

**“LITTLE SENEGAL” VS. THE NEW HARLEM RENAISSANCE:
SENEGALESE IMMIGRANTS AND THE GENTRIFICATION OF HARLEM¹**

The bustling community known as “Little Senegal” at West 116th St. in Harlem has been a center for West Africans in New York since the 1990s.² With its western boundary at the “African mosque” (the Masjid Aqsa) on Frederick Douglass Boulevard and going eastward toward Fifth Avenue just beyond the open-air African market, it is a unique stretch of Harlem that has become a focal point for West African immigrants from former French colonies. Men and women from Senegal, often dressed in colorful *boubous* and pulling their children along with them, call out greetings to friends, shop and do errands here, all to the rhythms booming through loudspeakers of the beloved Senegalese singer, Youssou N’Dour, or the sacred poems (*xassaid*s) of Cheikh Amadu Bamba, the founder of a popular Senegalese Sufi *tariqa* known as the Murids that was founded in the early 20th century to which many of the Senegalese immigrants in this neighborhood belong.³

Little Senegal is home to other West Africans as well, but the Senegalese and especially the followers of Cheikh Amadu Bamba dominate, at least on a visual level. Many of the stores between Frederick Douglass Boulevard and Lenox Avenue are named for Cheikh Amadu Bamba, his descendants, or for the sacred town, Touba, the Murid center in Senegal. These visual cues are a vivid reminder that the first Senegalese who moved into the neighborhood in the mid-1980s were Murid.

¹ This is a revised version of a paper that appeared in French in *Revue Asylon*, no. 3, March 2008 in an issue on migration and Senegal.

² The neighborhood is celebrated in the film, “*Little Senegal*” by Rachid Bouchareb about the journey of a Senegalese man who comes to New York in search of his relatives. Though the Senegalese immigrants are the topic of this paper and were the first residents in the neighborhood, Little Senegal also includes immigrants from Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, and Niger.

³ The Murid *tariqa* was founded by a Senegalese saint, Cheikh Amadu Bamba (1853-1927), in the peanut-basin of Senegal in the early 20th century. Most of the early followers were Wolof peoples whose social organization had been disrupted by the French colonization and internal struggles for power. The brotherhood is known for its resilience and there is an extensive bibliography that accompanies its transition from a mainly rural, peanut-producing organization to an urban setting as its members developed trade networks, initially in Senegal and neighboring countries, and then on an international scale. By the 1990s, Murid commercants in Sandaga, Dakar’s central market, had a stronghold on several trade sectors. Though France was their first major site of international organization, they later switched their attention to the US, developing communities initially in New York and then fanning out across to major cities in the US. For an extensive and up-to-date Murid bibliography, see Babou 2007.

Senegalese Migrants in New York

Murids began coming to New York in the early 1980s for a range of reasons; the initial impetus was the 1970s drought that hit the Sahel and turned much of the Murid area, in what was formerly known as the peanut basin, into a wasteland. Many of the agricultural Murids then turned to trade, eventually expanding to international commerce, and developing international trade circuits connecting Senegal to Europe, North America, and Asia. In the mid-1980s, the US and especially New York became a target for an ever-growing number of Murid immigrants in search of a livelihood.

For the majority of these early Senegalese immigrants who came to New York in the mid-1980s, and who were mostly Murid, street vending became the niche occupation. They sold sunglasses, umbrellas and other small items on the streets of Manhattan that they bought from wholesalers in Chinatown and Little Korea as the neighborhood around 30th St. and Broadway was then known.⁴ While this occupation opened a way for Murids to survive in New York, it was an arduous life. Working long hours in inclement weather, frequently losing all their merchandise to the police or thieves, their lives in New York were physically and emotionally exhausting. One Murid man who was teased by his friends about breaking into tears after a policeman confiscated his merchandise, replied, "Who has not cried on the streets of New York?"⁵

The actual number of Senegalese immigrants who came during this period is not known because a significant proportion of them were not legal. One estimate is that the number of Senegalese in the US tripled between 1978 and 1981, bringing the total to about 3000, but only about 10 percent of these had the right to work (Diouf 1997). After 1981, the numbers increased rapidly but precise figures are unknown.⁶

⁴ According to Murid lore at that time, when street vending was rare in New York, one of the first Murids in the city learned how to be a vendor from a Moroccan who sold sunglasses on the streets.

⁵ Author's notes from a scene at the foot of the Empire State building in 1994.

⁶ Figures for African-born immigrants in the US reflect the same trend; in 2005, there about 925,000 with 41 percent of them arriving between 2000 and 2005 (Kent 2007:4).

Over time, the profile of Senegalese immigrants diversified. It was no longer mainly Murid men, there were Murid women, who came to join their husbands or on their own, and also large numbers of Senegalese who were not Murids. These later arrivals tended to have more advanced education than those who preceded them and many were coming to the US with grants or personal funds to study.⁷

During the 1980s and 1990s, most Senegalese did not question that their time in New York was temporary; eventually they assumed they would move on or return to Senegal. They generally said they planned to stay only long enough to save money to build a house back in Senegal and start up a business there, but more than 20 years later, many of these same individuals are still in New York and their children have grown up on the streets of Harlem.

Murid Studies

Studies of Murid migration to the US and Europe have focused on the transnational aspects of the brotherhood's organization and the fluidity of Murid traders moving from site to site, juggling contexts, languages, and communities as they negotiate their place in various host countries. These studies emphasized the ability of Murids to create webs of connection between dispersed sites of migration and their sacred city of Touba in Senegal, and focused on specific aspects of their social organization that helped create the strong internal cohesion of the Murid community, despite the itinerant nature of their lives (Diouf 2000; Ebin 1992; Salem 1981).

Later studies of Senegalese migration to Italy and New York continued to note the on-going and strong ties the migrants maintained with Senegal but also described the ways in which they were creating "distinct niches" (Perry 1997: 229) and staking a claim for

⁷ Nearly 50 percent of the Africans in the US have earned either a BA or an advanced degree, well in advance of the 23 percent of Americans with an equivalent education (<http://www.inmotionaame.org>). Though figures on education levels of Senegalese-born in the US are not available, African migrants are the most educated group in the US. Among the Senegalese in New York today, a rapidly-growing number with advanced degrees can be seen in all professions. This distinction among first and second waves of Senegalese immigrants also applies to the Murids. The younger, more recent arrivals also tend to have more education and are well-represented across the professions, with large numbers in new information technology.)

public space (Salzbrunn 2004). In the case of the Murids, from the very first days of their arrival in New York, they established weekly prayer meetings (*da'ira*) in honor of their cheikhs in apartments around New York City and a great-grandson of Cheikh Amadu Bamba created a Murid center in Brooklyn. The Murid community later purchased, under the direction of a son of Cheikh Amadu Bamba, a large house north of 116th St. that they used as their main meeting place and where important cheikhs would stay when visiting New York. They also persuaded the New York City mayor's office to create an annual Cheikh Amadu Bamba day in July.

Over time, mobility has become less important for the Senegalese in New York than creating community and making a place that is safe to raise their children. Though never relinquishing their dream of returning to Senegal to live in the often quite luxurious houses they have built back home their lives are increasingly located in the US. As Riccio pointed out, a transnational way of life is still their ideal but they are caught in a continuing dynamic between Senegal and their host country in a pattern that he identified as "a specific blend of dwelling and moving" (Riccio 2004:930).

Among many Senegalese who live here, there is a sense of having established their identity here. A Senegalese teacher who has been in New York since the early 1980s looked out at the crowded lively scene on 116th St. and reminisced about his early days here. Back in the 1980s when he attended the Murid *da'ira* (meeting place), then deep in Brooklyn, he said, "It was so dangerous in those days to be walking down the street in a *boubou*." Then he pointed outside to 116th St. and said, "Now everyone is."

History of Little Senegal

When West Africans immigrants, led by Senegalese Murids, began to move into Harlem in the 1980s, the area was going through a particularly bad time with drugs and violence. Census results from that time show that, unlike the rest of Manhattan, living standards in central Harlem were dropping sharply (Shaffer and Smith 1986: 353). For some of the newly arrived Murids, however, it was an attractive alternative to living in the outer boroughs. The Manhattan location was easily accessible to the most profitable street vending locations, rents were low, and there were government-assistance programs that

provided rent-controlled apartments (Beck 2006: 20). The subsequent development of the African Market on 125th St. was another pull to the neighborhood.⁸

Senegalese and other West African families and single men and women, moved into over-crowded apartments in run-down buildings and surrounded by family and friends, they created “vertical villages” (Ndiaye and Ndiaye 2006). As their numbers grew, the West Africans took credit for making the neighborhood safe, a claim that was reinforced by the police and local politicians.

Snapshot of Little Senegal

In a discussion of immigrant businesses, Aldrich et al (2006:126) described a stage in the establishment of an immigrant community when it becomes large enough to support “co-ethnic” businesses that cater to the needs of the immigrant population. In Little Senegal, clusters of these businesses developed in parallel with the settling of the neighborhood by West Africans. The primary and original aim of these stores and businesses is to meet the needs of African customers, not only from Harlem but also from other boroughs and neighboring states.

Murid trade activities, so central to the shape of Senegalese migration in the 1980s, assisted in the initial establishment of businesses, stores, and restaurants that today bear the names of Murid ‘saints’ or important Murid geographical sites.⁹ There is, for example, the “Serigne Fallou Dollar Store,” (named for an especially beloved son of Cheikh Amadu Bamba) and the “Thies” hardware shop named for a town in Senegal. It should be noted however, that today French-speaking West Africans from other countries run stores and businesses in the neighborhood.¹⁰

⁸ The African Market now located at 116th St. Is a much-reduced place nowadays compared to its heyday back in the early 1990s when it was at 125th St. and was a crowded and chaotic spot that drew vendors and customers from all over the city, even rating as a regular stop on the itinerary of the tourist buses. Stoller (1998:776-788) provides a full account of the market and the eviction of the vendors to their present site by then-mayor Rudy Giuliani. Smith (1999:98) has described these policies as “revanchist” and his appropriation of the city’s public space as a blend of “reaction and revenge.”

⁹ Similar patterns have been observed among South Asians in the UK who worked as street vendors and then opened shops to meet the needs of the large influx of their compatriots in the 1950s (Waldinger, McEvoy et al. 2006: 123).

¹⁰ See for example, Paul Stoller 2002 for an account of Nigerians in Harlem.

The story of one Murid couple who came to New York in the mid-1980s provides an illustration of how Senegalese businesses developed on 116th St. Moctar Ndiaye and his wife came to New York and immediately upon their arrival they began selling watches and other small items on the streets of Manhattan that they bought in New York's Chinatown.¹¹ As one of the earliest Senegalese vendors, they set an example to the scores of young would-be vendors who began arriving after them. Moctar then stepped his business up a notch by becoming a wholesaler to other Senegalese. He invested in large quantities of watches that he sold to other street vendors who could not afford to buy in large quantities and also saved them from the trip to Chinatown. Because rents on 116th St. were cheap then, Moctar rented a space to store these goods and also to rent out to other vendors who stored their goods there over night. After a few years, he turned this space into a shop for the sale of Senegalese cloth and ready-made items as well as a few African art objects. Though the store served a primarily an African clientele, it also sporadically attracted a few American customers who wandered into the neighborhood.

Another early store opened by a Murid immigrant was a butcher's shop selling halal meat. Other grocery stores followed, selling products such as millet, gunpowder tea and spices, along with brand names favored by West Africans, like Maggi sauce and Beghin sugar.¹² Other African-run businesses in the neighborhood also target African customers; a shipping company transports goods between West Africa and New York; "gypsy cab" companies with mostly West African drivers have their offices in the neighborhood, hair braiders, tailors, and the financial advisors fill out tax papers and provide translation services. The beauty supply shops along the street sell an eclectic mix of Senegalese and African-American products with an emphasis on appealing to African tastes and styles.

¹¹ Names have been changed.

¹² In yet another example of Senegalese entrepreneurial spirit, an entire business has developed in Senegal to meet the needs of the Senegalese diaspora; suppliers in Dakar process fruits that the Senegalese have a particular fondness for, such as *madd* and *bouye* (the fruit of the baobab tree), formerly consumed fresh, but now available in powdered form and therefore not subject to US customs restrictions. These stores follow the cycles of the Senegalese fetes, supplying products to meet the needs of Senegalese households at certain times of year. On the history of the African Market, see Stoller 1998, 2002. For a discussion of its place in the representation of Africa for the clients at the market, see Abdullah 2006.

The West African spirit of the neighborhood also fosters the sort of informal initiatives so common in large African markets. For example, there's a young Guinean vendor who sells cheap international phone cards from a tiny kiosk on 116th St. next to a popular Senegalese restaurant. His business strategies include prices that undercut the market (his cards cost 50 cents less than anywhere else on the street), young assistants who are family members, long hours and a central location. Among his helpers is a "runner" who keeps an eye out for the gypsy cab drivers who come to get take-out food from the restaurant but cannot leave the car because of risk of getting a parking ticket. The "runner" picks up their food for them and at the same time sells them a phone card.

The ubiquitous African film and music stores keep the community supplied with representations of home; selling mainly West African music and films, some of them provide purely home-style entertainment, while others that depict religious events and conferences filmed in both Senegal and New York are a powerful link to Senegalese spiritual centers back home.

The thriving "dollar" stores on 116th St. offer a wide range of goods at prices much lower than the chain stores on nearby avenues and therefore manage to attract both African and local customers. The African restaurants in the neighborhood, especially the larger ones, are also attracting an increasingly local clientele.

Muslim, especially Murid, religious items are also available on 116th St. Until a few years ago, the main Murid resource was a store called Touba Khassayites. Overflowing with items used in Muslim worship, tapes, and films of Murid events and music, it was not just a store, it was a center for informal Murid gatherings. In the evenings, visiting Murid cheikhs and local notables would gather to talk and drink "café Touba," the spicy coffee associated with Cheikh Amadu Bamba. Though it was a touchstone for Murids in the neighborhood, its meager sales could not keep up with the neighborhood's rising rents and when it closed a few years ago, its owner moved to the outer boroughs.

Next door to the former site of Touba Khassayites is a new Murid enterprise Sopey Cheikhoul Khadim, Inc., also known as the *Daara* or "school." In contrast to the esoteric clutter of Touba Khassayites, it is an open and inviting space. Through the large front

window, passers-by see a neat arrangement of Murid books and tapes and a staff that appears eager to wait on customers; the young staff who work here also provide services to customers, such as downloading Murid songs on to cell phones and installing images of the sacred town of Touba as screen savers. While the *Daara* sells many of the same items as the older store, the ambience is somewhat more welcoming to outsiders and represents an attempt at an outreach strategy. As an added attraction to interested non-Muslims, they also offer classes in the Koran that are open to anyone, reinforcing the impression of an openness to outsiders.¹³

The Murids have their main meeting place several blocks to the north of 116th St. Purchased with the help of Cheikh Amadu Bamba's last-born son, the house reportedly cost almost half a million dollars and gives the Murids a permanent presence in New York (Babou 2001:30-31).¹⁴

Finally, there is the Senegalese Association of America (ASA) which also has its offices on 116th St. A mediating, pivotal point for immigrants between their lives in New York and Senegal, it develops links with local New York officials and politicians, as the signed photographs of Bill Perkins, Mayor Bloomberg and other notables, attest. The ASA offers the community many services: a regular radio program in Wolof, Pulaar, and French; classes in English and computer training; and after-school programs. The current president said that he has developed links with, among other institutions, local hospitals that allow ASA members to receive medical care and family planning. The ASA also serves occasionally as a focal point for the Senegalese government to contact the New York immigrant community¹⁵ One of their latest activities are Saturday afternoon skype conference calls that allow immigrants from a specific town in Senegal, who are now based in New York, France, Germany, and Italy, to hold discussions with the mayor of their home town.

¹³ Interview with a founding member of Sopey Cheikhoul Khadim, Jan. 5, 2008.

¹⁴ The purchase of the building also reflects practices used by the Murid cheikhs since the beginning of the brotherhood to establish "pioneer" outposts as the Murids expanded to new territories (Ebin and Lake 1992; Salem 1981).

¹⁵ Immigrants from other countries in the neighborhood have also created associations but none has a permanent locale.

Though 116th St. is far from a Paradise—the streets are often dirty and littered, rats run under piles of garbage, and the explosions of violence for which the neighborhood was once known, still occasionally erupt—Little Senegal is, nevertheless, a sort of haven for West Africans in New York. 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 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.”

This overview gives a picture of a Senegalese community in New York City.¹⁶ Despite the hardships of living in New York, this neighborhood has provided them with a foothold in America where, with the support of their community, they have learned key lessons on life in America and even developed the knowledge and skills to maneuver within the local political context.¹⁷ For those who live or work here, or even those who come here only to meet friends, shop and eat, it is the core center of their universe around which they construct their lives in America and it is also a powerful tie to their homeland.¹⁸

¹⁶ Senegalese have also settled in other parts of New York City. There is for example a large population in Brooklyn and the Bronx but this is the only one to be called “Little Senegal.”

¹⁷ For example, 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.

¹⁸ Harlem’s new residents are taking a cue from the Africans with whom the neighborhood is identified. An upscale restaurant called “The Native” caters to an affluent crowd of black and white Americans. The menu is “Mediterranean”; the décor is sleek dark wood with large black and white portraits of East African animals and music by the Senegalese star, Baaba Maal, plays softly in the background. Another notable trace of African influence in the neighborhood is the large apartment building called the *Kalahari* that “[stands] proudly at the crossroads of the Old Harlem and the New Harlem.” Its vivid striped patterns, inspired by the Ndebele of South Africa, plaques of *adinkra* patterns from Ghana, and a valuable work by El Anatsui, a celebrated Ghanaian sculptor in the lobby (personal correspondence, Enid Schildkrout); bamboo floors and indoor greenery reinforce the African theme. See also Julian, Kate. “Ndebele Tribe of South Africa Inspires Harlem Development,” *The New York Sun*. March 8, 2007.

The creation of such immigrant neighborhoods or “ethnic enclaves” has been part of the history of New York City since its beginnings. Defined as “spatially clustered networks of businesses owned and staffed by members of the same minority group,” these enclaves offer a haven to the millions of immigrants who have been arriving in New York throughout its history (Foner 2001:13).¹⁹

Gentrification in Harlem

Despite their visible presence in the neighborhood for a number of years and the vibrancy they brought to the streets, the West Africans are tenants with a precarious hold on the bustling community they helped to create. The growing surge in the value of Harlem real estate (until it took a downward turn with the 2008 recession) brought home to the Africans their extreme vulnerability to economic conditions (Aldrich et al 2006). Until that time, the value of Harlem real estate was growing faster than New York’s Upper East Side, the traditional bastion of New York’s rich.²⁰ Though the current recession and the downfall in Manhattan real estate, which hit Harlem especially hard, has offered a reprieve, business owners continue to complain about steadily increasing rents in Harlem. The manager of a dollar store on 116th St. recently complained that his rent had risen from \$600 to \$1400 in the 1990s to \$4000/month in 2009, and shows no signs of tapering off.

For the past several years, Columbia University has also been increasing the pressure for space in Harlem. Though the streets targeted for its new buildings are to the west of Little Senegal, the plans for a new campus have brought students into the neighborhood in search of affordable housing. They are moving into recently renovated buildings that until 2006 were the “vertical villages” mentioned earlier, inhabited nearly exclusively by Africans. The city’s Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development is also contributing to the squeeze on affordable housing by building new apartment buildings in

¹⁹ For a detailed explanation on discussions on the use of the term, see Waldinger and Der-Matrosian 2001.

²⁰ In the mid-1980s, the *New York Times* was already carrying articles on Harlem as the next frontier for the middle-class. In 1986, an article noted that Harlem residents were gearing up to defend themselves and their main weapon was home ownership (Foderero 1987).

Little Senegal. Harlem neighborhood associations, however, are hotly contesting the city's claim that they will be affordable to local residents.²¹

Several African-run businesses closed in 2007 and have remained empty. Among the significant losses are the Murid store Touba Khassayites, a masjid on 116th St., and two neighborhood African restaurants, one of which was immediately replaced by a *Dunkin' Donuts*.

Mouride immigrants, who were the first major Senegalese group to come to the US, relied on specific strategies that served them well in setting up trade networks and these later translated into profitable circuits that facilitated migration to the US and the creation of Little Senegal. But this same set of skills did not equip them to face the changing context in Harlem. According to Senegalese businessmen, they could have bought a building on 116th St. before they became so expensive if they had been better organized and acted as a group. But when they first arrived in New York, they were saving money to send home, they did not intend to stay in New York, and, not surprisingly, they did not see that acquiring Harlem property could be a financially savvy move.²²

The Crisis

Rising rents and the departure of stores and businesses in 2007/2008 are now pushing African business owners to search for solutions to protect their businesses and way of life. In 2007, the Senegalese who owned stores and businesses in Harlem decided it was time to take collective action against the appropriation of their space. The loss of both residential and commercial leases magnified the crisis for them. With rising rents, the African residents who were their client base were also being forced out of the neighborhood. As the manager of a store that sells films and music said, "In 10 years, will there be a Little Senegal?"

²¹ Lockwood, Sarah. "Harlem Residents Split over City Development on Frederick Douglass." *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Friday February 8, 2008.

²² When asked why the Senegalese had never thought to buy property before the boom, Abdoulaye Thiam from the ASA said, "Those English Africans (Nigerians and Ghanaians) should have babysat (mentored) us. No one babysat the African-Americans so they didn't know what to do and couldn't tell us what to do. The Senegalese had to baby-sit themselves. We taught Americans and others about hair braiding but they didn't teach us about this."

The Senegalese business owners took action. The owner of a grocery store, who, like many others on 116th St., came to New York in the 1980s, began talking with the others about forming an association to defend their place in Harlem. When explaining why they needed an association, he said, “This is the American way. You have to do things as a group. Individuals don’t get anywhere” (see also Beck 2006: 28).

At the association’s first meeting in mid-January, 2008, 11 men and one woman showed up. The initial plan was to restrict membership to only Senegalese but they later expanded the criteria to include any business owner of any nationality in the general neighborhood of 116th St., the switch to a more open membership reflecting their sense that in the face of this crisis, they need to work together.

The non-Senegalese however, saw the proposal as a Senegalese-driven project and kept their distance. A Malian and Guinean attended the second meeting but did not return and the Senegalese were not at all optimistic that a non-Senegalese would take part in the association. One man noted that on another occasion when the Senegalese tried to form an inclusive association, the Malians would not contribute even \$20 a month. When asked if they planned to be part of the association, the Malians, who work in a shipping business, just shrugged and said it was not worthwhile. They would just move to Brooklyn when they could no longer afford the Harlem rent. One man offered, “We have no sentimental attachment to the neighborhood. For us, it’s just a place to work.”²³

Business Owners’ Association

At the first meeting, discussions revolved on collective action they could take to protect their interests, ranging from asking the city to improve street cleaning and security on

²³ As has been discussed elsewhere, relations among West African immigrants from different countries are not especially close, though over the years their experience in American has made them adopt a more united front. The Senegalese are often criticized as being too eager to put themselves in the limelight and benefit from the others’ hard work. Stoller (1998) cites an example of this antagonism in his description of events around the closing of the 125th St. market; he wrote about Nigerians’ belief that Murids encouraged the move to the Shabazz-sponsored market on 116th St. because they would benefit from it financially.

116th St., to re-naming the street in honor of the Senegalese community; someone also suggested hiring a lawyer to advise them on buying a building through a city-sponsored plan to encourage development in Harlem.

The main challenge, however, was to attract more clients, especially from the local, non-African population.²⁴ This would require changing their practices and products since while they were effective in bringing in African customers, they were not drawing in other local residents. In discussions and interviews with business owners, and by observation, some specific features of their businesses practices emerged as obstacles to expanding their client base. Some features were obvious, such as the grocery stores that carry mostly brand names from Africa and Europe that are familiar to francophone Africans but not to Americans. Other features are less evident. For example, some of the African stores carry an eclectic range of products because the owners tend to buy whatever stock they can get at a low price. For example, a store that sells music and films also carries women's shoes; wig stores sell cooking oil, and small grocery stores offer a wide selection of incense-burners and teapots. These stores lack specialization and therefore offer a less complete range of stock than others.

A Senegalese woman who owns a cosmetic store that has a steady stream of non-African clients, described this non-specialization as "boutique" and compared it to Sandaga market, Dakar's largest outdoor market, a chaotic, sprawling maze of commerce, where most of the Senegalese business owners got their start. In contrast to the somewhat unpredictable selection available in many of the African-owned stores, her store carries only beauty products. When asked about her sales strategy, she said, "When we come to a developed country, we don't want to just do African."

The Senegalese-owned stores can deter American clients in other more subtle ways. The use of space, as the Senegalese woman storekeeper pointed out, is also based on Sandaga market. Their stores tend to be open with products stacked on shelves up the walls or spread on the floor. Her store, as she pointed out, has aisles, in contrast to others on 116th St.

²⁴ In a discussion of how to adapt their strategies to attract more non-African clients, someone brought up the astuteness of an Asian entrepreneur who had opened an elegant florist shop (and the street's first Korean nail salon) a few days before Valentine's Day in 2008.

Another example that reflects practices in Sandaga is that a storeowner will acquire two stores in close proximity and sell the same products in both stores. The explanation for this is that it is cheaper for storekeepers to buy wholesale in large quantities than to diversify their merchandise. According to another Senegalese businessman, these storekeepers realize that “Africans are copy-cats” and if they do not duplicate their own stores, someone else will. Having two stores selling the same products on the same street gives them a strong chance of deterring a competitor from opening a third store selling the same product.

Another similarity with Sandaga practices is that some of the Harlem stores are not especially welcoming. For example, some of the cosmetic stores in both locations are staffed by men sitting around watching tapes of Africa soccer and drinking tea.

Change in Tactics

As a result of the crisis facing them, business owners began to adapt their strategies to meet the needs of a broader market. One man who has two grocery stores, both selling mainly food for African clients, expanded his stock to include American products; the owner of a cosmetic store plans to expand the number of brands he carries and to open stores in Brooklyn and Atlanta, and, for the first time, to employ women.

In these efforts to adapt and update their strategies, the businessmen asked for help from Senegalese professionals whose education and acumen helped them integrate into mainstream American financial life. One who is giving them lessons in finance is a highly successful Senegalese businessman who has contracts with a number of New York restaurants and private clubs. Another is a Senegalese accountant who studied in the US and recently moved to Little Senegal from Brooklyn because, as he said, he “wanted to be where the action is.” His goal, he said, is to help Senegalese “move their businesses up to the next level.” With some of his Senegalese clients, he said this means giving them information about checking accounts and credit. More Senegalese than ever before are coming to him for advice; he described two well-established Senegalese businessmen who have a strong base of New York clients but who could easily develop a strong core of customers from New Jersey and Connecticut. The drawback is they still run their business like “a Mom and Pop store” because they do not

trust outsiders with the details of their business. They answer their own phones and refuse to hire support staff because they want to keep their work private. The accountant said his goal is to persuade them to branch out geographically and to hire staff but he is facing strong resistance in overcoming their inclinations to continue to follow a model imported from Senegal's Sandaga market.

Conclusion

This paper describes a community in transition. In the mid-1980s, the Murids were part of a highly mobile trade diaspora and their stated intention was to remain in New York just long enough to save enough money to build a house back in Senegal and start a business. Now twenty years later, many of these individuals and those who arrived subsequently continue to say they intend eventually to return to Senegal to live, but they are nonetheless still firmly based in New York; they have raised their families here and created a community that carries their name. With gentrification and increased rents in Harlem, Senegalese immigrants are now intensifying efforts to keep a hold on their space. Despite a rapidly-changing context, their emphasis continues to be on "dwelling" rather than "moving" and they are developing new strategies to expand their businesses and maintain their place on 116th St. The primary challenge facing them will be to see if they can expand beyond serving the needs of a mainly African clientele and meet the needs of a growing and diversifying Harlem population.

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