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IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES: THE MURIDS OF SENEGAL IN NEW YORK

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR EDWARD HALEY

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

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FOR

SENIOR THESIS

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Introduction

International migration, or the movement of peoples across borders, is one element of globalization contributing to profound societal change in the postmodern world. Voluntary migration is characterized by the pursuit of economic or educational opportunity, driven by the global demand for skilled and unskilled workers or as a result of conflict, violence, or natural disaster while involuntary migration results from more brutal measures like slave trade, human trafficking, and ethnic cleansing. For centuries, the United States has been a "distant magnet" for voluntary global migrants as the land of opportunity, where one's hopes and dreams may become fulfilled.[1] Migration flows continue to impact the social, economic and political environment of America, and the desire of policymakers to reflect tough on immigration attitudes contribute to the rising tensions between citizens and non-citizens. This thesis will explain the assimilation processes of immigrant groups in the United States through an examination of a case study of a specific segment of newer American immigrants, the Senegalese in Harlem, New York affiliated with the Murid Brotherhood. It will explore the following research questions:

- To what extent do the trends of Senegalese, Murid immigrants in Harlem follow or deviate from the past models and patterns of American immigrant experiences?
- Does the model of "segmented assimilation" accurately explain the experience of the Murid immigrant community?
- What projections can we make for the behavior of the Murid immigrant enclave in Harlem?

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[1] Charles H. Mindel, Robert W. Habenstein, and Roosevelt Wright Jr., *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations,* ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 15.

- How are the outcomes for immigrants directly connected to the absence or presence of a cohesive immigrant community?

This paper will provide a discussion of the major theories of assimilation and apply the Murid immigrant community to these models. It argues that the theory of "segmented assimilation" is the most effective way for immigrants to assimilate and succeed economically while simultaneously preserving their cultural identity. According to the theory of segmented assimilation, a migrant connected to a community affiliation, such as the Murid Brotherhood, can assuage the psychological stresses and obstacles associated with migration, with the support of his or her cohesive network. The first chapter will provide a brief historical background on the Murid Brotherhood and rely on Robin Cohen's typification of global diasporas, describing the Murids as a part of both the cultural and trade diasporas. The next chapter will identify and explain in further depth the three major sociological theories of immigration: the first projects a "straight-line trajectory" which implicates upward social mobility.[2] This includes educational attainment (level of education and education retention rates), employment, occupation and income, language use and language preference.[3] This theory, often referred to as the "classical assimilation theory," is largely based on the experiences of earlier European immigrants. This is not to detract from the difficulty and hardship in their transition to America, though it recognizes that with one or two generations, these earlier immigrant groups were able to climb the "mobility ladders" of society. Herbert Gans however, argues that second-generation children of new immigrants may experience downward

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[2] Mindel et al., 15.
[3] Alejandro Portes, Patricia Fernandez-Kelly and William Haller, "Segmented Assimilation on the Ground: The New Second Generation in Early Adulthood," *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* Vol. 28, no. 6 (November 2005): 1016.

social mobility due to their lack of skills, education, or training, which constrains them from participating in the local economy. Factors used to measure downward trends include, dropping out of school early, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior. Finally, as stated in the central argument, Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou propose "segmented assimilation," a process in which second-generation children of immigrants may experience a more gradual transition into American society and utilize the traditional values and material resources of the immigrant community. Researchers have noted this theory through case studies and fieldwork:

> A major finding to emerge from the international cases cited here, as well as recent studies is that minority students do better in school when they feel strongly anchored in the identities of their families, communities and peers and when they feel supported in pursuing a strategy of selective or additive acculturation . . . Conversely, those at greater risk of failure are those who feel disenfranchised from their culture.[4]

They also discuss the difficulty for the newer immigrants who are unable to take advantage of the favorable conditions of early European immigrants, given their social context of race, location, and the disappearance of the "mobility ladders."[5] The third chapter will discuss the advantages of "segmentation" in allowing immigrant groups to maintain their systems of tradition and cultural identity. It will also provide supporting evidence for the Murid Brotherhood as a vehicle for the segmented assimilation model demonstrating how this transitional approach has contributed to its social and economic success in the United States. Alternatively, chapter four will describe the advantages of the "assimilation" aspects and delve into qualities that the Murid community has shed upon its arrival to the U.S. and signs of incorporation into American society which has

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[4] Portes et al., 1001.
[5] Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch. *The Other African Americans*, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 18.

fostered their success in the U.S. This includes stifling cultural elements that may have evolved with relocation to the U.S. like patriarchal practices and restrictions to individual freedom. The penultimate chapter will discuss the Murid Brotherhood today, dealing with contemporary issues that have impacted this group such as the post-9/11, anti-Muslim sentiment and the post-economic recession. The conclusion will then project the future trends of the Murids of Senegal in New York and the relation to other patterns of immigrant groups and assimilation processes in the United States.

Many immigrants come to the United States in search of economic prosperity though studies show that this outcome is dependent on a number of important factors. The factors that determine the second-generation success rate include "parents' human capital, family type and modes of incorporation."[6] While the majority of researchers on migration theory find that the second-generation will assimilate through absorption of the English language and American culture, there are generally two outcomes: the upward mobility route in assimilation with white, middle class America, or the downward mobility route in assimilation with the marginalized underclass. This shows that alongside the vast opportunity in America for immigrants, the persistent racial discrimination and inequality within the labor market constrains the immigrant's access to the "mobility ladder." Whereas the earlier wave of European immigrants was able to take advantage of the social and economic mobility in the U.S., newer immigrants must overcome new barriers to access economic mobility. Though many studies rely on the classical assimilation theory of "upward-mobility," this model is no longer sufficient to explain the experiences of contemporary immigrants to the United States. The model of

[6] Portes, et al., 1000.

"downward mobility" is also oversimplified and incomprehensive, as it does not capture the experiences of middle-class minorities.

Since the release of the segmented assimilation theory, the "minority culture of mobility" model has also emerged. This hypothesis proposes that minority middle classes share distinctive characteristics in how they respond to inter-racial and inter-class relations.[7] It argues that segmented assimilation leaves out the possibility for immigrant groups to use native minority middle classes in the U.S., such as African-Americans, as models for social mobility. Other researchers suggest that assimilation processes may lead to downward trends or no assimilation into American culture at all. However, because downward assimilation can often be linked to various constraining factors like social and economic inequalities, immigrants can rely on a support system from their cohesive community when the American dream turns sour. Alternatively, immigrants without this critical backbone are prone to fall through the cracks of society.

Immigration to the United States: General Trends and Attitudes

The pattern of "out-migration" to the United States in which a variety of ethnicities and nationalities seek refuge in a host nation has characterized America's development for centuries. America built its nation and economic success through a consistent inflow of migrants, many highly skilled and highly educated attracted to greater opportunity in the U.S. Despite the strong historical links to immigration, it has remained a controversial topic in domestic politics, incensing attitudes of nationalism and xenophobia, reflected during periods of strict immigration policy. The first wave of immigration to the U.S. after the arrival of English colonists in the 1600's up until 1860

[7] Kathryn M. Neckerman, Prudence Carter and Jennifer Lee, "Segmented Assimilation and Minority Cultures of Mobility," *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* Vol. 22, No. 6 (November 1999): 945.

was of mainly Protestant, Western Europeans, including German and Irish immigrants.[8] From 1860 to 1920, the second wave brought over 28 million immigrants who were seen as "different," with darker skin tones and largely Catholic or Jewish backgrounds, from Southern or Eastern Europe.[9] Many Asians, primarily Chinese and Japanese, also came during this time. As national biases developed against immigrants, local newspapers published outright racist and demeaning comments, claiming that immigrants were a "startling national menace that [could not] be disregarded with safety."[10]

Before 1965, immigration to the United States was heavily restricted. 1965 immigration reforms changed the previous national-origin quota system, which allowed greater emigration flows to the U.S. of varying nationalities.[11] Revocation of restrictive policies combined with economic downturn and political instability in developing nations led to an influx of diverse immigrant groups. Recent migration trends to the U.S. have included Hispanics: Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, Asians: Koreans, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese and Indians, and Africans.[12] Figure 1 depicts the changing demographics of the immigrant population in the United States from 1960 to 2009. The decline of European immigrants is visible in this bar graph (from 74.5% in 1960 to 12.7% in 2009) as the increase in Latin American (from 9.3% in 1960 to 53.1% in 2009), Asian (from 5% in 1960 to 27.7% in 2009), and African immigrants (from .4% in 1960 to 3.9% in 2009) as a percentage of the total U.S. immigrant population increases substantially.

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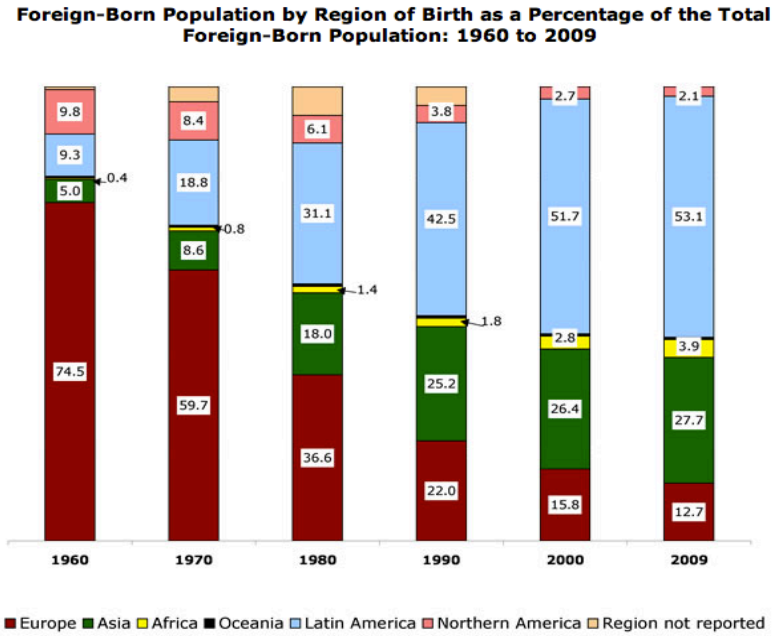
[8] Neckerman et al., 2.
[9] Mindel et al., 3.
[10] Ibid, 15.
[11] Kevin J. A. Thomas, "What Explains the Increasing Trend of African Emigration to the U.S.?" *International Migration Review,* Vol. 45, No. 1 (2011): 6.
[12] Thomas, 10.

Figure 1.



From Figure 1, taken from the Migration Information Source website, it is also notable that the African immigrant population is small (3.9% in 2009) in comparison to other immigrant groups. During the 1980's the first wave of economic migrants from West African countries including Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Northern Nigeria, and Ghana contributed to a growing population of African-American Muslims in America.[13] The 1980's also marked a new period of voluntary African migration to the United States. From 1980 to 2009, the population of African-born immigrants in the United States increased from under 200,000 to nearly 1.5 million 1990 to 2000, the African-born population in the U.S. grew by more than 383,000, almost tripling the African population during this period, indicating the high growth rate of this dynamic group.[14] Many African

[13] Mbaye Lo and Aman Nadhiri, "Contextualizing 'Muridiyya' within the American Muslim Community: Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future," *A Special Publication of Murid Islamic Community in America, Inc., The Cultural Commission* (2011): 37.
[14] Shaw-Taylor and Tuch, 52.

immigrants are practicing Muslims, disproportionately male, possess high educational attainment (In 2007, 42.5% of the 1.1 million African-born adults ages 25 and older held a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 27% of the total foreign-born adults in America), and tend to have higher median household incomes and lower poverty and crime rates than African-Americans and Hispanics.[15]

In discussion of past African migration movements Robin Cohen identifies Africans as a "victim diaspora" based on the symbolism of "enslavement, poverty, denigration, exploitation, white superiority, the loss of language and the loss of self-respect" still associated with Africa today.[16] African nations only recently acquired political independence, international recognition and respect. The horrors of the slave trade, European colonization, and the later "scramble for Africa" or colonial-era partition in the 19th century, were all movements that led to the dispersion and resettlement of Africans abroad. The African Slave Trade, from the 16th to the 19th century, resulted in the involuntary displacement of between 12 and 25 million Africans who reached the Americas, not counting the thousands more who perished on the trans-Atlantic passage.[17] The African diaspora is impacted both by the earlier involuntary migration and contemporary voluntary movements, which incites further exploration of the diaspora's maintenance of traditions from the African homelands and adaptation to new societies in the host environments. The "globalization of black economic and political dependence on Europeans" resulting from the history of inhumane actions towards Africans and African

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[15] Ibid, 56.
[16] Robin Cohen. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. (Seattle, WA: UP Washington, 1997), 40.
[17] Alusine Jalloh and Stephen E. Maizlish. *The African Diaspora*. eds. (Arlington, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996), 25.

descendants abroad pervades the social, economic and political marginalization of the African immigrant experience today.[18]

Attitudes of resentment and hostility towards immigrant newcomers remain present in American society today. Current stigmas attached to racial makeup, linguistic barriers, and religious backgrounds fuel anti-immigration movements and xenophobic attitudes. A recent Washington Post article reports the "record high" U.S. deportations in the past year of more than 392,000 unauthorized immigrants.[19] Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., "'they must get right with the law' by paying fines, committing to learn English and submitting to criminal background checks," reflecting the current political agenda of toughness towards illegal immigration and border security. In 2006, President George W. Bush created a "Task Force on New Americans" to ensure assimilation of immigrants into American society. Mexicans are the largest immigrant population in the U.S. today. According to recent estimates from the Migration Information Source website, about 5.3 million undocumented Mexican immigrants are currently living in the United States and over one in two Mexican immigrants are undocumented, compared to one in six for the remaining immigrant population. Future projections indicate a continuation of this massive immigrant inflow from Mexico, though immigration laws and US-Mexico border enforcement are becoming stricter in many states.

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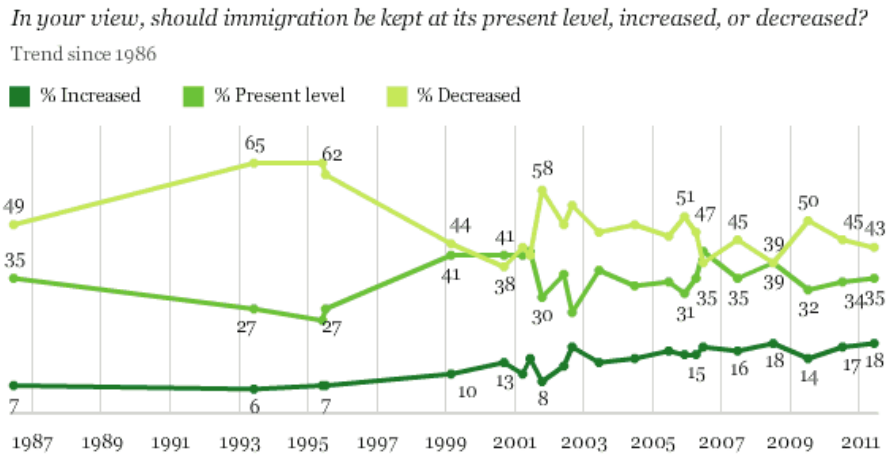
[18] Joseph E. Harris, *The African Diaspora*, ed. Alusine Jallon and Stephen E. Maizlish (Arlington: University of Texas, 1996), 13.
[19] Shankar Vedantam, "U.S. Deportations Reach Record High," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/06/AR2010100607232.html (accessed October 28, 2011).

After the radical terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the most deadly terrorist attacks in history, which caused the deaths of nearly 3,000 Americans, the U.S. and international community responded with more intensive anti-terror operations and border security initiatives. Across America, in a time of national crisis, attitudes of nationalism and patriotism rose as well as anti-Muslim sentiment and prejudice towards foreign-born communities. Hate crimes directed towards Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim have also increased substantially in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In some cases, U.S. citizens have taken extreme measures displaying hostility, ignorance and intolerance. On September 21, 2001, Mark Stroman of Texas killed two men and partially blinded another he thought to be Arab Muslims in an act of revenge, calling himself "the first American to Retaliate and take a stand."[20] Figure 2, taken from a recent Gallup public opinion poll, depicts American attitudes towards immigration from 1987 to 2011 and in 2011 post-9/11 Americans favoring a decrease in immigration rose from 41% to 58%. Current trends show a slight preference for decreased immigration levels (43%) and only a minority favors an increase in immigration levels (18%).

[20] Richard A. Serrano, "Finding Forgiveness on Death Row," *Los Angeles Times,* October 21, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/oct/21/nation/la-na-muslim-forgive-20111021 (accessed October 28, 2011).

Figure 2.



Changes in immigration demographics from primarily white, European to Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans have altered the previous discourse on the immigrant experience, processes of assimilation, and "Americanization." Despite fluctuations in national attitudes towards immigrants, citizens of low-income countries will continue to seek travel and migration opportunities to the United States, further increasing the demand for economic migrants to enter U.S. borders. According to the U.S. census:

> Almost one-third of the current population growth is caused by net immigration. By 2000, the Nation's population is projected to be 8 million larger than it would have been if there were no net immigration after July 1, 1992. By 2050, this difference would increase to 82 million. In fact, about 86 percent of the population growth during the year 2050 may be due to the effects of post-1992 net immigration.

This high propensity of immigration calls for a greater understanding of the patterns of assimilation and adaptation methods of current immigrant groups in the U.S. This will allow us to better predict future immigrant behavior and relations between the host nation and foreign-born populations.

Case Study: The Murids of Senegal in Harlem, NY

New York is an attractive destination for Senegalese immigrants for various reasons. First, though Europe is a more common destination for many African immigrants given its proximity to the African continent, European countries tend to have difficult immigration policies and maintain tense relations with many former African colonies. Senegalese are also driven by the media's influences and perceptions of America as the land of prosperity. These factors, combined with the dynamism of New York's trading districts and its international cultural climate hold a distinctive appeal for the Senegalese and many immigrant groups. The first Murids of Senegal arrived in New York as temporary workers in the 1970s, and then began to migrate in larger numbers in the mid-1980s.[21] The Murid brotherhood, a religious and social organization originating in Senegal, West Africa, has developed vast trade networks across the globe, maintaining their largest enclave abroad in Harlem. In 2002, an estimated 7,000 Murids inhabited the ethnic enclave "Little Senegal" in Harlem.[22] It is through these cohesive communities that immigrants are able to maintain their cultural traditions from their home country, assimilating into America at a slower rate than immigrants who do not have such an extensive network of support.

It is important to note, however, that the Murid immigrant community, is one of many examples of tightly bound immigrant groups in the U.S., held together by common ethnic, racial, national and/or religious backgrounds and this thesis demonstrates the importance of this communal context in successful assimilation processes. The Jewish

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[21] Cheikh Anta Babou, "Brotherhood Solidarity, Education and Migration: The Role of the *Dahiras* among the Murid Muslim Community of New York." *African Affairs* (2002): 158.
[22] Richard Dowden, "God, Trust and Trade: Senegal." *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles,* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 261.

diaspora in the United States is widely recognized as an example of an economically prosperous immigrant group, benefiting from networks of concentrated Jewish communities. Other studies on ethnic enclaves in America cite the Vietnamese community of New Orleans, where descendants have retained their maternal language and traditional practices.[23] Also, the Punjabi Sikhs from northwest India near San Francisco and Caribbean immigrants in New York are other examples of communities who have demonstrated maintenance of cultural values and identities alongside Americanization and assimilation. The following chapter will provide a historical depth of the Murids of Senegal to contribute greater insight into the Murid immigrant experience in the United States.

[23] Charles Hirschman, "The Educational Enrollment of Immigrant Youth: A Test of the Segmented-Assimilation Hypothesis," *Demography*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (August, 2001): 319.

Chapter 1 –
Historical Background

The majority of Senegalese Muslims subscribe to one of three major Islamic Brotherhoods including, Tijaniyya (51% of the Muslim population), Muridiyya (30.1%), and Qadiriyya (10.9%), which play critical roles in the social, political, and economic spheres of Senegalese society.[1] The Muridiyyah Brotherhood is the second largest Islamic brotherhood and holds the most political and economic power.[2] From its founding in 1883, the Murid community has provided a source of spirituality and salvation as well as material security and political protection, among other benefits for its followers.[3] The Murid Brotherhood responded to the social and cultural context of French colonial occupation of the Senegalese state (1891-1960) and rose in popularity during that time.[4] The French sought economic opportunity in Senegal's fertile land for groundnut production and subjected the Wolof peoples to a period of severe social displacement and humiliation. The aftermath of this national identity crisis bore the attraction of the Murid Brotherhood, founded by a charismatic, Senegalese saintly teacher, Amadou Bamba. The literature on Sufism in Africa describes it as "a complex spiritual practice, historical memory, and ethical models, which continues to evolve from

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[1]Khadim Mbacké, *Sufism and Religious Brotherhoods in Senegal* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2005), ix.
[2] Mbaye Lo and Aman Nadhiri, "Contextualizing 'Muridiyya' within the American Muslim Community: Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future," *A Special Publication of Murid Islamic Community in America, Inc., The Cultural Commission* (2011): 28.
[3] D.B. Cruise O'Brien, *Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 5.
[4] Nancy Kwang Johnson, "Senegalese 'into Frenchmen'? The French Technology of Nationalism in Senegal," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics,* Vol. 10, No. 1 (2004): 136.

its medieval Islamic origins in response to the political, ideological, and technological transformations of the contemporary world."[1] The nature of the Murid movement within Sufism restored legitimacy to the population and adapted to the social and political changes in the surrounding environment.

Islam had been prevalent in the North and West African regions since the 11th century, but the popular demand for social order during French colonization became the catalyst for widespread Islamic conversion[2]. As the French symbolized a force of physical colonization of the land, Islam symbolized a force of psychological colonization of the minds and souls of the Senegalese populace. By 1970, there were more than half a million Murids in Senegal; now, there are an estimated three million out of a population of 10 million.[3] Amadou Bamba instilled simple principles to guide the Murid practice. The Wolof phrase *dem leen ligééy* or "Go and Work" provided the maxim for Bamba's followers, with an emphasis on hard work as a divine path to Allah.[4] Aligned with the values of traditional, pre-colonial Wolof society as communal and hierarchical, Bamba criticized actions of self-interest and stressed the importance of the *talibé,* the religious student, and the *talibés* full submission to his *marabout*, the religious leader. Reinforcement of moral virtues such as hard work, humility, perseverance, sharing and non-violence built strong bonds of trust within the brotherhood that developed out of a distrustful environment of corruption and oppression during the French colonial regime.[5]

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[1] Rèudiger Seesamann, *The Divine Flood* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 15.
[2] Ibid, 12.
[3] Richard Dowden, "God, Trust and Trade: Senegal." *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles,* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 256.
[4] Cruise O'Brien, 52.
[5] Dowden, 256.

The Murids in Senegal, are the "most tightly organized and influential" of the three Brotherhoods and enjoy the advantages of language, economic, and political dominance.[6] Wolof is the *lingua franca* of Senegal and the ethnic majority and most Murids are of the Wolof ethnic group. Wolof peanut farmers make up 60 percent of the peanut economy and this production is 90 percent of Senegal's exports, contributing to the Murids economic power and political influence.[7] Today, Murid followers are part of a vast global African trading network that has spread from Paris to Los Angeles and from Hong Kong to Dubai.[8] The brotherhood has successfully created a "Murid modernity that is at once global and local, West African and French, and Islamic and secular" it its unique hybrid nature, adaptive to various contexts across generations.[9] The Murid network in New York was founded in 1985 by Amadou Bamba's great-grandson.[10] The reach of the Murid membership has strengthened its organizational hold through NGO's such as the Senegalese Murid Community of the Khadimul Rasul Society, the Murid Islamic Community of America (MICA), and the Senegalese Association community center, which extend support for assimilation and connections between local and international trade.[11]

This chapter will continue in discussion of the Murid, Senegalese immigrant community in the United States through the conceptual framework set up by Robin Cohen, in his account, *Global Diasporas*. Cohen defines *diaspora* as the preservation of a

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[6] Johnson, 151-2.
[7] Ibid, 255.
[8] Ibid.
[9] John Glover, "Murid Modernity: Historical Perceptions of Islamic Reform, Sufism, and Colonization," in *New Perspectives on Islam in Senegal: Conversion, Migration, Wealth, Power, and Femininity,* ed., Mamadou Diouf and Mara Leichtman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 72.
[10] Dowden, 260.
[11] Lo and Nadhiri, 45.

collective identity and writes, "a member's adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background."[12] This psychological and social displacement creates a common experience among all immigrant populations. The acculturation experience includes high levels of stress, culture shock, family and cultural pressures and volatile relationships with the host population, which may "range from acceptance, tolerance, and encouragement to disdain, ridicule, or hostility toward immigrants' efforts to learn the new language, norms, and values."[13]

In applying the diaspora models to the Murid immigrant community it is also important to understand it within the context of the multifaceted African diaspora. First, the diaspora explains a dispersed population's relationship with their homeland and host country, recognizing the social, political, and economic implications of their dispersal, which make it an important issue for national and international relations. In discussing Africans abroad, there are important historical stereotypes and myths that still impact the African immigrant experience today such as perceptions of Africans as "inferior, destined to be slaves, incapable of developing complex societies, lacking a meaningful cultural history, and uncivilized."[14] Therefore, the African immigrant in the U.S. must develop mechanisms to confront the structures of racial inequality in America. This chapter will explore two of the five main types of diasporas: the cultural and trade diaspora in their application to the Murid immigrants of Senegal in the U.S.

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[12] Robin Cohen. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. (Seattle, WA: UP Washington, 1997), ix.
[13] Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch. *The Other African Americans*, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 257.
[14] Joseph E. Harris, *The African Diaspora*, ed. Alusine Jalloh and Stephen E. Maizlish (Arlington: University of Texas, 1996), 8.

Section A – Cultural Diaspora

In his chapter on the "cultural diaspora," Cohen describes the dichotomy of globalization which leads to homogeneity and assimilation into the mainstream "global culture" and localism, which calls for preservation of traditional values and religious, ethnic or national identities.[15] The cultural disaspora is a transitional mechanism for the individual, balancing both the local and the global forces. During the colonial era in Senegal (1891-1960), these competing forces were the French, Islamic, and local traditions. The French initially favored a harsh policy of assimilation as a part of their *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission).[16] Colonial pressures and violence ultimately led the Senegalese to side with Islam against the French. Backed by the powerful *marabouts,* Senegalese asserted their religious identity. The rise of Islam in Senegal was due to "[t]he Muslim brotherhoods' ability to adapt to changing social conditions, the spread of Koranic primary schools, and Senegal's growing ties with the Islamic world."[17]

The competing forces of French colonization and Islam, modernization and localism induced a sense of rootlessness, and the Islamic Brotherhoods swiftly rose to fill this gap in the Senegalese society. This is the same rootlessness that comes with migration in "living between worlds, between a lost past and non-integrated present" and explains the condition of a diaspora.[18] "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference." This quote provides insight on the Murid Brotherhood's ability to constantly redefining itself in across the social, cultural and political context of the time period.

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[15] Cohen, 131.
[16] Johnson, 136.
[17] Ibid, 152.
[18] Cohen, 133.

The first characteristic of the cultural diaspora is retention of identity. From its founding the Murid Brotherhood has aided its members through times of social displacement and identity crisis. In the early stages of Muriddyah in Senegal, the construction of a grand mosque represented a monument of independence from colonial powers and an expression of their SengaleseMuslim identity.[19] Similarly, the building of the Malcolm Shabaaz mosque, a replica to mosques found in Senegal, is located at the center of the "Little Senegal" ethnic enclave in Harlem as a community center for Murids as an icon of the Murid, Islamic identity in a foreign environment.[20] The *dahira* or Islamic prayer circle, also a symbol of the Murid identity, was founded in the 1940s in Senegal by Mustafa Mbakke to promote solidarity among the Murid urban community.[21] This society of disciples created cohesion and translated well to the foreign environments, founded in New York in 1985/86 allowing members of the Murid Brotherhood to maintain their identity outside of the holy city of Touba in Senegal.[22] The *dahira* provides a support group to share the difficulties and obligations of city life as well as the stresses of migration in a collective struggle. According to Cheikh Anta Babou, the *dahira* emphasizes the values of "brotherly love and sharing" and "discipline and hard work" that solidifies the Murid identity.[23]

In my own ethnographic research, I spoke with an 18-year-old, Senegalese, young man who aspires to migrate to the United States to live and work. When asked if he was worried if he would lose his identity, he replied simply that as long as he could

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[19] Glover, 72.
[20] Babou, 161.
[21] Ibid, 154.
[22] Ibid, 163.
[23] Ibid, 156.

attend the mosque he would be fine.[24] In a conversation with an elderly Senegalese man visiting his son, a Senegalese-born, Muslim immigrant living in Washington D.C., I asked him if he ever worried about his son losing his cultural identity. He responded that he is comforted by the knowledge that he raised his son with the teachings of Islam and as long as he maintains regular Islamic practices, he does not fear his identity loss.[25] This was a theme across many other Senegalese immigrants in the United States who felt that their religious practice and participation with activities of the Brotherhood would be sufficient to maintain their cultural identities. This is not surprising as in Senegal during the colonial period, the "Wolof ethnicity became wed to religious brotherhood membership in such as way that 'to be Wolof' was 'necessarily to be Muslim.'"[26]

Also on retention of identity, the Murid Brotherhood has aligned itself with the ideals of "Negritude" and the black experience in America. The idea of *Islam noir* or "Black Islam" is often contrasted with "orthodox Islam" of the pure Middle East as a result of colonial designations of cultural or racial hierarchies.[27] "Amadou Bamba created a place for the blacks within Islam" and the Murid Brotherhood re-legitimized the conceptions of African Islam.[28] Therefore, this identification with native blacks reasserts the Murid presence in the U.S. as well as the African presence within Islam.

Cohen's second factor of the cultural disapora, the "return movement" both literal and symbolic, remains pertinent for many Murid, Senegalese immigrants. Murid immigrants first arrived in the United States in the 1970s as temporary migrants seeking

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[24] Amadou. Interviewed by Angie Tyler. Personal interview. Dakar, Senegal, April 14, 2011.
[25] Mbegane. Interviewed by Angie Tyler. Personal Interview. Washington D.C., August 3, 2011.
[26] Johnson, 151.
[27] Seesemann, 12.
[28] Glover, 78.

business ventures.[29] Murids in the 1980's, primarily men in their thirties were attracted by the opportunities to profit from American markets selling African goods through street vending. They lived collectively, reproducing their way of life back in Senegal. Gradually, by 1990's "Little Senegal" became a centralized location for Murid activities where small businesses were dominated by Senegalese. The creation of a local niche and concentrated community allows immigrants to access the sights and sensations similar to those found back home, signifying this metaphorical return movement when the physical return is not possible. In conversation with Senegalese immigrants in the United States even those with families and careers in the United States who have not been back to Senegal in a decade will insist on their eventual return to Senegal. The Murid Brotherhood will also pay for its deceased members to ship their bodies back to the homeland for a proper burial and so that even if Senegalese may understand that they will not return to Senegal in their lifetime, they are comforted by the notion that their souls will one day return.

The final element of the cultural diaspora is the "social conduct and popular attitudes."[30] The importance of community which comes from traditional Senegalese values and is reinforced by teachings of the Murid Brotherhood pervades the Murid immigrant experience. The *marabouts* or local religious leaders serve as a direct link for disciples back to Senegal. Close relationships within the *dahira* connect the network of disciples and this translates to the urban, New York setting leading immigrants to open their homes to other Murid members and extend support when needed. One young Senegalese immigrant explained the cultural values that he chooses to maintain in

[29] Babou, 158.
[30] Cohen, 150.

America. For example, in urban areas in the United States neighbors may live for years side by side without acknowledging one another. However this Senegalese immigrant emphasized the importance of meeting each of his neighbors to create a sense of community despite the social norms in a dispersed and estranged society.

Section B – Trade Diaspora

Cohen identifies the "trade diasporas" as those populations who have built allies among colonial occupiers to expand their economic capital. French colonial rule in Senegal altered the systems of production from local and varied crops to a mono-crop, groundnut-based economy that demanded "systems of taxation, cash crop production, military/ labor recruitment, and rural to urban migration."[31] The Murid Brotherhood, first seen as a threat to French colonial power, built up its trading networks and gained political leverage through diplomatic interaction. As the peanut based economy in Senegal declined, the Murid brotherhood extended networks to Dakar, the capital city, throughout West Africa, European cities and New York.[32]

Another factor for Cohen's "trade disapora" is the "pariah-capitalism" which calls for deep internal trust to insulate the group from outside influences. Cohen cites the Lebanese in West Africa or the Indians in East Africa as examples. Additionally, Japanese immigrants in America have also received recognition for similar patterns of entrepreneurial behavior that contributes to a unique experience in a host environment.[33] Parallel to these examples, Donal Cruise O'Brien references the *Mouride capitalism*, as

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[31] Glover, 77.
[32] Leonardo A. Villalon, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and citizens in Fatick*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 69.
[33] Edna Bonacich and John Modell, *The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity: Small Business in the Japanese American Community*, (University of California Press, 1981), 5.

Murids in Senegal expanded their economic power in Senegal first through capitalizing on the groundnut production and eventually internationally through trade networks dealing with a variety of goods. Richard Dowden writes that "trust is key to the Mourides" and greatly contributed to their economic success. Murid systems are faith-based while other systems of trust may be connected by kinship or clans. Dowden claims that the leading artists, musicians and businessmen in Senegal are all Murids.[34] Because trust in the government is minimal, Senegalese citizens trust the Brotherhoods or Islamic institutions with the expectation of salvation as well as material security and social services, usually provided by the nation-state.

Finally, the "trade disapora" acts as an "innovatory model of social organization that may be advantageous to the diaspora itself, its homeland and its place of settlement" as a "middle-man minority." [35] The Murid Brotherhood gained spiritual credibility from its founder, Amadou Bamba, the spiritual guide and recipient of a divine mission and political and economic prestige through the work of Mame Thierno, the diplomat who settled Murid affairs with the French.[36] Thierno paid taxes to the French on the behalf of the Murid community, distancing the Murid members from the French and "transformed a secular colonial obligation into a religious duty with its incumbent gravity and sense of reward."[37] From my ethnographic research of the ethnic enclave in New York, it is apparent that the Murid religious leaders play a similar, diplomatic role for newcomers and Senegalese immigrants today. Acting as the liaison between the Murid immigrant

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[34] Dowden, 261.
[35] Cohen, 104.
[36] Glover, 81.
[37] Ibid.

community and the American government authorities, religious leaders in many ways still perform the roles of the earlier *marabouts* in Senegal under French occupation.

With this insight into the Murid identity and diaspora, the next chapter will explore the main modes of incorporation for immigrants in the U.S. and then apply the Murids of Senegal in Harlem to these models.

Chapter 2 –
Sociological Theories of Assimilation

Indiana's governor, Mitch Daniels recently referred to upward mobility as "the crux of the American promise."[1] For incoming immigrants, however, the centuries-old American dream is largely dependent upon their assimilation processes. Cultural assimilation, or "acculturation," is the process of compromising different ethnic, cultural, and national identities. Acculturation theory attempts to explain how some immigrants succeed socially and economically, while others fall into the cycle of poverty. Second-generation immigrants experience the added difficulty of bridging their parents' traditional practices, values and norms with those of the mainstream society in the host country.

Before exploring the broader theories of assimilation, it is important to consider the diversity of immigrant groups in America which are increasingly varied and complex. Bryan Roberts, in a discussion of ethnic identities among immigrants, has identified three groupings: the first group is the *cultural exiles*, including immigrants like the Jewish, Irish and Cuban immigrants who have fled from religious persecution or political oppression. Due to their permanent status in the host country, the *cultural exiles* can

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[1] Scott Winship, "Mobility Impaired: The American Dream must move from the bottom up," *National Review*, November 14, 2011, http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/282292/mobility-impaired-scott-winship (accessed November 20, 2011)

make long-term commitments in their communities.[1] The second grouping is the *transnational ethnic community,* like the Murid Brotherhood and many other African immigrant groups. These immigrants often migrate due to poor economic conditions in the homeland, wish to acquire short-term capital and eventually, return home. The temporary migration flows of the *transnational ethnic community* enables them to retain their language of origin and traditional cultural practices but discourages long-term commitments. Despite the temporary nature of the transnational ethnic community, these migrants are dependent on the host country for stable incomes to provide for their families back in their maternal countries. The third identity group is the *ethnic American,* like the Italian or Polish, who do not necessarily hold onto their cultural roots given their ability to assimilate into American culture and develop an American identity, and not based on a "sense of exile from the homeland."[2]

While these three groupings provide an image of the multidimensional characteristics of immigration, there are still other factors that may contribute to differences in assimilation processes. Along with the temporal expectations of immigrant groups, the ease of assimilation into American culture can also be determined by an immigrant's physical and human capital including material, educational, and occupational skills and resources that they possess or lack upon their arrival.[3] Migrants also enter the United States through a diverse range of modes like a work visa, travel or tourist visa, student visa, through state-granted refugee or asylum status, or by obtaining a

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[1] Bryan R. Roberts, "Socially Expected Durations and the Economic Adjustment of Immigrants," in *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship*, ed., Alejandro Portes (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1995), 63.
[2] Roberts, 68.
[3] Alejandro Portes, "Children of Immigrants: Segmented Assimilation and Its Determinants," in *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship*, 252.

green card through marriage to an American citizen, among other avenues. It is therefore impossible to pinpoint one, generalized "immigrant experience" in America. However, this chapter will discuss the three main theories of assimilation which predict the immigrant's outcome based on a variety of factors based on a conceptual framework; these theories include: upward mobility, downward mobility and segmented assimilation.

Upward mobility, also referred to as the *straight-line theory* or *classical assimilation theory*, is largely based on the experiences of earlier European immigrant groups in the United States. Upward mobility theorizes that, "each consecutive ethnic generation pushes progressively farther out of the bottom level and into each of the successive layers above."[4] This theory, however, relies on the assumption that second generation children of immigrants will assimilate into a mono-American culture of the white middle-class.[5] It also implies that the immigrant will shed his or her cultural ties, without acknowledgement of the contribution immigrants make to multicultural, multiethnic communities.

As a part of the earlier migration movements to the United States, Eastern European Jews represented this upwardly mobile track.[6] Jewish immigrants, as *cultural exiles*, held an even greater incentive to integrate into the American mainstream. In one generation, they achieved social and economic mobility due to their linguistic preferences, choosing English over Yiddish, and their complete residential, occupational,

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[4] Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway, *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 6.
[5] Ibid, 7.
[6] Herbert Gans, "Second-Generation Decline: Scenarios for the economic and ethnic futures of the post-1965 American immigrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 2 (April 1992): 176.

and identity assimilation.[7] Economic growth after the Civil War allowed Europeans like the Jewish immigrants to access low-paying, undervalued, but stable jobs poising the children of immigrants favorably towards upward mobility. By the late 1920s, second-generation immigrants were able to reach greater economic stability and success. The second economic boom after WWII gave them even greater economic mobility which allowed them to assimilate firmly into the middle-class.[8]

The idea of "succession-driven upward mobility" was thus a common path for many European immigrants. The second-generation would acquire lower social status but generally secure menial jobs. The "immigrant jobs" of the 1920s and 1940s were largely a part of the industrial or manufacturing sectors, which are rapidly diminishing due to technological advancement and out-sourcing.[9] Also, due to racial discrimination, the "unmeltable" ethnic immigrants of the contemporary age experience greater social barriers, which block them from the privileges and opportunities of the white mainstream. Changes in the demographics of immigrant groups and the waning mobility ladders gave rise to critics of the upward mobility model for its narrow approach. Herbert Gans for example, argues that because education is only accessible by a minority of immigrants, the idea of "education-driven upward mobility" is highly unlikely for the majority of contemporary immigrants.

The previous assumption of upward mobility predicted the vast benefits of Americanization for immigrants –that once they shed their roots they could reap the rewards in the land of opportunity. However, this theory lacked recognition of the

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[7] Kasinitz et al., 7.
[8] Ibid, 181.
[9] Gans, 178.

negative aspects of assimilation, which in some cases, results in the second generation adopting more destructive characteristics due to discrimination and disadvantage. As the upward mobility theory became obsolete with the changing demographics of American immigrants, Herbert Gans introduced the phenomenon of "downward mobility." This theory asserts that newer immigrant groups are more vulnerable to assimilating into the American underclass due to lower economic growth and lower economic mobility. He writes, "in adulthood, some members of the second generation, especially those whose parents did not themselves escape poverty, will end up in persistent poverty, because they will be reluctant to work at immigrant wages and hours like their parents, but lack the job opportunities, skills or connections to do better."[10] Gans points out that as jobs become scarce, the next group of incoming immigrants are left with limited options, which can lead to negative activities such as crime, drug-selling and prostitution.[11]

In a recent political debate surrounding issues of income inequality in America, Representative Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) stated, "class is not a fixed designation in this country. We are an upwardly mobile society with a lot of movement between income groups."[12] However, with deindustrialization as Gans demonstrates, fewer jobs are available for immigrants and with the consistent rise in income inequality, mobility ladders begin to disappear and low-income immigrant groups are the first in America to suffer the adverse consequences. The United States is "the most unequal affluent country" in the world and the unbalanced distribution of income disproportionally affects

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[10] Kasinitz et al., 8.
[11] Ibid, 180.
[12] E.J. Dionne Jr., "Paul Ryan's frown should make Democrats smile," *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/paul-ryans-frown-should-make-democrats-smile/2011/10/30/gIQAFUWEXM_story.html (accessed November 4, 2011).

immigrants who may not have the cultural, social, or material capital to gain an advantage when competing for jobs with native-born individuals.[13]

Immigrants' acculturation process is also largely based on widespread attitudes in the host environment. Some host communities welcome and accept immigrants, which lead to greater economic success for immigrants. Others remain highly skeptical and hostile towards immigrants, which leads to less opportunity for integration into American society and less access to economic mobility.[14] Socially, children of immigrants face a difficult transition period which is only exacerbated in a hostile host environment. Portes provides a vivid example of Haitian children in Miami who deal with some of these issues:

> Second-generation Haitian children find themselves torn between conflicting ideas and values: to remain "Haitian" they would have to face social ostracism and continuing attacks in school; to become "American" (black American in this case), they would have to forgo their parents' dreams of making it in America on the basis of ethnic solidarity and preservation of traditional values.[15]

Nonwhite immigrants are highly aware of the *native disadvantages* of racial discrimination, which makes them vulnerable to becoming the "wrong American" and assimilating into the inner city culture of America.[16] These *immigrant disadvantages* also include language barriers and lack of material or human capital. West Indians or Dominicans for example, face discrimination in housing markets and therefore tend to occupy more crime-ridden neighborhoods. As a result, their children often attend the worst schools which ultimately contribute to their downward assimilation.

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[13]Markus Gangl, Joakim Palme, and Lane Kenworthy. "Is High Inequality Offset by Mobility?" (2008) :1.
[14] Portes, 249.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Kasinitz et al., 20.

However, as Portes demonstrates through the segmented assimilation model, the immigrant can rely on their *immigrant advantages*; primarily, this consists of an ethnic network of solidarity and mutual support that allows them to overcome these obstacles.[17] Other ethnographic studies show that if children of immigrants can tap into these critical resources from the cohesive community, they may even surpass their American peers. Portes illustrates this theory through the example of the Punjabi Sikh community in northern California. In this particular context, Punjabi children receive harsh discrimination in school and public climates due to their immigrant background. However, the Punjabi immigrant community uses its strength in cultural traditions to urge children to learn English and useful skills, resist targeted discrimination, and attain higher levels of education. Through a process of segmented assimilation, where the immigrant community eases into the assimilation process through holding onto advantageous traditional values, a community can restore its ability to climb the ladder of social and economic mobility.[18] This theory unites the forces of "economic mobility with preservation of the immigrant community's solidarity."[19]

Another example of prosperity through segmented assimilation is demonstrated by the Chinese immigrants in New York. They have succeeded through "family strategies for the accumulation and intergenerational transfer of capital," relying on a cohesive network to supplement their children's experiences. For example, many Chinese adults send their children to weekend Chinese schools and have regular access to newspapers, churches and other co-ethnic resources that keeps their community insulated from

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[17] Kasinitz et al., 20.
[18] Portes, 251.
[19] Ibid.

discriminatory forces and provides further opportunities within the enclave for immigrant families.

Just as humans naturally bond under times of immense stress and common struggle, the solidarity of immigrant communities is fueled by economic and social marginalization in the host society. This linkage of a "common cultural memory" and an "emergent sentiment of we-ness," stimulates the abundance of immigrant social capital found in ethnic enclaves with shops, restaurants, schools, religious institutions, and other businesses catering specifically to their needs by "their people" who speak their language and understand their cultural backgrounds.[20] The social capital of immigrants builds force and sustainability as these networks widen. The prosperity of small-business and entrepreneurship enables the second-generation to remain connected and generally stay within the confines of the community. This becomes critical as ethnic and racial minority immigrant groups are unable to access the resources and opportunities of the white mainstream but can avoid downward assimilation into the underclass of America through mutual assistance.[21] Portes describes the logic behind the segmented assimilation theory:

> The more immigrant solidarity is grounded in a common cultural memory and the replication of home country institutions; the greater density of social networks within these communities. Then the greater the social capital available to: (1) parents for social control, and (2) their offspring for access to scarce community-controlled resources. The greater 1 and 2, then, the lower the probability of downward assimilation.[22]

The "common membership in an overarching community" incenses loyalty and obligation and therefore its members' energies contribute to the dynamism of a thriving community environment, which then allows them to avoid downward mobility.

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[20] Portes, 256.
[21] Ibid, 257.
[22] Ibid, 258.

In sum, the segmented assimilation model takes into account the barriers identified by Gans, which increases immigrants' vulnerability to downward assimilation, but provides insight to how some immigrant groups are using their cultural solidarity to overcome these barriers. The rising inequality in America threatens the success of immigrant newcomers. In fact, those in the marginalized underclass face "youth gangs, drug dictated lifestyles, premature childbearing, imprisonment and early death," a life that has led some immigrant families to send their children back to the homeland to escape urban violence in city ghettos.[23] Therefore, if immigrants can land higher incomes and stable jobs, and find housing in safer neighborhoods near better school districts for their children, they will experience higher success rates. The Murids of Senegal in New York are favorably positioned to access the wealth of social capital provided by the Murid Brotherhood despite native disadvantages that may urge assimilation into the underclass. The next chapter will discuss the Murid Brotherhood in further detail and its ability to employ the *immigrant advantages* or advantages of segmentation. The following chapter will then examine the *native advantages* or advantages of assimilation that Murid immigrants employ through greater assimilation into American culture.

[23] Kasinitz et al., 348.

Chapter 3 –
Advantages of "Segmentation"

> *"Our blackness should not be an obstacle to our knowledge and our perfection. All men were created equal."*[1]
>
> —Cheikh Amadou Bamba

The above quote by the founder of the Murid Brotherhood highlights the shared struggle of the Murids of Senegal and Black Americans, and this connection gives the Murids a sense of belonging in America.[2] This demonstrates one example of the Brotherhood's abilities to adjust to its surrounding environment and provide a safe inclusive space for its disciples to thrive. During the colonial era in Senegal, a period of severe social displacement, the Murid Brotherhood played a critical role in restoring pride and prestige in the minds of the Senegalese. With its vast international networks, today the Murid Brotherhood serves a similar function in a global context to reassure the Murid immigrants who may feel isolated from the mainstream society of the host country.

Immigrants living in New York endure physically and mentally arduous conditions that challenge their everyday survival, including intense feelings of social isolation living away from family. The unpredictability of outcomes after migration also

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[1] Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.
[2] Ibid, 112.

leads to a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness.[1] Young African men, the bulk of African migrants, are particularly prone to these types of difficulties. They often arrive to the U.S. with the responsibility of providing for large family networks and even entire villages back home, which comes at a high cost of personal sacrifice. In Paul Stoller's ethnographic account of West African traders in New York, one West African-born immigrant, Issifi, described the difficulties of life in New York: "[it] is filled with uncertainties. If I fall sick, will I be able to get help? Will immigration detain and deport me? Will I make enough money to send to my family in Niger and Cote D'Ivoire? Will I make enough to pay my bills?"[2] Arriving with low levels of education and little knowledge of English or cultural norms, these immigrant newcomers heavily rely on a range of support networks such as government or non-profit programs and relatives or friends for their immediate needs. The Murid Brotherhood, then, fills this gap for immigrants in need and "when a Murid visits a city for the first time, he will go straight to the *dahira*, which will provide him with somewhere to stay, credit to trade and social support."[3]

Through the process of segmented assimilation, as described in the previous chapter, immigrants with a strong ethnic community can greatly benefit from the material and social resources to facilitate their incorporation process and achieve upward mobility. In Harlem, New York, the Senegalese have established an ethnic enclave, defined as "spatially clustered networks of businesses owned and staffed by members of the same

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[1] Paul Stoller, *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 159.
[2] Stoller, 16.
[3] Richard Dowden, "God, Trust and Trade: Senegal." *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles,* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 260.

minority group," called "Little Senegal," which provides protection from discrimination and presents opportunities to expand on social capital through cohesion and solidarity.[4] Little Senegal is home to many businesses dedicated to serving African populations. The print of the Murid Brotherhood is visible in this area, as storefronts mount titles of Murid saints or landmarks.[5] The Murid Brotherhood acts as a transitional mechanism to offer material, social, and spiritual support during this period of rootlessness and emotional strain. Membership with the modern Murid brotherhood and ethnic enclave in Harlem offers the following benefits:

Spiritual Practice and Religious Community

Dahiras, Islamic prayer circles, provide a base for Murid members to gather, socialize, study the Koran and celebrate Amadou Bamba's works together.[6] From its creation, "the *dahira* bridged the ethnic, geographical and other cleavages upon which urban solidarity was built," based on the need to build a sense of community to cope with dispersion and urbanization.[7] The weekly meetings allow for an exchange between Murid newcomers and their more experienced peers, where they can vent their frustrations and seek assistance. Often, the *marabout* or religious leader will also provide spiritual guidance and counseling to his disciples.

The Murid Brotherhood gives its members a sense of purpose and dignity, critical elements to their survival in the host environment. Members of Muriddiya work towards the moral virtues of humility, discipline and hard work to achieve salvation in the

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[4] Victoria Ebin, "'Little Senegal' vs. The New Harlem Renaissance: Senegalese Immigrants and the Gentrification of Harlem," *African Art,* 8.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Cheikh Anta Babou, "Brotherhood Solidarity, Education and Migration: The Role of the *Dahiras* among the Murid Muslim Community of New York." *African Affairs* (2002): 154.
[7] Ibid, 156.

afterlife. The religious community also practices traditional proceedings in births or deaths. For example, in the death of a Murid member abroad, religious leaders will provide funds to ensure the return of the body home for a proper burial.[8] The Murid Brotherhood also hosts traditional festivals and celebrations. The officially declared annual celebration of Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day in New York commemorates the life of the Murid founder and many immigrants from across the nation travel to this special event to attend the weeklong festivities.[9] Today, the *dahira* is a critical instrument for new immigrants in fostering an easier transition to city life in New York and Americanization.[10]

Financial Resources

The community also provides financial resources for Murids. Members of the Brotherhood pay a subscription fee and the Murid organization uses this accumulated capital as a welfare system to support its followers in need.[11] Wealthier members may also contribute financially for small business loans or other capital investments. In Victoria Ebin's account of Murid immigrants, she stresses the importance of these financial investments in building credit and confidence in newcomers. Successful business owners will often share their expertise and strategies with the Murid network.[12] Murids may also help their fellow disciples pay for airline tickets, lodging, food, and other financial assistance as needed.[13]

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[8] Dowden, 260.
[9] Mbaye Lo and Aman Nadhiri, "Contextualizing 'Muridiyya' within the American Muslim Community: Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future," *A Special Publication of Murid Islamic Community in America, Inc., The Cultural Commission* (2011): 42.
[10] Ibid, 40.
[11] Dowden, 256.
[12] Babou, 160.
[13] Ibid, 168.

Job Training and Employment Assistance

Although trends depict the incoming African immigrants in America as a highly educated group, with higher median incomes and lower rates of unemployment and poverty than African-Americans and Hispanics, this is not necessarily the trend for the Murids of Senegal in Harlem.[14] Most Murid immigrants, disproportionately male, have not received formal education and work as traders or unskilled laborers.[15] Many Senegalese worked in the 125th Street African market that was closed down in 1994 by Mayor Giuliani.[16] Despite the closing of this important market, most continue to sell African goods as street vendors or in the Masjid Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market in Little Senegal and sell a variety of products from "Asian-made watches, 'fantasy' jewelry, novelty items and American beauty products" and others follow African American trade shows and conventions to sell goods. [17] By 1990, the Senegalese connected in the Murid trading network "became the aristocracy of West African merchants in New York City."[18] Therefore, knowledge of trade is the key to economic success for incoming Murids. Others work as cab drivers, grocery clerks or security guards, and some have opened restaurants or boutiques in Little Senegal.

Local Murid leaders will often introduce newcomers to influential Murid members to facilitate employment assistance and exchange knowledge. Because of the Murid values and Senegalese traditions emphasis on mutual assistance, senior members often take on younger, inexperienced or newly arrived Murids as apprentices to teach

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[14] Shaw-Taylor and Tuch, 56.
[15] Stoller, 6.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Victoria Ebin, "Diaspora: The Mourides of Senegal Abroad." *A Special Publication of Murid Islamic Community in America, Inc.,*(2011): 23.
[18] Stoller, 18.

them practical trading skills.[19] The apprentice will be assisted until he or she is able to work independently, but may consult their mentor for continual support. Informal contractual relationships may develop between the experienced trader and the inexperienced trader whereby the inexperienced trader must prove himself by presenting two-thirds of his profits to the more experienced trader and if he succeeds with his first loan, the master trader will reward him with another loan.[20] The sharing of professional knowledge, trading goods, loans, and business contribute to the Murid Brotherhood's success in building a widely sustainable and profitable community.

Legal Aid

Newly arrived immigrants are often unaware of the judicial system of their host country and the Murid coalition provides extensive support for Murid immigrants through legal representation and assistance in matters with the state or foreign governments and embassies. In one example, a group of young, Murid immigrant men came close to eviction from their apartment in New York because of nightly singing and Islamic chanting.[21] In response, the Murid organization leaders threatened to sue the landlord, using connections with a local magistrate that often assists with Murid court proceedings.[22] Fellow Murids also negotiate with embassies to acquire increasingly uncommon visas to the United States and help them navigate the tedious process to gain U.S. citizenship.[23] Legal assistance becomes especially important to protect the rights of Murid vendors as some sources claim that 90 percent of all arrested street merchants are

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[19] Ebin, (2011), 25.
[20] Stoller, 41.
[21] Ebin, (2011), 25.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid, 26.

Murid in New York.[24] Because most West African traders living in New York City are undocumented immigrants, they largely rely on connections within the Brotherhood for legal assistance to avoid imprisonment or deportation.

Health and Education Services

The Murid community also provides members with connections to health services, which becomes critical as West African immigrants may be afraid or uncomfortable visiting public hospitals where communication and fear of deportation may deter them from receiving treatment. Also, because the Muslim religious leaders are also seen as Islamic healers, they may directly treat immigrants' physical ailments with traditional herbs and medicines and provide counseling for social and psychological support.[25] The Senegalese Association of America, a Murid civic organization, provides access to resources for medical services and family planning and also offers "a regular radio program in Wolof, Pulaar, and French; classes in English and computer training; and after-school programs."[26] The Brotherhood also partners with local organizations to offer educational tools such as language training and college preparation for its members as well as providing resources from its own Murid library and school in Harlem.[27]

Housing

Many newly arriving immigrants must settle for crime-ridden neighborhoods, including the traffic of gang members, drug dealers and hustlers, with high priced, substandard living arrangements.[28] Police brutality also contributes to the danger for

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[24] Babou, 159.
[25] Stoller, 22.
[26] Ebin, 8.
[27] Babou, 154.
[28] Stoller, 22.

West African immigrants who hear stories like the tragic killing of Amadou Diallo, a 22-year old West-African-born immigrant who was shot, unarmed, 19 times by four policemen outside of his apartment in Harlem in 1999.[29] Many West African immigrants must tolerate appalling living conditions including "leaks, urine, feces, roaches, trash and garbage" in housing complexes. [30] However, African immigrants survive these deplorable living environments through one key element: fellowship. In the mid-1980's Murid men lived collectively, sometimes sleeping two to a bed and four to one room.[31] The establishment of Little Senegal also created insulation from the external dangers. Highlighting the changes within Harlem neighborhoods with the residence of African immigrants and development of Little Senegal, a Senegalese teacher recounted that in the 1980's, "It was so dangerous in those days to be walking down the street in a *boubou*. Now everyone is."[32] Given the increasing numbers of Senegalese migrants in the U.S., which can be attributed to the success in the Murid Brotherhood's international trade networks, the expansion of the enclave has contributed to safer Harlem neighborhoods and further incentive for these immigrants to develop a more permanent status in the U.S.

Social Capital

Migration inevitably tears families apart. Because West African migration movements are predominately male, women and children are left in the homeland and often go several years without seeing each other. While some men stay faithful to their wives in West Africa, many others seek companionship from local women, and this

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[29]Michael Cooper, "Officers in Bronx Fire 41 Shots, And an Unarmed Man Is Killed," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/05/nyregion/officers-in-bronx-fire-41-shots-and-an-unarmed-man-is-killed.html (accessed November 12, 2011).
[30] Stoller, 154.
[31] Babou, 159.
[32] Ebin, 4.

fragmentation leads to instability in marriages.[33] Therefore, the communal living arrangements and sense of kinship are greatly beneficial for Murid immigrants in gaining social capital. The common nationality, ethnicity and religious affiliation connect these immigrants to a network of social support so strong that even non-Murids African immigrants partake in the communal settings.[34] This community allows Murid immigrants access to scarce resources and information and the *dahira* provides a social atmosphere for Murids to meet their spouses and find quality childcare. Failure to uphold moral principles among Murids is not only a personal offense but also a betrayal of the community, which ensures the regeneration of social capital. Moreover, the ability to help a fellow Murid given one's personal success is seen as a source of pride and prestige.

A Transnational Community in Harlem

With the establishment of Little Senegal in Harlem, the Murid Brotherhood has demonstrated its economic prowess. The religious brotherhood has asserted itself as a dynamic institution that can evolve to meet the needs of its members and in urban cities like New York and this social cohesion is critical for upward mobility. The expansion of the Brotherhood is still a newer phenomenon for the Harlem community and as the above goals outline, the Murids plan to continue to have a lasting impact. Victoria Ebin describes how the Murids of Senegal are becoming increasingly entrenched in the Harlem community as the "haven" of Little Senegal develops:

They have food and other items that remind them of home, they can pray as they do in Senegal, maintain contact with family and political structures in Senegal, and participate in religious and social events sponsored by the Senegalese community. As African

[33] Stoller, 22.
[34] Mamadou. Interviewed by Angie Tyler. Personal interview. Seattle, WA, August 12, 2011.

families continue to move in, activities and informal structures have grown up to meet their specific needs. As one Senegalese businessman said, "The children who grow up here speak Wolof and know about our country." In a poignant comment, he added, "They want to go back to Senegal even if they have never been there."[35]

When asked how the Murids plan to become a part of the Harlem community, a local religious leader highlighted three main goals: (1) To earn the respect of Harlem locals by opening legitimate businesses and demonstrating their economic empowerment, (2) To provide a model of unity and solidarity that the Harlem community lacks and share fellowship with others, and (3) To encourage intermarriage, especially among continental Africans and Black Americans.[36]

The Harlem enclave, supported by the strength of the Murid Brotherhood, upholds the model of segmented assimilation for immigrants, ultimately attributed to their success and increasingly permanent presence in the U.S.

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[35] Ebin, 9.
[36] Abdullah, 199.

Chapter 4 –
Advantages of "Assimilation"

Greater trends towards "Americanization" are not always thoroughly embraced by immigrant newcomers, especially among economic migrants like the Murids, who travel to the host country to support large networks back home. Therefore, Murid immigrants arriving to the U.S. often have no intention of marrying an American, starting a family, or contributing to American community life, but wish to gain capital and return home with dignity to work and raise a family.[1] One female immigrant attending a mosque in Harlem bluntly describes this focused intent:

> Most of us did not come here because we love America. We came here for economic reasons. Poverty is rampant back home. We have leaders who don't know anything about good governance. You see so many people here, and the life they had back home is so much better than the life they're living here. But they don't have the choices. Because of economic reasons, they have to be here and support their family back home. We love America. But we would come to visit and go back. It's not about coming here.[2]

For some immigrant groups, American culture may even be perceived as a threat to the traditional practices. Among religious communities it may be considered "cultural treason" or an "unforgivable sin" to develop and openly express loyalties to America.[3] Murid leaders may be wary of American individualism that for some equates to "amoral

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[1] Paul Stoller, *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23.
[2] Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111.
[2] Ibid, 45.
[3] Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 138.

egoism and a sign of family and societal breakdown."[4] In addition, Murids' sociocultural stigmatization as African, Muslim and foreign-born may also limit their integrative abilities.[5] As this chapter will demonstrate, group solidarity can be both *constructive* in its abilities to provide a common sense of identity and uphold societal structures and *destructive*, in its isolation from mainstream society and authoritative demands or restrictions. While the last chapter provided discussion on the strength and solidarity of the Murid Brotherhood as a positive resource for immigrants, this chapter will explore the ways in which the group incorporates itself into American culture. It will also evaluate whether this process of assimilation is either *intentional* and encouraged by the Murid institution or *unintentional* and in some cases, unwanted or restricted by the Murid leaders.

The Waning Power of Religious Leaders

In order to allow for assimilation, the Murid community leaders must sacrifice some of their power; this becomes problematic, however, for religious leaders who traditionally exercise great authority over their disciples. In the broader spectrum of Islam, compliance to Islamic rule allows religious leaders to exercise their duty to "impose their will on society at large" and accept Islam in all spheres of society.[6] The *marabouts*, or leaders, of the Murid Brotherhood are highly authoritative and replicate ancient traditions of submission to Wolof kings.[7] The subordinate relationship between the *talibe*, or student, and the *marabout* is not necessarily characterized by "blind

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[4] Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2003): 61.
[5] Linda Beck, "West African Muslims in America," in *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 183.
[6] Jackson, 141.
[7] D.B. Cruise O'Brien, *Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 12.

devotion," but as an expression of deep respect for this important religious figure.[8] Moreover, the *marabouts* in America occupy an even more involved relationship with their disciples, as they have often influenced to the migration decision and livelihood of their followers travelling abroad. Also, many Murid immigrants are arriving unskilled and uneducated and are therefore reliant on the religious community for some assistance. The *marabout* also controls the disciples' financial resources and in many cases the immigrant in America is expected to contribute a portion of his wealth to the religious community in addition to sending money to his family back home and sustaining himself. These additional elements compel Murid immigrants to remain loyal to his or her religious leader.[9] The Murid immigrant's obligation to the religious community directly collides with American individualism. These restrictions on the Murid disciples place them under a type of servitude to their *marabout* and unless they become financially independent they may be restricted from the ability to choose their own destiny to achieve higher education or pursue various career goals. However, Murids followers in America are impacted by these conflicting American values, as indicated by the "continuing softening" of relations with their *marabout.*[10] Also, as Murid youth and second-generation immigrants gain more knowledge and information they are less likely

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[8] Linda Beck, "An American's View of Muridism and the Murids of New York," *Alazhar Touba* (2009) http://www.alazhartouba.com/index.php/en/al-academia/85-professor-linda-beck-an-americans-view-of-muridism-and-the-murids-of-new-york- (accessed November 14, 2011)

[9] Joris Schapendonk and David van Moppes, "Migration and Information: Images of Europe, migration encouraging factoris and en route information sharing," *Working Papers Migration and Development Series, Report 16. (2007)* http://socgeo.ruhosting.nl/html/files/migration/migration16.pdf (accessed November 14, 2011)

[10] Cheikh Anta Babou, "Brotherhood Solidarity, Education and Migration: The Role of the *Dahiras* among the Murid Muslim Community of New York." *African Affairs* (2002): 153.

to maintain such obedience to religious leaders or even to elders who may have less cultural capital.[11]

The Shift in Language Preferences

Language is a strong indicator of incorporation into the host society. For many immigrants acquiring English leads to greater social and economic success in the host country. The Murid community, however, has constructed mosques in "Little Senegal" where religious leaders communicate in French or African languages.[12] Though this enables them to enjoy communication with co-ethnic and co-religion members, it creates an issue of dependency on this community and prevents newly arrived immigrants from learning the English language and leaving the ethnic enclave. Senegalese immigrants from a francophone state, often speak French and Wolof, among other African languages. Therefore, the inability to community keeps the enclave segregated from the English-speaking mainstream as well as other immigrant communities. Those who are able to learn English, then, are able to experience greater economic and educational opportunities.

The Separation of Church and State

America's commitment to the separation of church and state poses a challenge for American Muslims, among other religious groups, who subscribe to religious teachings that are meant to pervade the individual's daily life. According to Islamic rule, Islam functions as both a religion and a political ideology.[13] Therefore, because America is a non-Muslim country and an "emphatically secular, pluralistic democracy," Muslims are

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[11] Abdullah, 229.
[12] Leonard, 55.
[13] Jackson, 132.

discouraged from participating in public activism such as voting, lobbying, or running for office in America and may feel uneasy about living in a non-Islamic State long-term.[14] However, it is clear that as immigrant Muslims become more established within their communities in America, they do enter political life. By 2000, 700 total Muslim candidates ran for political offices and 153 were elected.[15] Murids have also taken political action to protect the street vendors from robbery and fraud and generally represent Murid interests and values in the political sphere.

Moreover, traditional Islamic leaders are concerned with the impacts of globalization and Americanization in the destruction of Islamic values. However, incorporation into America has encourages the Murid Brotherhood to reduce these rigid guidelines and allow for greater Islamic pluralism and interfaith dialogue. For example, orthodox Muslims may view transactions with non-Muslims as unacceptable. This is because from the Muslim point of view, non-Muslims would not be granted property rights by the divine authority without compliance to Islam.[16] However, as restricting trade from non-Muslim parties is not feasible in America, Murids do not subscribe to this ideal and encourage transactions with non-Muslims, as evident from the ethnographic account by Paul Stoller, *Money Has No Smell*. Although Murid vendors on the streets of New York are selling idolatrous and profane goods to non-Muslims forbidden by the Qur'an, economic and logistical needs override these restrictions.[17] "A local *marabout* explained, "You can do business with anybody; what's important is to earn a profit." Another went

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[14] Ibid, 134.
[15] Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), viii.
[16] Ba-Yunus and Kone, 149.
[17] Stoller, vii.

even further to say, "Money has no smell, and you can, indeed, do business with non-Muslims, with Christians for example."[18]

Intercultural Relations between the Murid Community and African-Americans

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the diversity in America allows for inter-marriage and is uniquely encouraged by Murid religious leaders who seek partnership with the African-American community. Despite a history of complex relations and competition for scarce resources that lead some Black Americans to accuse African immigrants of exploitation, there are developments of cross-cultural connections.[19] The Murid Brotherhood has attracted African-American women into its order, who have converted through marriage with Murid men.[20] This is an interesting observation within an immigrant community that aims to simultaneously create partnerships with the black community while shielding itself from assimilation into the black underclass. Both groups share a common racial identity in America and common ancestry. The trend of Black Americans converting to Islam provides an additional link between the two groups.[21] In addition, the Murids actively encourage the Negritude discourse and often invite Black Nationalist speakers to the Masjid Malcolm Shabazz mosque.[22] In one account of Black American and African relations, one black man living in Harlem explained how a shared devotion to Islam ultimately unifies them despite "cultural problems getting in the way."[23] They are also united by their common experience of

[18] Ibid, 12.
[19] Abdullah, 131.
[20] Leonard, 41.
[21] Abdullah, 43.
[22] Leonard, 58.
[23] Abdullah, 130.

social displacement and adherence to "fictive kin" relationships.[24] Ruptured family units are not uncommon in both communities as African migrants' families are uprooted and dispersed due to migration and African-American households are often run by single mothers. Therefore, blood ties become less important and the need for family binds them together.

The Evolution of Gender Dynamics

In the past two decades the rate of Murid female migration to the United States has been steadily increasing.[25] The waves of women's rights movements in America and progress made towards gender parity inevitably impact gender dynamics within the African, Murid immigrant community, where male primacy is upheld by both religious and cultural norms. Therefore, the incorporation of Murids into American culture has the potential to create positive change for Murid women who are subjected to sexist interpretations of Islam.[26] The practice of polygamy or marriage to several women, for example, is one point of conflict for Murid men coming to America.[27] Muslim men can marry up to four women according to the Qur'an, and many men, particularly men who travel, "believe it is their inalienable right to have sexual relationships with other women."[28] Therefore, the increasing numbers of women mobilizing and travelling with their families who find work are rapidly redefining these previously constricting roles.

For example, female entrepreneurs often sell items such as "dolls, jewelry, and cooked food" and go back and forth between New York and Senegal. Also, following

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[24] Ibid, 229.
[25] Babou, 162.
[26] Abdullah, 229.
[27] Ibid, 202.
[28] Abdullah, 229.

black power movements in America of the 1960s and 1970s, by the 1990s, Senegalese hair salons in Harlem flourished.[29] Hair braiding provided "self-employment and upward mobility to female immigrants" that enabled them to achieve higher status and power within the family structure.[30] Some salons employ dozens of braiders and nearly 70 percent of Senegalese women in the U.S. work in these lucrative businesses.[31] Murid women are also empowered to exercise their rights as citizens. In one account, "one Senegalese woman went to the New York state capital at Albany to request a special certification for African hair braiders so they could legally practice their trade without being required to obtain the usual beauty license, which takes years of study."[32]

There is no doubt that the economic empowerment of women has greatly shifted gender dynamics within the traditional Wolof households, in which women hold subordinate positions to men. In this customary family structure it is a man's duty to provide for his family and a woman is not expected to contribute financially; her responsibility is to maintain the household. In America, these roles are now reversed in some cases "many husbands are employed by their wives; they help manage the hair salon, run errands, baby-sit the children, and serve as chauffeurs" and women are now the breadwinners, managing the finances of the household.[33] Therefore, given their elevated status, women now make the final decisions in issues like reproductive choices and future investments. This extreme power reversal has some adverse affects on the family stability

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[29] Cheikh Anta Babou, "Migration and Cultural Change: Money, 'Caste,' Gender, and Social Status among Senegalese Female Hair Braiders in the United States," (*Africa Today* 55, 2), 5.
[30] Babou, 9.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ebin, 9.
[33] Ibid, 12.

as men feel emasculated and uncomfortable with these changes, which often leads to divorce.

The *dahiras* are mixed gendered though most women are a part of all-female groups. Leadership within the Brotherhood primarily puts men at the forefront, though female saints are also recognized. Mame Diarra Bousso, Amadou Bamba's mother is the most important among these figures: "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 business."[34] According to Coulon Christian, the "Islam of the brotherhoods and the *marabouts* has become primarily the religion of women."[35] Women migrants in New York within the Murid brotherhood can challenge gender norms of male dominance and are becoming increasingly visible in the public sphere, using their economic and religious leverage to support *marabouts* who support their interests in return. Women's economic empowerment leads to social change within the family structure and within the "brotherhood" which may result in more severe changes in the future.

As a result of pressures of modern, American culture in the lives of Murid men and women, the cohesive community structure is compromised. Assimilation into America leads, in some cases, to less power for religious leaders, more individual enterprises and greater female empowerment. The Murid Brotherhood as a dynamic institution must adapt to the needs of Murid members which calls for revision of outdated practices inconsistent or infeasible with life in America. Some studies show that immigrants who better immerse themselves in the host community and are less reliant on

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[34] Abdullah, 119.
[35] Ibid, 120.

their coethnics can capitalize on a more expansive range of economic opportunities.[36] As they acquire greater cultural knowledge, learn English and develop other skills, they can become more competitive in the local labor markets. As Senegalese immigrants are entering the U.S. in greater numbers, the ethnic enclave cannot provide lucrative jobs for each individual within the community and immigrants must necessarily look outside the enclave. The Murid Brotherhood will likely continue to serve as a base and foundation for orientation into America for immigrant newcomers, but assimilation into American culture will ultimately lead immigrants to demand freedom from their servitude and expression of individuality, whether marrying, working or building a life outside the enclave. The next chapter will discuss newer developments in the Murid Brotherhood like widespread anti-Muslim sentiment post 9/11 and the impact of the economic downturn on the Brotherhood's financial capacities.

[36] Max J. Pfeffer and Pilar A. Parra, "Strong Ties, Weak Ties, and Human Capital: Latino Immigrant Employment Outside the Enclave," *Rural Sociology* 74 (2), 2009, 241.

Chapter 5 –
Hope in Harlem: The Murids of Senegal Today

Thousands of African migrants arrive to the U.S. filled with hope of attaining a better life for themselves and their families. However, many immigrants have had to quickly adjust their plans depending on the current social, political and economic climates. This chapter will examine the impacts of the economic crisis of 2008/2009, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the current immigration debates on the Little Senegal ethnic enclave and Murid Brotherhood organization as well as the group's coping mechanisms to overcome these difficulties.

Economic Recession

Poor economic conditions greatly contribute to conflict within the Harlem neighborhoods and specifically between Africans and Black Americans.[1] In the wake of the economic recession of 2008/2009, the Harlem communities and particularly small businesses and homeowners incurred huge losses from the real estate bubble. Many African business owners were forced to close and forfeit Harlem's more favorable property and relocate their enterprises elsewhere. The economic difficulties have led some to question whether Little Senegal will continue to sustain itself.[2] Moreover, in recent years, gentrification in Harlem has become a serious issue, also contributing to rising rents. Columbia University, looking to expand its campus, has increased initiatives

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[1] Linda Beck, "West African Muslims in America," in *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 200.
[2] Victoria Ebin, "'Little Senegal' vs. The New Harlem Renaissance: Senegalese Immigrants and the Gentrification of Harlem," *African Art,* 11.

to take over space in Harlem neighborhoods, threatening the availability of affordable housing for the Murid community and other low income residents in the area. For example, the store *Touba Khassayites* which provided a variety of Muslim resources and Murid worship materials and served as a social atmosphere for Murid disciples to gather informally was forced to close in recent years due to insubstantial sales and higher rents.[1] Recently, a dollar store manager in Little Senegal reported that his rent increased from $600 to $1400 in the 1990s to $4000/month in 2009, and continues to rise.[2]

After the global financial crisis led to higher unemployment, lower profits and higher costs for local businesses, West African immigrants took action by forming a business owners' association to protect their community.[3] Members of the association proposed a variety of efforts such as partnering with local government officials to clean the city streets, hiring a lawyer to secure construction of new African-owned buildings, and naming the street after the Little Senegal community to assert its permanence. The business association led to discussion on how to attract the wider local community, signaling a path towards greater incorporation into America by diversifying the products sold by their businesses and mimicking the outlay of some American-style boutiques. One African store owner contemplated hiring women for the first time.[4] This shows that although the economic crisis has greatly threatened the economic power of the Murid community and the Little Senegal enclave, it has spurred great reflection for innovative solutions.

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[1] Ebin, 7.
[2] Ibid, 10.
[3] Ibid, 12.
[4] Ibid, 14.

It has also driven some immigrants to look outside the enclave for ideas. For example, a Senegalese accountant relocated from the enclave in Harlem to Brooklyn because he "wanted to be where the action is" and assist Senegalese in improving their businesses.[5] He has uncovered the constraints of kin-based business structures that only rely on compatriots or coreligionists and encourages Senegalese to "branch out geographically and to hire staff."[6] Although he is met with some resistance, he has acted as a key figure in propelling this insulated community forward to attain a broader base of economic opportunity and ultimately, incorporation into American society and upward mobility.

Post 9/11 Anti-Muslim Sentiment in America

Before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2011, many Muslim communities were generally accepted and integrated into American society. As the fastest growing religion in the United States, they practiced their religion in mosques across the nation, participated in Islamic organizations and began to enter the political presence in larger numbers.[7] Then, in the tragic aftermath of the lethal attacks, Muslim life in America became heavily scrutinized by non-Muslims. All Muslims suddenly became suspected as potential terrorists and many Muslims lived in fear of aggressive forms of harassment. African Muslim immigrants, already subjected to "criminal violence, racial profiling, or police brutality" because of their racial makeup and immigrant status, were even more disadvantaged by the rise in hostile attitudes and public condemnation for their religious

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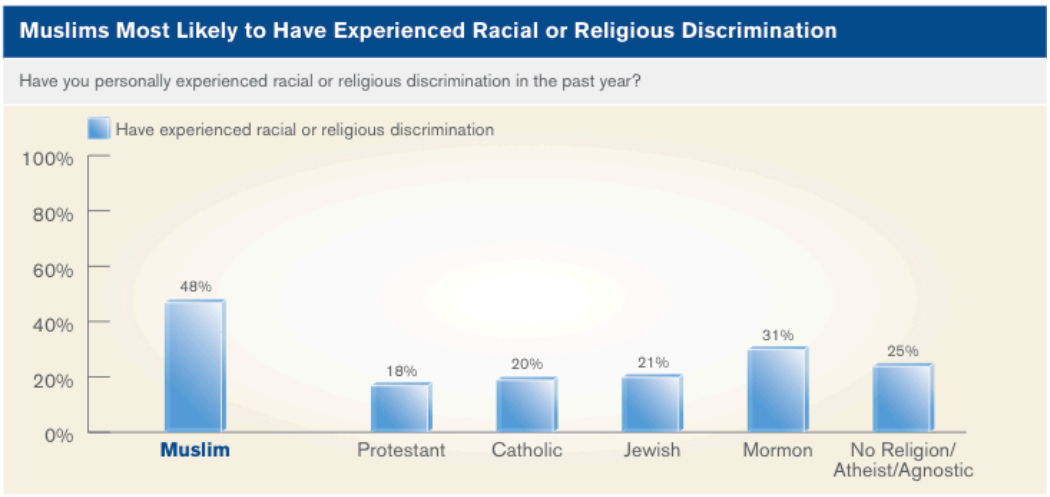
[5] Ebin, 14.
[6] Ibid, 15.
[7] Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), ix.

practices.[8] A decade after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 though the discriminatory attitudes towards Muslims have declined they still persist. According to a 2010 Gallup report, as shown in figure 1, "almost one-half of Muslim Americans report experiencing racial or religious discrimination in the past year, significantly more than other religious communities."[9] The rate of discrimination depends on other factors like the demographics of the community (non-Muslim or Muslim) and the targeted individuals appearance and religious expression (prayer beads, traditional clothing, etc.).

Figure 1.



Surveys conducted via Muslim American Polls from February 10-March 11, 2010, and October 1-21, 2010.

Africans, as part of the black community in the U.S. are disproportionately targets of racial discrimination compared with other immigrant groups. After 9/11, African Muslims in America confront the added anti-Islamicism and work to re-educate the host community by challenging misrepresentations of Islam. Because Murid, West African immigrants do not portray the typical Arab "Muslim" image, they can avoid some anti-

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[8] Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 234.

[9] "Muslim Americans: Faith, Freedom, and the Future: Examining U.S. Muslims' Political, Social, and Spiritual Engagement 10 Years After Sept. 11," *Gallup*, (2011) http://www.gallup.com/se/148805/Muslim-Americans-Faith-Freedom-Future.aspx (accessed, November 18, 2011)

Muslim directed harassment by non-Muslims. However, the Murid community is still affected by the widespread Muslim backlash. In Zain Abdullah's account on the African Muslims in Harlem, one woman Bintou describes her "double paranoia": while she fears to read the Qur'an in public or show any public display of her religion in America, she also fears the rejection as a U.S. citizen when travelling to a Muslim country abroad.[10] Other black Muslims with identifiably Muslim names are effectively targeted by immigration agencies for their questionable status. For example, one man with a traditionally Muslim name has not been able to obtain citizenship despite the fact that he has spent over a decade legally employed in the U.S. and though his family members who do not have "Muslim" names have acquired U.S. passports.[11]

Given the effects of post-9/11 anti-Muslim attitudes, there is an incentive for African Muslims to distance themselves from the image of "radical" Muslims.[12] However, they may not be able to escape this association. Even if the Murids do not currently experience widespread anti-Muslim discrimination, there is also the fear that with the spreading of terrorist groups and terrorist activities further into Sub-Saharan Africa, Africans may soon be "put in the same package" as Arab and South Asian Muslims.[13] The Murid community has responded by creating partnerships with local officials and government agencies to combat terrorism and promote education of Islamic values of peace and tolerance. In fact, increased prejudice towards Arab Muslims in America has led to greater unity within the diverse Muslim community in New York, who are committed to helping their fellow adherents. A Murid marabout in Harlem

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[10] Abdullah, 234.
[11] Beck, 191.
[12] Ibid, 193.
[13] Ibid, 192.

explained how their community has been invited to attend the Islamic Cultural Center, the most prominent mosque in New York City and diverse Muslim communities have "sat down and talked about their differences but also their need to come together or always be a victim of this society."[14]

Current Immigration Policy and Attitudes

The United States is the most difficult country in the world to arrive unauthorized.[15] Current anti-immigrant attitudes are on the rise, and federal funds allocated for immigration issues are primarily directed towards the new law enforcement agency, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) bureau. Vigilant action towards undocumented migrants has reached new heights, as the rate of deportation has risen substantially over the past year, higher than ever before.[16] Representative Luiz Gutierrez (D,Ill) recently stated, "We are deporting hundreds of thousands of people who came to the country to work, raise families, contribute to the economy, and want nothing more than to be allowed to live and work here legally."[17] The tense political climate surrounding current immigration laws have sparked a plea for comprehensive immigration reform, yet to the demise of the anxious undocumented immigrants restricted from basic civil rights, little concrete action has been taken.

Many African immigrants are living in the United States without proper documentation. Fear of deportation remains a very real fear for many immigrants of different groups especially as tensions in America remain strained and even legal

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[14] Beck, 195.
[15] Courtland Palmer, "Reluctant Acceptance, the Current State of American Immigration," (lecture, Claremont McKenna College, November 16, 2011).
[16] Jordy Yager, "Obama's ICE Reports Record Number of Deportations of Illegal Immigrants," *The Hill*, October 18, 2011, http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/188241-ice-announces-record-breaking-deportations (accessed November 18, 2011)
[17] Ibid.

immigrants live in fear of arrest. As explained by one Senegalese immigrant, "it's not if you're legal, it's *how* you became legal."[18] Within the Harlem community, there have also been anti-immigrant sentiments expressed from the Black American community. At one African-American mosque, the religious leader preached that African immigrants should "return home" and stop exploiting the neighborhood's resources.[19]

These layers of identity and the impact of recent events on the incorporation of Murid immigrants into the broader American society paint a picture of distress and hope. The distress comes from the various difficulties Murid immigrants face as black, Muslim, foreign-born immigrants in America that projects possible downward mobility. The added impact of economic recession increases tensions against immigrants and incenses local conflicts, threatening the existence of the African-owned businesses and boutiques in Little Senegal. However, these varying degrees of distress also provide greater opportunity and hope for the progress of local partnerships and community development. As a portion of Black America, affected by racial inequalities, Murids can form stronger alliances with the African-Americans to the benefit of both groups. Similarly, post-9/11 anti-Muslim attitudes in America have brought diverse Muslim groups together to form a broader base of understanding and support. All of these elements of composing the Murid identity reassert the function of the Murid Brotherhood as a dynamic institution that provides a critical network of support for its followers who might otherwise be unable to cope with these various constraints and difficulties.

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[18] Abdullah, 163.
[19] Beck, 200.

Conclusion –
Confronting "Warring Ideals" in a Transitional Society

One ever feels his two-ness, — An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts…two warring ideals in one dark body…

— W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folks (1903)

Upon magnification, the immigrant identity in America is multidimensional, characterized by a number of factors including race, ethnicity, nationality, language, class, gender and religious affiliation. As discussed in the last chapter, recent events have created greater visibility and tensions within the Murid community as foreign born, African Muslims competing for scarce economic resources. Therefore, the Murid transnational community in Harlem is threatened by various collisions or "warring ideals" as highlighted in the above quote by W.E.B. Du Bois, including the pressures of competing factors of globalism and localism, and the Murid leaders consciously favor the segmented process which allows their community to maintain cohesion and gain capital without fully sacrificing their cultural identity. As this paper demonstrates, the segmented assimilation theory best represents the Murid Brotherhood process of incorporation into American society and this course has had great benefits for the Murid disciples in Harlem. Although this theory projects their eventual full assimilation, which will lead to greater economic success, it should be noted that complete assimilation is not the ultimate intent of the Murids. This is because the Murid immigrants are not only driven by economic incentives but by a divine mission to spread the religious practice of Amadou

Bamba and Murid teachings. And even if the children of these immigrants do not hold the same sense of total devotion to their religious leaders, with the strength and expansion of Little Senegal and the success of the Murid Brotherhood in maintaining traditional practices, the children of immigrants are taught the importance of their embodiment of Bamba's vision.[1]

Therefore, even as higher rates of Murids acquire citizenship, learn English, gain cultural skills, and wish to take full advantage of the economic opportunity to its fullest, most will integrate, but not at the price of abandoning their connection to coethnics and coreligionists. The Murid Brotherhood keeps these immigrants rooted in times of stress, marginalization and displacement as foreign-born, Black Muslims in America. Though these immigrants possess a deep respect for the U.S. and have more recently begun to create an environment to raise their families in the enclave, as long as America is a place where blacks are marginalized and Muslims are attacked, the Brotherhood will continue to provide an important social safety net.[2] For this reason, the ethnic enclave and sense of community provided by the *dahrias* of the Murid Brotherhood grant a critical sense of belonging that is cherished among African immigrants. With a coalition of strength and solidarity, both male and female immigrants can form a shield against racial discrimination or nativist attitudes meant to disclude them from the mainstream society.

The Murid Brotherhood has expanded and increased the use of different modes of unity and communication to fulfill the needs of their evolving community. The Murid organization, *L'Association des Sénégalais d'Amerique* (the Senegalese Association of

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[1] Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 140.
[2] Ibid, 117.

America) and the Murid Islamic Community of America (MICA) are two formal coalitions for Murid immigrants that bridge transnational identities from Senegal to the United States.[3] With advances in technology and communication devices, immigrants are better able to maintain ties to the homeland. For example, the Senegalese Association of America now schedules afternoon skype conference calls to connect Senegalese immigrants not only with family and friends but with government officials back in Senegal.[4] This critical process of *glocalism* employs the local and global dimensions of the Islamic network at once.[5]

As previously discussed, however, there are many strains on social capital that threaten these critical connections. Most Murid immigrants are male and these migration trends are destroying family relationships, leaving the women and children back in the maternal country and creating great tension between family members. Even when families are united in the United States they do not necessarily remain intact. "According to some estimates, one of every two marriages among immigrants in the United States dissolves within five years –which is a very high divorce rate by the standards of the Senegalese household."[6] In addition, the economic empowerment of women and increasing numbers of single or divorced Murid women is creating a change in the Murid society in Harlem. However, instead of deserting the Murid Brotherhood, these women

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[3] Abdullah, 239.
[4] Victoria Ebin, "'Little Senegal' vs. The New Harlem Renaissance: Senegalese Immigrants and the Gentrification of Harlem," *African Art,* 8.
[5] Abdullah, 116.
[6] Cheikh Anta Babou, "Brotherhood Solidarity, Education and Migration: The Role of the *Dahiras* among the Murid Muslim Community of New York." *African Affairs* (2002): 161.

are changing the gender norms from within by asserting the importance of female saints and reinterpreting Islam through a woman's prospective.[7]

With increasing global polarization driving economic migrants from low-income countries to advanced economies, the African exodus will continue to flood the gates of America. These trends suggest that the arrival of economic migrants will increase cultural expression through the expansion of existing transnational communities and the formation of new ones in the U.S. Given the multitude of resources provided by these ethnic enclaves or transnational community networks, we should expect to observe greater trends of the "segmented assimilation" model which allow immigrants access to economic mobility, cushioned by a transitional cocoon of supportive resources from the coethnic community. As demonstrated by the current status of the Murid Brotherhood, however, over time, this figurative cocoon may become too restrictive and threatened by second and third generation immigrants who may see the traditional practices as outdated or irrelevant for their lives in America. I predict that despite these challenges, second generation immigrants will remain connected with the Murid community and find innovative ways to change it from within to create more consistencies with their lives in the U.S. As long as the need for a supportive base exists for this group that cannot be attained elsewhere and the current leaders continue to find ways to reassert the importance of the Murid Brotherhood in the lives of the Senegalese immigrants, it will postpone full assimilation into American society and remain the central guide towards economic opportunity and social support.

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[7] Babou, 162.

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