism as a technology of physical and metaphysical cultivation through which Muslims of African descent seek healing and spiritual care to navigate varying kinds of historical and cultural trauma. Furthermore, studies of Muslims in the United States have had a tendency to atomize Muslim communities along lines of ethnicity or nationality while spending less time trying to understand the multiple solidarities that have emerged as a result of mobility and globalization.

Studies of African-Americans' relationship to Islam has often relied upon implying a sustained relationship with their ancestry (whether real or imagined). However, this relationship comes with its complications; historically, a positive relationship between African-American Muslims and their African ancestry cannot be taken for granted.[3] On the other hand, African-American Muslims do have a history of positive relations with West African Sufism. While there is a dearth of work on African-American Sufism, scholars have pointed to the ways in which increased migration on the part of West African Muslims after 1965 and their multiple approaches to religious observance has had profound influence on African-American Muslim practices and identities.[4] Certainly, much has been written on the emergence of Senegalese migrants in the United States by analyzing how the transnational networks of Sufi brotherhoods have paved the way for increased wealth and mobility for West African adherents.[5] And while there has been some analysis on the interactions between African-Americans and West African Muslims,[6] and between African-Americans and West Africans in more general terms,[7] to date there has been no in-depth analysis of the inclusion of African-Americans into West African Sufi networks.

Black Muslim identities have often relied upon, and have been built atop, some meaningful relationship with West Africa. This tendency has been especially true of African-American Muslims who resisted understanding their own Muslimness from within an Arab cultural framework. In instances in which African-Americans have transitioned to Islam, for example, conversions often become framed within narratives of return. This manner of transition has been popularly described as "reversion," registering a religious psychology which claims that every human being is born Muslim and only loses their relationship to Islam due to their upbringing. 'Conversion' to Islam is therefore a 'return' to Islam. Yet African-American narratives of return suggest that the vocabulary of "reversion" also entails a relation (whether subtle or explicit) with the historicity of West African Muslim presence in the antebellum United States. In other words, the notion of "reversion" provides an interesting term that might be used to describe the intersections between shifts in religious belief and diasporic identities.[8]

West African Sufism & Black Muslimness in South Carolina

I suggest that there exists a continuity seen in the interactions of West African Muslims and African-American Muslims—a solidarity emboldened through the sufi practices out of which a broader politics of "Black Mus-

limness" endure. The emphasis on esotericism and gnosis as seen through a West African approach to Muslim piety binds itself to the emancipatory ethos which emerges from 'Black Religion' that has spanned multiple faith traditions, in which Muslims of African descent in the United States are embedded.[9] In order to discuss this connection, it is important to consider how the body is used as an 'instrument' or device for spiritual uplift and through which techniques of protection and liberation are learned. Marcel Mauss has theorized that bodies are incorporated into modes of learning physical activities (swimming, walking, etc.) in particular ways whereby they become the frames upon which certain kinds of mastery are enacted.[10] Bodies, however, cannot be considered apart from the environmental conditions in which those bodies are reared. By 'rearing' I refer to both the political atmosphere of marginality and the violence that black bodies must navigate. 'Rearing' also references the modes of learning and expertise gained for the purpose of overcoming tribulation. Pierre Bourdieu's influential concept in the sociology of religion (*habitus*) describes how a person or group (class) is profoundly shaped by the conditions in which that person is reared.[11] History shapes *habitus*; Bourdieu, much like James Baldwin years prior, tells us that our pasts (collective or individual) are always present.[12] Furthermore, engagements with the conditions in which people become reared produce certain 'dispositions' that impact how they move, think, and behave in the world.

The notion of a broader field of 'Black Muslimness' through which to understand the trajectories, solidarities, and spiritual strivings of African-descended Muslims in the Mustafawi Tariqa—of both those who are American-born and West African-born—requires an examination of these phenomena through the concept of 'diaspora.' As Paul Gilroy noted a quarter-century ago, theorists must avoid a too-narrow and localized viewpoint of blackness in order to better reveal vital historical and political connections found in more regional contexts.[13] His notion of the 'Black Atlantic' has initiated a vital conversation engaging numerous scholars to shed light on the multiple geographic entanglements that religious adepts pursue. An overwhelming literature has pushed diaspora scholarship to recognize that the concept has as much to do with identity and imagination as it does with physical dispersal.[14] With this in mind, there exists an opportunity to further illuminate how inclusion into religious networks has deepened and complicated black religious identities of African-American Muslims in particular. As Edward Curtis asserts, a rigorous study of the religious dimensions of African diaspora is vital to extend our collective understand-

ing of the diaspora concept.[15] Much like scholars who have studied how African-descended people have included themselves into diasporic networks via religion,[16] the purpose of this discussion is to further understand the cultivation of Black Muslim diasporic identities via religious observances that have animated pilgrimage. Moreover, as many have argued, it is necessary to distinguish diasporas from mere dispersals.[17]

I do not highlight the role of West African Sufism in the process of sharing and transmitting knowledge simply because the Mustafawi I discuss here are both "Black" and "Muslim." I read this particular qualia of recipients as significant due to the linkages between present Black Muslim learners in the American South with supposed ancestors who are believed to have been present in and around South Carolina at a time when those who now inhabit the Moncks Corner mosque would have been rendered chattel property. That is, unapproved religious gatherings, overt Islamic spiritualities, and at-will travel would have been nearly impossible a century and a half ago. Appreciating this context situates the significance of the Moncks Corner mosque's role as a space for worship, spiritual healing, and the dispensation of knowledge. The act of Islamic formulations of supplication and remembrance in that space inheres a simultaneous politics of Blackness and Muslimness, which is grounded in a broader transatlantic region.

J. Lorand Matory rightly raises the point that relations between Africa and its diaspora rest upon a continual 'dialogue' which troubles the notion that continental Africa serves as a point of origin stuck in the past.[18] His study of the religious trajectories of Candomblé practitioners demonstrates this well.[19] Kamari Clarke's account of Yoruba practitioners in South Carolina and Nigeria yields a similar argument through her analysis of their international movements and regional orientation.[20] Where my analysis intervenes, on the other hand, is to suggest that the vital relations between diasporic Africans and continental Africans is not merely historical and that this continuity (contemporaneity) can be found in Muslim contexts. Through studying how the Mustafawi regimen is deployed in the United States, I offer that Black Muslim bodies become the fields upon which messages of community and liberation are inscribed. Couched in the language of submission, piety, and *tarbiya* (spiritual/moral training), the religion of Islam provides a site of resistance to anti-black racism and a force for healing from the psychic trauma of historical black oppression.

Pilgrimage as a Black (Muslim) Diasporic Phenomenon

Masjidul Muhajjirun wal Ansar is a site of pilgrimage for Mustafawi members across the United States (and beyond). For many, Moncks Corner is a second home to where they flock during Muslim holidays (*Eid-al-Fitr*, *Eid-al-Adha*)[21] or other large events (*Mawlid an Nabi*). Others, however, have permanently relocated to Moncks Corner in order to live in proximity to Shaykh Faye and the Moncks Corner Muslim community. Most who have relocated have either moved from elsewhere in the state, or have come from northern cities like Washington or Philadelphia.

Practically speaking, those who have moved to Moncks Corner, or have even trekked across the country to visit, have done so due to the presence of Shaykh Arona Faye. Their camaraderie with other mosque-goers is valuable, no doubt, as too their sense of community, but the crux of why people visit is because most (if not all) are his students. That is, they have given their spiritual allegiance (*bay'a*) to him and have agreed to entrust their inward development to the Mustafawi regimen and his tutelage. When he travels (whether locally or internationally) to give lectures, visit sick or needful Muslims, or conduct religious ceremonies, his most devoted students often travel with him. Shaykh Arona Faye has also facilitated the founding of the annual Cheikh Mustafa Day, often held at the end of the year in Thiès, Senegal, in which a handful of American (and Spanish) Muslims attend as honored guests. During such trips, African-American Muslim guests engage in both visitation to the tomb of the late Cheikh Mustafa Gueye (d. 1989) in Thiès (and sometimes other holy sites around the country) and heritage tourism to the Slave Castle at Goreé Island off the coast of Dakar. These mobilities are essential to understanding the culmination of diasporic religious identities amongst the Mustafawi of the United States and beyond.

Much work has been done to track and interpret the meanings of pilgrimage in terms that has understood this particular kind of movement as diasporic insofar it provides a vehicle for the construction and maintenance of 'home-going' discourses.[22] These processes of identity formation for African-Americans in particular have included heritage tourism to sites such as Ghana and Senegal.[23] As Edward Bruner argued in his foundational 1996 article, one of the major motives for African American tourism to Africa involved visits to historic sites (such as Elmina Castle on the Ghanaian Coast and La Maison des Esclaves in Gorée Island of Senegal) as a preoccupation with root-seeking.[24] Looking beyond tourism as 'superficial' and

'temporary' forms of travel, Bruner contends that this kind of diasporic mobility, which results in pilgrimages to historic sites, must be read as a meaning-making process that allows diasporic communities to assemble routes backward to an imagined homeland. This process entails, in the minds of African-American tourists, a commemorative observance and participation in the embodiment of the enslavement narrative by tracking the path backward. By gazing upon the "Door of No Return" as they envision possible ancestors shuffled through dungeons and onto slaveships, this portal becomes infused with meaning that emboldens the relationship between a dispersed population and an imagined home—a location for return. Bruner finds that diasporans must thus confront complex notions of belonging that collide with local understandings of selfhood, history, and ownership. To be clear, there lies a specific difference between the tourism to these historic sites, nineteenth-century migration efforts, and twentieth-century repatriation movements such as Garveyism.[25] As Salamishah Tillet explains, the overwhelming motive for this kind of travel, which began in the 1970s and rose in popularity in the 1990s, is the desire to reconcile the formation of African Diasporic identities formed partly through the history of forced migration and enslavement with a past mis-recognized in public American historical discourse.

Of course, scholars have also looked at how the act of travel (especially pilgrimage) is has informed the development of Muslim diasporas.[26] Although it is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) which first comes to mind, I here consider pilgrimage of a different order whereby Sufi Muslims migrate to specific locations that are imbued with meaning and become sites around which ethno-religious identities emerge. Johara Berraine has shown how "spiritual tourism" within the context of a Sufi tradition provides a mode of belonging for West African Tidjanis who travel to Fez in order to commemorate the eighteenth-century Tidjaniyya founder, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tidjani.[27] He finds that the *zāwiya* in Fez operates as 'pole' for a larger Senegalese/Tidjani diaspora such that whether they reside in Senegal or Europe, members can participate in the construction and maintenance of a larger imagined community.

I have observed how African and African-American Muslims—whom I collectively refer to as 'Black Muslims'—in the Mustafawiyya Tariqa are incorporated into networks of pilgrimage that are centered in two primary locations: Moncks Corner in South Carolina and Thiès in Senegal. These locations operate differently in the Tariqa. The main pull toward Moncks

Corner for students from around the Atlantic is Shaykh Arona Faye. Visits to the community are motivated by the desire for proximity to their teacher. On the other hand, visits to Thiès are motivated by a different order of pilgrimage. Practitioners visit (*ziyāra*) the shrines and tombs of venerated saints to access perceived blessings and pay homage to the recognized spiritual authority in a given tradition. I argue that, for African-American Muslims, these visits are coupled with the desire to experience a kind of heritage tourism that work along lines of ancestry—both genealogical and spiritual. This story begins with Umm Aisha Faye's travel from South Carolina to West Africa to meet Shaykh Arona Faye, followed by their wedding, and the route set in motion by Shaykh Faye's move from West Africa to the United States in 1994.

The Mosque in Moncks Corner

The mosque in Moncks Corner, South Carolina is named "Masjidul Muhajjirun wal-Ansar," literally the "place of prostration (mosque) for migrants and their assistants/helpers." This name certainly cites the story of the Prophet Muhammad and his community's transition from Mecca to Medina as a means of escaping religious persecution. It is there that the young religion first pushed its roots into the soil and held political stability from which vital relationships were established with nearby communities in seventh-century Arabia. At the same time, however, this name must also be understood as an apt signifier of the vital relationship between local South Carolinian Muslims of African descent and their West African brethren and sistren who have migrated to the region. The mosque name that describes the mutuality of economics and of cultural exchange held between two components of a single community.

The Mosque in Moncks Corner was initially located on Carolina Avenue in a residential section downtown. Shaykh Faye and Umm Aisha had pooled their money to purchase a two-story house on a half-acre lot. Years later, the community (which they had also built up) had outgrown the building; they would sell the property (a decision about which Shaykh Faye expressed regret in hindsight) to move the Mosque into a rented commercial space on Main Street. Community dinners, religious gatherings, and weddings would take place there until the rent was raised to exorbidant amount, forcing them to relocate once again into a commercial building on Old Highway 52 (further away from downtown).

While the majority of Muslims who live in Moncks Corner are South Carolina natives, there is a good portion of the community that has specifi-

cally relocated to this small town from larger urban centers (or from across the Atlantic), in order to take advantage of the intimacy that students can share with their beloved teacher. This is related to another Arabic word, *hijra*, that refers to a process of migration, specifically toward a location of refuge. *Muhājirūn*, in this case, refers to the (West African) migrant who has traveled in order to seek refuge within the *zāwiya* of the Moncks Corner Muslim community and to seek nearness to God under the tutelage of Shaykh Faye. As such, the *zāwiya* itself operates as a proper site of pilgrimage for the Mustafawi. Like the city of Medina in seventh-century Arabia, Moncks Corner functions as a practical space for communal care and consistent, directed religious study.

Thiès, Senegal

The second site of pilgrimage for American Muslims whose central orientation is the *zāwiya* of Moncks Corner is the city of Thiès in Senegal, West Africa. Thiès is the birth home of Shaykh Faye; it is the location of Cheikh Mustafa Gueye Haydara's (d. 1989) house as well as his gravesite, which is shared with Shaykh Faye's grandfather, Shaykh Samba Gueye, and Faye's beloved mother, Umm Khadijatou. The cemetery which houses the tomb of Shaykh Faye's family is crowded with the graves of community members, fathers, mothers, and uncles, both heavily groomed sites and those that have seemingly fallen into disrepair. Unlike the other graves, the tomb of Cheikh Mustafa Gueye is clad in white tile with green trim, set back from the street and situated near the middle of the cemetery. Over the years, Shaykh Faye has taken many African-American students to visit his home city in order to meet his family, pay homage to the memory of Cheikh Mustafa through visiting his home and tomb, and connect with the other side of the Mustafawiyya Tariqa. It is through this act of pilgrimage that the African-American students physically participate in a West African religious experience which plays a part in the further cultivation of diasporic identities.

To reiterate, travel to Senegal is not only motivated by the desire to visit the tomb of Cheikh Mustafa. For African American Muslims in particular, a visit to Senegal also entails taking time to visit tourist locations such as *Le Monument de la Renaissance Africaine* and *La Maison des Esclaves* on Gorée Island.[28] Shaykh Faye himself encourages his African-American students who visit Senegal for the first time to visit *La Maison des Esclaves*, and has taken his students for visits to the historic site during time spent in Dakar in past years. Back home, he has repeatedly suggested that his Afri-

can-American students consider relocating to Senegal due to ease of living in a predominantly Muslim country that would welcome the children of its stolen family members. Heritage tourism and spiritual tourism are merged in the journey to Thiès, such that religious pilgrimage and discourses of African ancestry are combined to cultivate black Muslim diasporic identities.

Notions of "home" abound when speaking to some of those in Moncks Corner who have visited Senegal with Shaykh Arona Faye. But "home" here is doubled; the students talk of "leaving home" to "go home". Abdur-Rasheed Watson, one such student, frequently shared his memories of having visited Senegal and Gambia for the first time in 2008, when he stayed for about three months. Our numerous conversations while sitting in the mosque during down time or running errands around Moncks Corner have revealed that as he traveled to the home of his teacher, he quickly became "comfortable in [his] skin," venturing out to wander the streets even early on during his trip. Abdur-Rasheed confessed that he felt out of place in the United States and yearned to return to the Senegambia, as he imagined himself able to live there permanently. His most cherished recollections seemed to be of traveling to Thiès in Senegal to visit the grave and ancestral house of Cheikh Mustafa Gueye Haydar, founder of the Tariqa Mustafawiyya. It is here that his ideation of African descent was impacted heavily. Not only has the region, for Abdur-Rasheed, operated as a location that he views as a "home" due to his identification as a man of African descent living in the diaspora, but his particular relationship to Senegal is mediated via Shaykh Arona Faye.

At the same time, it is not solely the movement of the body that produces or cultivates black Muslim diasporic identities. Many African-American students who reside in Moncks Corner have never traveled to West Africa, and yet frequently speak of a strong desire to go. Students like "Dawud New York" and Sulaiman Barr have not yet had the opportunity to travel with Shaykh Faye to Senegal, but certainly yearn to do so. Over the years, they have watched others leave to visit Senegal and return with numerous anecdotes and favorable descriptions about delicious food, beautiful scenery, and the spiritual power that resides in a region where Islam is rooted so deeply in the hearts of people and in the very soil upon which those people tread. Furthermore, recordings of the Cheikh Mustafa Day program and other events held in Senegal during those trips were sometimes screened in the cafeteria of the mosque as people ate. This footage included scenes of their African-American Muslim family members sitting in a large audi-

ence amongst their Senegalese hosts as lectures are given in Wolof. From afar, they witnessed the vast sea of colorful garments specifically tailored for each attendant. For American-born students who intend to travel and even imagine relocating permanently to West Africa, these shared notions of a "home elsewhere" stand in stark contrast to what is perceived as an increasingly hostile environment in the United States where the light of Islam seems much more dim. These perceptions are mediated by discourses of travel and desire cultivated between travelers and future travelers. In this religious discourse, the United States is depicted as a place of racial and religious oppression, and an environment where the life of a devout Muslim of African descent is more difficult; Senegal is imagined as a space where one's ability to live a devout and austere life is less challenging. This is not to say Senegal or Gambia is cast as the direct inverse of America, or as a kind of paradise; however, a discursive power is consolidated among the students living in South Carolina as Shaykh Faye and others discuss the attractions of Senegal for Muslims living in the United States. More important yet, however, is how Senegal operates as a site of pilgrimage; the multiple discourses of transition "homeward" cultivate a heightened sense of being dispersed, and African-American Muslims become embedded within a diasporic community.

In January of 2015, I accompanied Shaykh Arona Faye and his contingent of African-American students to visit the city of Thiès in Senegal. After a roughly two-hour drive from Dakar, we stopped at a few houses of Shaykh Faye's relatives to rest and be fed by our hosts. These visits seemed organized by the cultural politics of decorum and etiquette for a revered family member who has been away for much too long. Our intent was to visit the gravesite of Cheikh Mustafa, Shaykh Faye's late uncle and initiator of the Tariqa. Our other primary reason for the trip was to meet with a local real estate broker who agreed to show us the land that Shaykh Mikhail Abdullah, African-American ex-patriate and son-in-law of Shaykh Arona Faye, purchased on behalf of his teacher. As we rode out to the site, it became apparent that this parcel of land was situated on the outskirts of Thiès. The surrounding landscape was sparse, littered with small and large shrubs, and had yet to have electricity and sewer services routed out to the site. The only markers that hinted at the prospect of present and future owners were several large, white sticks that were flagged and numbered. These markers were placed in rows that would suggest both the relative size of the plots and gave a general idea of where streets and alleyways would be

placed. During the drive toward the city I was told that this land was to be sectioned off into smaller pieces (roughly 150 square meters in size) with the hope that the Shaykh's American students who wished to relocate to Senegal could build modest housing. Shaykh Arona Faye explained that he planned to name this community "Moncks Corner" in honor of the town in which he had worked tirelessly for the past two decades. At the time, the only trace signalling that this location was a site for future development were the flagged white pegs. It remains to be seen what will become of this land, but the gesture of naming this community too Moncks Corner brings the two locations within a shared tradition into further dialogue.

We must also consider the manner in which religious pilgrimages are mobilized, for they offer the possibility of diasporic identity via the medium of the Shaykh himself. Insofar as Shaykh Arona Faye operates as a conduit for such travel, I argue that it is the relationship with the Shaykh that propels students from Senegal to visit Moncks Corner and students from Moncks Corner to visit Senegal. Moreover, it is to visit the Shaykh and reconnect with a broader transatlantic community of Mustafawi that inspires local travel to the mosque of Moncks Corner, South Carolina. He thus serves as a node in a circulation of movement at different scales. During our trip to Senegal in January 2015 for the Cheikh Mustafa Day celebration in Thiès, I shared a small three-bedroom apartment with two other African-American Muslim men: Luqman, son-in-law to Shaykh Faye and part-time resident of Moncks Corner, and Rasheed Philson, another student of Shaykh Faye who resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During a telephone interview I had with Rasheed after having returned to the USA from Senegal, he described the experience of meeting Shaykh Mikhail Abdullah at the airport with Shaykh Faye as a "family reunion." He recounted that he had not seen Mikhail for several years, and that to see him living in Dakar with his family gave him inspiration to consider relocating with his own family there in the future. His usage of the term "family reunion" signified a familial reconnection beyond his feeling of sharing a cultural background and being a student of Shaykh Faye. The overwhelming impression I was given as we discussed his experience in Senegal was that he was both reconnecting with a fellow student of Shaykh Faye and also reconnecting with family members he had yet to meet. Having anticipated a trip such as this without the ability to afford the trip until that year, Rasheed also articulated his experience during our conversation as a 'home-going' trip. It was in this frame of mind that he entered *La Maison des Esclaves* on

Gorée Island in order to view the dungeons and shackles that were used to imprison captured African Muslims as they were forcibly migrated to their enslavement. It was this experience, in addition to praying in mosques filled with African Muslims and being welcomed into the houses of fellow Mustafawi to share meals, that made his 'pilgrimage home' powerful in the maintenance of his diasporic identity.

While travel from Senegal to Moncks Corner is more difficult due to lack of economic resources for many who desire to make the trip, and the difficulty of gaining an American visitor visa, some have made the trip in order to attend particular events held at the Mosque (to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad, for example) or to move closer to family members who reside in Moncks Corner. For example, Imam Drammeh, a prominent religious leader in Gambia and a student of Shaykh Arona Faye, and Serigne Bara, a popular Mouride singer in Senegal, have both had trips to Moncks Corner sponsored by Shaykh Faye and the Moncks Corner *zāwiya*. Their visit to the *zāwiya* was on the occasion of a celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birth and served as an opportunity to connect with Mustafawi on the other side of the Atlantic. More importantly, however, this served as an opportunity to spend time with someone whom they consider a master specialist in the esoteric sciences.

Mustafawi who live in South Carolina, who have yet to make the trip across the Atlantic, witness these pilgrimages back and forth while taking note of how Senegal registers as a space for travel homeward. These associations of home are placed upon both the imagined Senegambian religious landscape as well as the West African Muslim actors who mediate positive notions of their homeland for their compatriots in the United States. Jamaal Abdul-Salaam, an African-American Muslim who has studied with and followed Shaykh Faye for over two decades, has never had the opportunity to travel to Senegal. The possibility of his international travel has been hampered due to persistent economic difficulties or other personal challenges. However, his desire to travel and eventually relocate to Senegal or Gambia has remained constant due to his overwhelmingly positive association with the West African deployment of Sufism.

> I've met Muslims from all over the world, but the West African Muslim has a unique spirituality. I don't know if it's because they are black or if it's because Sufism has permeated the Islamic culture…but I think it's a combination of both, because when I'm with the West African Muslims even when I'm traveling and I'm in Philadelphia or New York or Mary-

> land…I feel a sense of home…and I see the enactment of the Sunna as living, viable force. And I have not experienced that with no other people in the Islamic world, no other people…and I attribute that to the fact that *taṣawwuf* is being implemented correctly because you can feel the heart of the people…you feel that they are family.[29]

Jamaal's comments are telling of the impact and importance that personal relationships held between African Americans and West Africans have on the configuring and maintenance of diasporic solidarities. For Jamaal, 'home' is not necessarily identified as a geographic space; rather, it is located among the people with whom he has come into contact. Furthermore, it is not a coincidence that his sense of home is placed within a West African tradition of *taṣawwuf*. For Jamaal, this imagined sense of home is not built from mobilities. Instead, his notions of homewardness orient from within and are determined by the interpersonal relationships he has found with West African Mustafawi with whom he has had direct and sustained experience. Home, he tells us, is not in places or landscapes. It is found in the warmth of an invitation to dine with fellow seekers on the path to spiritual expansion and to bask in the shared love of human excellence.

Inheriting the Ṣalāt al-Samawiyya

African-American and Senegalese members of the Mustafawi Tariqa identify within a broader category of 'Black Muslim' in the mobilization of bodies oriented toward two sites of pilgrimage. Their processes of diasporic identification, I argue, are grounded in both physical mobility and spiritual pedagogy. In order to further elaborate how local and international solidarities are framed from within the concept of diaspora, it is also necessary to unpack the manner in which religious genealogies, discourses of ancestry, and the transmission of esoteric knowledge reinforce such affinities.

An analytical lens of kinship employed to describe the interpersonal relations built within and among the Mustafawi, while certainly applicable in some sense, might muddy the quest to better understand the modes of spiritual authority and knowledge transmission that are a function of these relationships. In other words, although the anthropological term 'kinship' does not simply refer to consanguinity, it does not illuminate how the spiritual linkages between adherents in religious traditions work.[30] It does not yield a better description of how these relationships are formed and what they actually do—of how knowledge and authority is transmitted and dispensed throughout a transnational network to children, to students, to its

migrants, to its seekers. While the social scientific deployment of kinship analysis as a theoretical framework has yielded rich scholarship, that is, the term alone does not seem to move us toward the distinct texture and dynamism of the highly-mobile relationships shared throughout the translocal Sufi network highlighted here. This is partially why the theoretical role of 'kinship' in such settings has been supplanted by concepts of transnationalism and diaspora. Furthermore, Jane Carsten explains that earlier generations of anthropologists too often saw in kinship a means of delineating between civilized and less-civilized peoples—a system around which 'cultures' were tightly-wound only later to be unravelled by realizations of global migrations, exceptions, and fresher conceptual devices.[31] In reflecting on the knowledge production offered via anthropologies of kinship, Michael Herzfeld also contends that due to former emphases on structuralism and antiquated interpretations, "kinship carried the dead weight of outmoded assumptions."[32] On the other hand, Herzfeld acknowledges that "global hierarchies of value" set in motion by colonization and the necessity to better understand the multiple locations of affinity for postcolonial actors are the fields within which analyses of kinship relations possibly retains its relevance. Similarly, Carsten finds it wiser not to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Where a kinship analysis can be instructive is to think through how affinities founded upon religious observances and discourses of ancestry actualized in the transmission of esoteric knowledge and the production of 'cultural intimacy' (to borrow Herzfeld's language) between teacher and student (or, between *shaykh* and *murīd*/*taalibe*) might be framed as 'fictive' (pseudo-) and religiously-based formations of kinship. Any translocal religious network where social relations are built upon claims of 'brotherhood' or 'sisterhood'—and sanguine or marital relations may (or may not) be absent—requires an examination of the intimacies contained within. Secondly, articulations of 'going home' and 'family reunions' as outlined above reflect an ontology of diasporic connectedness and can hardly be ignored. Since the mid-twentieth century, social scientists have used 'fictive kinship' (a subfield of kinship studies) to describe the mutability of familial and extra-familial relations crafted from religious ritual and close friendship ties—all between actors who rely upon the variability of their interpersonal affinities to amass social capital in a given environment. Many have observed how African-Americans have historically negotiated the difficulties of urban life, expanded the bounds of parentage where necessary, and sur-

vived challenging socioeconomic conditions through fictive kinship alliances.[33] These reliances upon fictive kin have also been used for increasing social capital and international mobilities within African-descended migrant communities.[34]

It then follows to tackle how discourses of ancestry—locatable from within this category of fictive kinship—have arguably paved the way for outward migration of African Americans and have provided a site where varying communities of African descent (e.g. continental Africans and diasporic Africans) have fused and sought alliances. Most recently, scholarship on genealogical testing has shown how African Americans seek a diasporic reconciliation that would firmly place their approximate points of origin somewhere on the African continent (for claims of 'genetic ancestry' may be authorized/confirmed through modern technologies).[35] This desire to map the genealogical linkages made improbable by the rupture of the transatlantic slave trade is clearly situated in the desire of dispersed Africans to reconnect to lost ancestors by space and time and history. The willingness to interpret one's roots via the imprecise probabilities of such genetic testing services is patched by the creative alliances placed within an imagined kinship and also partly due to widely accepted genetic essentialism. In other words, forms of blackness (or 'African-ness'), performed and packaged in response to a number of sociopolitical factors, are here emboldened and made richer by the reading of one's mitochondrial DNA, albeit already firmly rooted in prior ideations of biological forbears. Paul Brodwin rightly highlights how such testing opens a set of questions that surely has political ramifications as people find genetic connections in unexpected places or devise ancestral claims from which new ethnic boundaries will be forged.[36] However, for African-American and West African Muslims in Moncks Corner, such science-based approaches to root-seeking are far less prevalent. Claims to African ancestry remain otherwise built from power dynamics of racial difference, phenotypic presumptions of blackness, and the social constructions of a perceived shared historical past (and present) that figures prominently in postbellum South Carolina. It is these grounds of shared Black Muslimness upon which diasporic solidarities are consolidated and reinforced by participation in West African-derived spiritual practices.

More prominent than claims of direct or approximate ancestry is the vocabulary of familial relations (brother/*akh*, sister, auntie, uncle, mother/*umm*, etc.) drawn from a shared religious tradition that buttresses diasporic

affinity in Moncks Corner. This mode of fraternity between African-American and Senegambian Muslims in the Tariqa that is founded upon shared routes (roots) to righteousness falls within what is referred to as 'spiritual kinship.' Rather than a cross-cultural catch-all for every religious solidarity, Michael Frishkopf's articulation of this term answers what happens when a religious community 'globalizes':

> Spiritual kinship can be defined as that sub-class of…pseudo-kinship that comprises social relations described (or named, or invoked) using the discourse of ordinary kinship terminology, but grounded in a religious (metaphysical) ideology, which is quasi-independent of biological ideology, and therefore supports a quasi-independent set of social institutions. This is not to say that biological and ordinary kinship do not come to bear upon spiritual kinship relations, but that spiritual kinship possesses a degree of independence the fictive kinds lack.[37]

Frishkopf's framing of social relations within this type of solidarity also acknowledges the difficulties of temporal and spatial proximities that are threatened by global expansions and maintained by communication technologies and a discursive emphasis on metaphysical aspects (dreams, visions, etc.). Most useful for this analysis is Frishkopf's account of how fictive kinship is maintained and renewed against acculturation in new ethnic and linguistic contexts and without physical proximity. Physical and social mobilities could threaten the continuity of spiritual kinships, but Frishkopf offers that it is the heightened allure of sacred sites (tombs, shrines, points of origin, etc.) that extend the 'scope' and 'reach' of the relationship to a homeland. Furthermore, for these kinships to remain continuous as they are stretched away from their points of origin by global migration, they must adapt via the establishment of new lineages.[38] Shaykh Arona Faye intentionally brings students together through weddings, providing the most concrete example of solidarities founded upon spiritual kinship alliances.

In my first interview with Shaykh Faye in November 2014, he explained that he chose to come to Moncks Corner in South Carolina for two major reasons (both related to the question of ancestry). At the time he was married to an African-American Muslim woman, Aisha Faye ("Umm Aisha"), whose main place of residence was the town of Moncks Corner. Although she is originally from Philadelphia, her career as a midwife in the South and her ownership of a small house in blue-collar South Carolina called them to establish a community where the ground was fertile. Thus, it was the marital relationship between a Senegalese guide and African-American

traveler that initiated this diasporic reconnection. Secondly, Shaykh Faye explained that he recognizes that it was his ancestors who were taken from his homeland, displaced, and enslaved in the American South. It is certainly significant for him that these ancestors were Muslim.

A significant population of the enslaved Africans brought to the Americas during the Transatlantic Slave Trade were Muslims,[39] bolstering how African-American Muslims in Moncks Corner today view themselves as 'regaining' or 'rediscovering' the possible spiritual practices of their imagined Muslim ancestors. In response to being asked about how his own identity has been formed and shaped by his participation in a West African Muslim tradition, one interlocutor, Yasin Abdul-Quddus, explained that his own understanding of self became firmly rooted in the idea that (like Shaykh Faye's lineage) his own ancestors may have well have included numerous generations committed to a tradition of Islamic spiritual exercise, prior to the transatlantic enslavement of his foremothers and forefathers. For Yasin, this provides a route through which the ideational force of an imagined heritage informed by historical possibility (and subsequently rooted in the practice of remembrance activated by the writings of Cheikh Mustafa Gueye) adheres him to a broader diasporic network that is imprinted onto a spiritual genealogy. Reflecting upon his meeting Shaykh Faye in 2006, Yasin recalls that

> being a young African-American and Muslim in the South, it was hard to find (or hard for me to find at that time) a lot of African-American teachers that were really scholars and greatly learned…I also didn't really have a lot of knowledge on people of who were outside of America like other African countries who were scholars. And when I met [Shaykh Faye] - you know he's an Alim [knowledgeable scholar] and he's rooted in that…you know, his whole family, generation after generation after generation after generation…they were all scholars, so it definitely helped me to know that my roots, or our roots, our ancestry surely came from, or could have come from, people who were rooted in the religion, it gave me better self awareness, self awareness to see where I could go in the future, you know?…my understanding of where it was that we come from. And from what I've learned, many of the [enslaved] Africans [who were brought here] were Muslim, and that's something that we aren't really taught…so being with the Shaykh helped me realize that.[40]

Abdul-Quddus's transformation into an African-American Muslim devotee within the Mustafawiyya tradition was animated by a thorough initia-

tion into the pedagogical approach to inward growth as understood by his Shaykh. Once again, this mobilization of identity through practice does not involve tracing scientific genealogies through time and space. Rather, it is a process that encourages the diasporized disciple to locate himself in a tradition which spans continents and centuries by engaging the body into an appropriation of an already-established spiritual network that affixes present students to past teachers through Shaykh Faye.

Other sites of solidarity lie in how African-American Muslims marry their Senegalese counterparts, to access a kind of lineage actuated by marriage and not solely devotional practice; and in how students engage in certain kinds of cultural mimesis—that is, specific practices of the body—which seek to recognize spiritual authority as such. These "diasporic inheritances", as we can call them, form multiple access points to draw students squarely into the fold of the Tariqa. I use the term "inheritances" in order to describe the manner in which Mustafawi *inherit* forms of knowledge, both secretive and more public, from their spiritual guide. As regularly explained to his students, the knowledge Shaykh Arona Faye possesses is not attainable through books.[41] In fact, the knowledge he possesses cannot be found, or gained, easily. It is through the arduous work of reflection and time spent in solitude (*khalwa*) that his ancestors have collectively amassed a wealth of esoteric knowledge accumulated across many generations. Almost a millennium of formulae for healing particular ailments, special prayers for protection and wealth, numerological sciences, and secrets derived from Qur'anic passages have all been passed down to Shaykh Faye—and, by extension, to his students. Not only do they *inherit* practical knowledge for understanding religious matters and secretive knowledge for attending to more sensitive needs, but they also gain access to a network of similarly spiritually-inclined compatriots. Thus, the path of transmission marks the manner in which knowledge of 'the journey to God' has been inherited from grandfather (Cheikh Samba Gueye)[42] to founder of the tariqa (Cheikh Mustafa Gueye) to eldest nephew (Shaykh Arona Faye)—and subsequently to his students. To clarify, this chain of transmission of esoteric knowledge must be understood as an iteration of spiritual kinship, a diasporic inheritance, because even though the passage from grandfather to grandson occurs biologically, the transmission from teacher to student is not simply based in common family or religion.

It was during our second interview that Shaykh Faye recounted his prophetic lineage to me, which he read from a page of a large journal in

December 2014. At the time, his main office was located at the back of Umm Aisha's quaint house on Tall Spruce Street in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. I remember staring down at the page of meticulously hand-written Arabic as we sat in his wood-paneled office surrounded by several large wooden bookcases that bore the weight of numerous books on Islam, Qur'ans and hadith collections, videotapes of past lectures, and newspapers. The page contained the names of his ancestors that included Shaykh Abdul-Qadir Jilani (1078-1166), founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi Order, and Fatima al-Zahra (604-632), the daughter of the Prophet. As in other Sufi traditions, the ability of a shaykh to trace one's lineage (*silsila*) to the Prophet Muhammad, both genetically and spiritually, is paramount to his perceived legitimacy—and by extension, the whole of a tariqa.[43]

While this genealogical relationship to Prophet Muhammad stands out as important, as far as discourses of legitimacy and spiritual authority are concerned, Shaykh Arona Faye more frequently references his spiritual relationship to the Prophet and his pedagogical relationship to his late uncle and founder of the Tariqa, Cheikh Mustafa Gueye Haydara. According to Shaykh Faye, his uncle was visited by Prophet Muhammad and given a special prayer, *al-ṣalāt al-samawiyya* ("heavenly salutation," i.e. to the Prophet), and this gave him permission and confirmation to inaugurate his own path (*ṭarīqa*). It is under Cheikh Mustafa that Shaykh Faye received his direct training; his own acclaim and validity is based upon this relationship to the Prophet Muhammad through Cheikh Mustafa. "Inheritance" addresses the question of continuity by providing a lens for discussing the transmission of formulaic prayer and incantations. This de-emphasizes lines of strict genealogical descent, expanding the possibility for spiritual kinships in new social contexts. As Mustafawi take the *wird* from their Shaykh and pledge a spiritual allegiance (*bayʿa*) to him, they become incorporated into a specific pathway which includes access to the religious guidance and spiritual genealogy built into the transnational network. As explained by Jamal Abdus-Salaam, the daily recitation of the *wird* activates a spiritual connection between the student and his master; at the same time, the Shaykh acts as an access point to the Prophet Muhammad.[44]

Analyzing diasporic mobility from this perspective shows how multiple sites of pilgrimage work in tandem to reinforce a larger network of circulatory communication and migration among Senegalese and African-American Muslims across a multi-nodal network (not merely between 'centers' and 'peripheries'). Likewise, analyzing diasporic identity from

the lens of reversion does not solely place emphasis on religious converts. While there are many Muslims in the network who were not born Muslim, there are many who were. I argue that it is the historical narrative embedded in the landscape of genealogical discourse of religious return from which the representation and production of black Muslim diasporic identities emerge. The notion of reversion does foreground the affect placed onto confabulations of ancestry and spiritual kinship situated in inherited prayers and esoteric knowledge transmission between and among Shaykh Arona Faye and his students.

Conclusion

In sum, it is important to remember that the West African Islamic tradition is the point of origin for the practice of Islam in the United States in general, and should be considered a point of departure when thinking about the long historical development of African-descended Muslim communities around much of the Black Atlantic.[45] The Mustafawi Tariqa provides an infrastructure that organizes migration for Muslims located in the United States and in West Africa, while multiple *zāwiya*s (specifically the two major locations outlined above) within that structure operate as points of reception and departure for local and international migrants. The underlying thesis here is that diasporic mobility facilitates—and is facilitated by—the bidirectional transmission of West African spiritual pedagogies and diasporic linkages founded upon migrations around a Black Atlantic. These, in turn, cultivate particular religious identities informed by the diasporic linkages established by such exchanges. These exchanges impact not just travelers but also initiates who orient themselves toward other locations in the Tariqa. An esoteric expertise, mastered in Senegal and seasoned by an African-American inflection, takes shape through an *articulation* made possible by the meeting of two kinds of African religious production, out of which new things are born. These collaborations result in inventions at the intersection of West African learning traditions and African-American cultural inflections. In this diasporic spiritual network, African-American Muslims who adopt a specific West African Islamic tradition perceive themselves as returning to a mode of religion once held by their imagined forefathers.

Endnotes

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39. Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
40. Interview with Yasin Abdul-Quddus, October 4, 2015.
41. This relationship between seeker and guide is one that requires either sustained access or at least frequent visits in order to maintain the sense of being guided. The appeal of a spiritual guide whose engagement with the finer points of Islam (extending beyond a strictly textual approach) increases the social-human aspect of the tradition. In fact, one can delve deeper and become more intimate in his path toward God when one holds hands with a man who knows the way. In his commentary on the importance of a Shaykh's tutelage for the seeker by virtue of the former's physical presence, over and above that of learning from texts, Titus Burckhardt has said that "[t]he quintessence of Sufi doctrine comes from the Prophet, but, as there is no esoterism without a certain inspiration, the doctrine is continually manifested afresh by the mouth of masters. Oral teaching is moreover superior, since it is direct and 'personal,' to what can be gleaned from writings. Writings play only a secondary part as a preparation, a complement, or an aid to memory and for this reason the historical continuity of Sufi teaching sometimes eludes the researches of scholars" (in "Sufi Doctrine and Method," *Sufism:*

Love and Wisdom, ed. Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (World Wisdom, 2006), 1-20).

42. Praise-singers in Senegal revere the ancestral line of Shaykh Arona Faye, while referring to his renowned grandfather as "Mame Samba" (Grandfather Samba), an honorific title that not only marks the paths of spiritual authority but also demonstrates a spiritual kinship between admirers and teacher.
43. Tatsuya Nakanishi, "The Logic of Succession in the Case of Chinese Muslims during the Qing Period," *Orient* 42 (2007): 55-70; Ann Vogel, "Sufism," *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization,* ed. George Ritzer (Wiley, 2012); F. Betul Yavuz, "The Making of a Sufi Order Between Heresy and Legitimacy: Bayrami-Malāmis in the Ottoman Empire" (PhD diss., Rice University, 2013); Liazzat JK Bonate, "The Advent and Schisms of Sufi Orders in Mozambique, 1896–1964," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 26, no. 4 (2015): 483-501.
44. Interview, Jamal Abdus-Salaam, November 19, 2014.
45. Rudolph T. Ware III, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Diouf, *Servants of Allah*; Gomez, *Black Crescent*.