Religious Agency, Memory and Travel

Transnational Islam of Senegalese Murids in Helsinki

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The comings, the goings and the settlement of Muridism

...Sometimes the cheikhs come here to spend a week with the disciples, we need that. They remind us of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, they remind us of our obligation, they remind us, you know, which way we need to take. (taalibe, Fr)

In this study I approach present-day Sufi Islam of Senegalese Murids in Helsinki. The Murid brotherhood originated during the late 19th century around a Senegalese Muslim teacher Cheikh Amadou Bamba who remains today as the key reference to Murid belief, practice and organization as exemplified in the previous quote. By the 21st century, the Murid brotherhood, one of the most influential Sufi brotherhoods\(^1\) of West-African Senegal, has spread out through migrant disciples to all continents. Today’s Muridism takes an established form of transnational Islam.

One way in which the brotherhood’s activities cut across nation states’ borders is its religious guides’ travel. The Murid brotherhood is organized around the city of Touba in Senegal from where the leader of the brotherhood, a descendant of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, coordinates its activities. Following in the footsteps of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, a number of descendant and allied religious guides travel to visit Murid disciples and the related religious associations in different cities across the world. This Thesis studies the visits that the travelling religious guides, here called cheikhs, pay to Murid disciples, here called taalibes, in Helsinki\(^2\).

In the quote above, a Murid taalibe explains that the cheikhs remind the disciples which “way” they “need to take”. Through their temporary presence, the visiting cheikhs are able to guide the Murid taalibes at least on two levels: in their collective religious organization in a new society of settlement and in their individual religious lives. In this thesis, my aim is to analyze how Muridism is mobilized in yet another overseas location collectively as well as through individually lived Murid identities. In particular, I pay attention to the role

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\(^1\) The other three most influential brotherhoods are the Xaadir (W), the Tiijaan (W) and the Laayeen (W).

\(^2\) See 9.2 Glossary for the most frequently used Wolof words.
the cheikhs’ visits as a social context have in this process. In order to grasp the meanings given for the encounters between the cheikhs and the taalibes I conducted ethnographic participative observation in the Murid taalibes’ homes in Helsinki during the cheikhs’ visits. Additionally, I carried out interviews with taalibes residing in Helsinki as well as with travelling cheikhs. I remain grateful for the Murid disciples’ willingness to initiate opportunities to meet their travelling guides.

Finland has been an unusual destination for people from Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly for immigrants from the francophone West-Africa. This may be explained *inter alia* by a considerable geographical distance and an absence of historical ties. 27 654 African born residents lived in Finland in 2013. Over a third of these residents are Somalian born. (Statistics Finland 2014.) In 2005 the top ten countries for Senegalese migration were Gambia, France, Italy, Mauritania, Spain, Gabon, United States, Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria (Dilip & Xu, 2005). In 2013, there were 157 Senegalese born residents in Finland, of whom only 29 are women. Over a half of the Senegalese born residents lived in Southern Uusimaa, the most populous region of the country. (Statistics Finland 2014.) The majority of Muslims of African origin lives in the capital region (Martikainen 2013, 113). Similarly to Italy, the Senegalese immigrants in Finland seem to be mainly men migrating as individuals (for Italy see Riccio 2001; 2004).

Senegal may be regarded as a Muslim country in a sense that most of its population is Muslim (see Sakaranaho 1998, 12) and therefore a great part of the Senegalese born residents in Finland are also likely to have Muslim origins. Sufi brotherhoods are a prevalent form of Islam in the country but not everyone is affiliated with the brotherhoods. Murid migrants are usually associated to the predominant Wolof ethnic group. In light of this information, it is important to note that the research findings of this Thesis cannot be generalized to all Senegalese born residents with diverse orientations to religion in Finland. Instead, this study is informed by the interaction with a couple of dozen Senegalese born residents who are affiliated to the Murid brotherhood and who participated in Murid religious activities in Helsinki during the Thesis fieldwork. Consequently, the image the current Thesis suggests about Muridism is not only bound in the contacts that could be created between the researcher and the researched community but also bound in the moment of the study.

On the grounds of a previous study, the Senegalese migrant Murids have a tendency to maintain and renew a practice of a particular form of Senegalese Islam, instead of making
a strong identification in the already existing larger Islamic communities in Helsinki. Furthermore, an orientation to the religious centre, the city of Touba in Senegal and an awareness of other Murid communities abroad seems to shape the religiousness of the Murids in Helsinki. (Peltonen 2011.)

Similarly to Murid practices in other countries, the Murids have founded a local prayer circle, *dahira*, in Helsinki as well as celebrating Murid calendrical religious festivities in rented public locations or in private spaces. Among the Muslims in Finland, various religious and ethno-cultural associations exist beyond the mosque communities. These associations, such as the Murids’ *dahira*, serve for particular religious purposes of selected group of people. (see Martikainen 2013, 117.)

Although religion from the practitioners’ viewpoint is occasionally regarded as unchangeable from the root, the Murids necessarily produce something new when they introduce their specific tradition of Islam in Finland. Even a repetition of same religious expression may be considered as creating something new when it takes place in a new social environment (Joseph 2004, 69). Change may be positioned in the core of the study of religion in the modern world (Hervieu-Léger 2000). In the context of this Thesis, the Murids’ migration processes open windows for looking at both change and continuity in their present religious dispositions.

Embodied means of researching, in other words being physically present in the visits, considerably guided me to view “what religious participants understand, say, intend and/or value about their own religious activities” and also about those of others, especially those of their religious guides (Harvey 2011, 218). An ideal of a Murid *taalibe*’s devotion to his cheikh is crystallized in Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s religious text *Masalik al-Jinan, Paths of Paradise* where he writes: “the true murid is he who always loves his shaikh”\(^3\). In everyday religion, the Murid tradition based for instance on the founder’s texts, is continuously reinterpreted. It is not least the Murids’ strong involvement in the cheikhs’ visits and the diverse ways in which they claim Muridism as their “own” in the interview accounts that led me to select religious agency as a focal point of this study.

During the fieldwork the research participants traveled between Finland and various other countries while I stayed, in the limits of this study, in Helsinki. All interviewed Murid *taalibes* articulated their ideal living arrangement as somewhat transnational which denotes at least returning to Senegal at fairly frequent intervals. The *taalibe* interviewees depicted

\(^3\) Cited in Monteil 1962, 88.
for instance work, study or love as the motivating factors in their decisions to emigrate. My fieldwork led me to consider migration not as “one-off event with one-way consequences, but rather as an on-going process of building links and relationships” (Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk 2005, 15) at material, social and religious levels. This study focuses on the religious level, which is justifiable since migration scholars have traditionally overlooked the importance of religion in social life (Levitt & Jarowsky 2007, 140).

The research participants’ comings and goings together with a sense of belonging to a global religious community highlight the ways in which individuals may increasingly feel a simultaneous belonging to multiple places, countries and communities (e.g. Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc 1994; Faist 2000; Wahlbeck 1999). The modern transport and communication technologies reduce distance between places and facilitate interaction between people previously “separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers” (Clifford 1994, 304) in a more categorical manner.

The increasing interaction and mobility leads to new social innovations based on established religious forms. In Tuomas Martikainen’s words “Migration is a transformative force that, besides altering local religious landscapes, leads to the birth of hybrid cultural forms that transform aspects of particular religious traditions.” (2013, 59). The overall aim of this Thesis is to enhance understanding on the diversity of religious dispositions, speech and experiences that are mobilized in – and that transform – the Finnish society. As a multidisciplinary field of study, the study of religions is well suited for this task, which requires observing the everyday of complex social realities instead of limiting the scope of research in the official religious doctrine or the religious authorities’ views.

At present, the Finnish academia has responded to the need to study Islam in relation to migration but the research has been conducted mostly only among the largest Muslim groups (Sakaranaho 2008, 24-25). Therefore, this Thesis contributes to the lack of studies on smaller and more recent Muslim settlement. Also, the literature on the “African diaspora” members’ agency in Finland merits contributions (see Rastas & Seye 2011; Rastas & Päivärinta 2010). A familiarization with the Senegalese Murids’ religiousness sheds light on the way Muslims in Finland orientate to religion from diverse historical, linguistic and cultural viewpoints. This view opposes the Finnish public discourse’s common perception of Muslims as a monolithic entity and Islam as a monolithic, unchangeable religion. (see Juntunen 2008, 48; Raittila & Maasilta 2008, 225.) As there is a tendency in Europe to view “Muslims” as a single united group, different historical and
cultural premises are very likely overlooked (Hylland Eriksen 2002, 6). In this field, the study of religions has an important task in diversifying the image of both Islam and African communities in Western societies.

1.2 Previous research on Islam in the Finnish religious landscape

During past decades, international migration has increased religious diversity inside European nation-states. In Finland this trend may be observed for instance in the growing number of Muslims. From a country of emigration, Finland turned to a country of immigration in the beginning of the 1990s. In the end of the 1980s there were few thousand Muslims in Finland, whereas the number of Muslims had mounted to 50 000-60 000 by 2010. (Martikainen 2008, 65; 2013, 110, 61.) The Muslims in Finland do not consist only of immigrant groups from different countries but also of an increasing number of Finnish converts who have become active in the local field of Islam since the 1990s (Sakaranaho 2006, 248).

Islam is not a new phenomenon as such in Finland; the settlement of a Tatar Muslim community began already in the 19th century (e.g. Martikainen 2008, 68). By the 1980s small-scale migration from Turkey, Morocco and other Mediterranean countries had brought new Muslims to the country. The Somalis became the largest Muslim group seeking asylum in Finland during the aftermath of the civil war in 1990. Before the Somalis, the Muslims among migrants accepted as quota refugees to Finland were mostly Kurds and Shiites from Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Iran and Turkey. After the Somalis, Kosovo Albanians and Bosnian Muslims arrived as they escaped ethnic violence related to the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Sakaranaho 2006, 246-248). As these examples point out, the Muslim migration to Finland was characterized by the refugee condition and asylum seeking from 1980s to late 1990s. (Martikainen 2013, 111).

Islam is the most studied immigrant religion in Finland (Martikainen 2013, 11). While most anthropologists engaged in the study of Islam have focused on Tatars and Somalis, some other Muslim groups have also received academic attention. (Sakaranaho 2008, 24-25.) Nevertheless, no studies in Finland have been conducted specifically on Senegalese Muslims. Given the relatively small yet mounting number of Senegalese born residents in Finland, this is understandable. On the whole, Sub-Saharan immigrant groups other than
the Somalis have received little academic attention in Finland (Rastas 2011). However, there are two Master’s thesis that are close to the study of Senegalese Muslims. The first is Ilona Korhonen’s (1996) research on the Gambian Mandingos, a group geographically and historically very close to the Senegalese Muslims. Korhonen approaches the Gambian Mandingos’ religiousness in Finland through changes that have taken place in their practice of religion in the post-migration situation in Finland versus their practice of religion pre-migration in Gambia.

Korhonen notes that religious guides⁴ are an important element of the researched Mandingos’ practice of Islam. However, she does not mention any visits of religious guides in Finland and none of her interviewees belonged to a Sufi brotherhood. In fact the interviewees’ attitudes towards brotherhoods were rather suspicious. (Korhonen 1996, 27; see also Lovio 2013, 63.) Ilari Lovio’s (2013) Master’s thesis research is also concerned with Senegambian⁵ migrants’ transnational practices in Finland. Lovio’s discussion, however, focuses on social dynamics behind remittances in multi-local family ties. Among the interviewed Gambian and Senegalese migrants, the transnational practices are situated in the sphere of family and not in the sphere of religion.

In the Finnish academia, Marja Tiilikainen’s (2003) anthropological research on another African Sufi-Islamic migrant group in Finland, the Somali diaspora, can be named as a signpost for this Thesis research. Tiilikainen is interested in the everyday religiousness of Somali women who have arrived to Finland as refugees. Home that is defined by the diasporic experience is observed as an important sphere of the women’s agency. The Somali women take advantage of and redefine the resources and rules of Islam as they build a home in a new environment. Tiilikainen opens up the women’s experiences of their refugee condition through their interpretations of illness in which the causes of illnesses are often traced to the Finnish environment (2003, 198-230). Collective rituals and for instance the recitation of Quran are used as a remedy for trouble that may have originated from the jinns (spirits widely known in Islam) or from the saar (spirits known in Somalia). According to the Somali women interviewed in the research, these spirits have an influence in Finland although their position is somewhat altered compared to Somalia. (Tiilikainen 2003, 236-266.)

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⁴ Korhonen uses the word marabout instead of cheikh.
⁵ Senegalese and Gambian.
1.3 Previous research on Muridism and migration

Outside Finland, Murid migrants have been the most studied group inside studies on recent Senegalese migration (for a review of studies on Senegalese transnational migration see Jacques 2009, 16-22). In a few theoretical publications, the Murids are even mentioned as an exemplary case of migrants who use their nation-state crossing networks for not only religious but also for economic and political purposes (see e.g. Vertovec 2009, 31). The recent studies on Murid migrants discuss the brotherhood’s religious and trading networks, the diverse forms of organization overseas for instance as religious associations or civil society organizations, the Murids’ experiences in and adaptation to new host societies and the relations they maintain to Senegal.

Since a comprehensive body of literature already provides information on the Murids’ common transnational patterns with an emphasis on such themes as migrants’ trade networks, there is a specific need to avoid building reified images on the migrant Murid communities (Riccio 2001). According to Bruno Riccio, researchers should disaggregate the “so-called ‘transnational community’ by recognizing and analyzing its internal tensions and the plurality of trajectories emerging from the transnational spaces” (2001, 584). Riccio emphasizes that there are various ways of being Senegalese transmigrant; “transnational migration… encompasses a wide range of different and situationally varied practices.” (2001, 596). For instance, the image of an ever-moving Murid trader “who is always just stopping off” (Diouf 2000, 695) may not correspond to the trajectories and experiences of a Murid migrant who has for instance lived in the “new” country of settlement for more than a decade, is employed in the national labor markets and/or sustaining a bi-cultural family.

By the same token, beside the existing similarity in religious expressions, there are various ways of mobilizing Muridism in recent and traditional locations. Eva Evers-Rosander (2004) emphasizes that the Murids refer to more hybrid registers in their religious dispositions than is often thought. Monika Salzbrunn concludes that the diversity of Senegalese Muslim migrants’ social and religious lives leads to a wider hybridization and reprivatization of religion which affects also the level of Senegalese politics. She takes the Murid cheikhs’ reduced impact on presidential voting patterns as an example of this. (Salzbrunn 2002.) In the following paragraphs, I will take a closer look to the research agendas of recent studies on Murid migrants.

Sophie Bava’s (2005) research suggests that every new migratory situation organizes the religious sphere anew. Bava observes three different sites with three different Murid migrant groups: the first Murid traders in Marseille; rural Murids on their way to migrate from Niamey towards Europe and the US; and, young educated Murid students in Cairo. In these three cases, the combinations of migration experiences and locality influenced the reinterpretation of religious symbols, however, without challenging the religious hierarchy of the Murids’ holy city of Touba in Senegal. (Bava, 2005.)

Again, as the religious authorities of Touba are physically absent from the migration locations, Bava notes that the organization of the religious falls in the hands of the migrant dahiras (2003b). In her research, she observes the preparation and realization of the Murid religious guide Sëriñ Mourtada Mbacké’s visit in Marseille in 2001. The visit is organized in a sports center in the form of a ziyara, periodic visit to a Murid religious guide during which the disciples make their religious offerings. Bava describes the serenity that the cheikhs’ visits bring for the participating Murids as well as analyzing how the migrants’ tensions between mobility and anchoring influence their religious dispositions. By looking at an itinerant cheikh’s visit Bava distinguishes different traveling and non-traveling cheikhs’ multiple characteristics. (Bava 2003b.)

The travelling Murid cheikhs have already been noted in Victoria Ebin’s ethnographical fieldwork that took place in Marseille and New York in 1986-1988. Ebin describes the visit of a Murid cheikh also in Paris as she analyses the “itinerant Murid traders”’ use of apartments and hotel rooms: “These traders live without a permanent space of their own and travel with few possessions. They do not have a mosque or a sacred place. They sanctify space by their own actions, by making the ‘inside outside’.” (1996). Murid traders are the focus of Ebin’s other ethnographical work that discusses how the Murid social relations function in the organization of international commercial activities. Ebin follows five Senegalese brothers’ commercial activities that center in their electronic store in the Sandaga market in Dakar. From Sandaga the brothers’ commercial activities extend for example to New York, Jeddah, Dubai and Hong Kong. (Ebin 1992.)

Various research agendas could be applied to the Murid cheikhs’ visits to migration locations. In yet another study, Bava (2003a) discusses the cheikhs’ visits’ as religious occasions during which the Murid migrant traders come in search of barke6, a divine grace and an indispensable resource for the Murid traders’ enterprises, mediated by the cheikhs.

6 From the Arab baraka.
As the connection between the economic and the religious is examined in the present transnational Muridism, the Murid doctrine of work needs to be re-contextualised from the colonial time’s taalibes’ agricultural work for the cheikhs to the context of the present migrant taalibes’ cash donations to the cheikhs. According to Bava, Murids’ mobility and the subsequent delocalisation process of Muridism has led to a shift from the ethos of religious value of work to an ethic of economic success. Despite this change, the Murid body of miracles continues to guide the routes and enterprises of the traveling Murids. (Bava 2003a.)

When Bava discusses the recent framework of the economic and the religious in Muridism she takes into account the religious weight of transnational practices. For instance, for the migrant disciple, donating money for the cheikhs may be a way of being close to the holy city of Touba in spite of physical distance. (Bava 2003a.) Eva Evers Rosander (2004) deepens the academic understanding of Murid religious faith’s tight connectedness to economic resources and to the generation and accumulation of such resources. As the Murid migrant women’s money travels from Spain to the Senegalese pilgrimage site of Amadou Bamba’s mother, Mame Diarra Bousso, in Porokhane “…womens corporeal absence is compensated by the physical co-presence of money which increases their social capital and is converted into moral capital.” (Evers-Rosander 2004, 71). By discussing the moral space which Muridism offers for the Senegalese Murid women in Tenerife, Spain Evers-Rosander’s study fills the lack of studies on Murid migrant women. As Evers-Rosander compares the women’s practice of religion in Senegal and in the diaspora, she concludes that in the contexts of her study, economic activities constitute the core of this specific Murid migrant dahira’s existence. (Evers-Rosander 2004.)

The migrant Murids’ enthusiasm to install dahiras together with these associations’ multiple functions has been demonstrated in several other studies as well. Cheikh Anta Babou’s (2002) case study on the Murid community of New York is concerned in the ways in which the dahira institution contributes to the cohesion and continuity of the brotherhood. According to Babou, the economic and spiritual goals of the Murids in New York dahiras reinforce and legitimize each other. Values conveyed through dahiras foster networks and social capital that is generated through the activities of the members. (Babou 2002, 170.)

Zain Abdullah presents how the Murids inscribe their specific form of Islam and Africanness in the enclave of “Little Africa” in Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City.
The Murid migrants do not establish their religious organization in a vacuum: for example the annual Cheikh Amadou Bamba-day may be regarded as to “...represent their struggle to put forth a Murid identity against the backdrop of other Muslim constituencies in Harlem.” (Abdullah 2009, 48-49). Abdullah analyses the neighbourliness and the tensions between the Black American population and the West-African Muslim migrants. Furthermore, he explores the differences between the Murids and the West-African Sunni Muslims who proclaim a more universal Muslim identity. In Harlem, the Murids joined the African American Muslim community Masjid Malcolm Shabazz prior to establishing their own group. This community’s Black Nationalist rhetoric, included for instance in the Friday sermons, was more familiar to the Murids than the West African Sunni Muslims. (Abdullah 2009.)

Ellen E. Foley and Cheikh Anta Babou (2010) examine a transnational Murid dahira’s development initiative of constructing the medical hospital of Matlaboul Fawzaini in the Murid holy city of Touba. The dahira in question, Matlaboul Fawzaini, was the first dahira to take the form of a non-governmental organization (NGO). By constructing the hospital, the dahira members who live mostly in Northern America and Western Europe, implemented a project that would generally be executed by the state. Furthermore, the Murid migrant dahira members were able to negotiate a financial commitment from the state-actors once the hospital infrastructure was completed. The two researchers bring out the complex motivations behind diaspora development: the dahira’s foremost objective is achieving Amadou Bamba’s holy vision of building the city of Touba after which other development-related objectives follow. (Foley & Babou 2010.)

Similarly, according to Eric Ross the capital which Murid migrant entrepreneurs generate in New York accumulate first of all in Touba. He presents that Touba’s continued growth is linked to the global diffusion of its sacred values and structures. Ross examines the US online yellow page’s diverse Murid businesses of which more than a half carries the name “Touba”. Touba’s global connectedness with other world cities is not only related to the growing flow of international remittances but also to the dissemination of images and artefacts that associate with the Murid holy city. (Ross 2011.)

From the viewpoint of social production in Senegal, Touba may be viewed as a center of Murid migrant traders’ intended social projects, which often seem to manifest in half-built villas and half-formed, elder women-headed families. The Murid men’s involvement in transnational trade means also that they are absent from the families they found in Senegal.
At the same time their cash remittances have led into an escalation of ostentatious domestic rituals with diverse social payments performed by the elder women who have stayed behind in Senegal. Beth Anne Buggenhagen brings out the disjuncture of Murid migrant traders’ renowned prosperity and their ability to generate functioning households in Senegal. Buggenhagen demonstrates the changes that the neoliberal reform and migration induces in gendered and generational household authority in Senegal through an ethnographic observation of an exchange of bridewealth which failed to result in a marriage. (Buggenhagen 2001.)

Sophie Bava and Cheikh Gueye (2001) observe the pilgrimage to Touba during the annual Grand Magal which commemorates the brotherhood’s founder Amadou Bamba’s departure in exile and thus the beginning of his struggle during the colonial times. Bava and Gueye trace how the Grand Magal was constituted in the form of a pilgrimage in the course of time and how its religious symbolism has survived and continued to metamorphose to this day. As the study demonstrates, the Grand Magal bears remarkable affective and effective significance whether it is celebrated in Marseille or in the form of a physical pilgrimage to the city of Touba. In Touba, the Grand Magal is an occasion for the migrant taalibes not only to receive barke or pray fulfillment for their dreams while visiting the saints’ tombs, but also to admire the constructions they have contributed to finance in the city. As for the leaders of the brotherhood, they may not only reinforce the religious commitment inside the brotherhood but also express their stances to the Senegalese national politics. (Bava & Gueye 2001.) Christian Coulon (1999, 204) notes that beside the devotion and austerity of the holy sites, gaiety, trading and amusement characterize the atmosphere of the Grand Magal.

The brotherhood’s internal dynamics have been included in the dispositions of several studies. Mamadou Diouf (2000) notes that inside the brotherhood, the Murid traders’ desire for a distinctive community and unique Islamic identity has differed from the Murid intellectuals’ pursuit for the brotherhood’s stronger affiliation to Islam as a world religion. In his research Diouf discusses how the Murid locality is produced among the Murid trade diaspora, that consists of traders and laborers, by an invocation of globalization. From early on, the economic scenario of the Murid trade diaspora differed from Western notions of modernity and economic success. (Diouf 2000.)

Charlotte Pezeril (2008) is concerned in the ways the Baay Faal path of the followers of Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s devoted disciple Cheikh Ibrahima Fall became progressively
visible and differentiable in others’ eyes. The external observers did not differentiate the Baay Faals from other Murids before the 1950s. Pezeril approaches the Baay Faals’ position in the moral space of Senegalese Islam through communal stigmatization and the Baay Faal groups’ internal dynamics of marginalization and self-presentation. On one hand, the Baay Faals are labeled as deviant because a great part of the Baay Faal disciples do not exercise the five daily prayers or the fast of Ramadan according to Cheikh Ibrahima Fall’s example. Also, the branch remains open for the socially marginalized. On the other hand, nevertheless, the Baay Faal branch is, to this day, indistinguishable from other Murids because the guide of the Baay Faals established central Murid ideals and norms such as the submission to a religious guide. (Pezeril, 2008.) Xavier Audrain observes Senegalese youth’s conversions to the Baay Faal branch. According to Audrain, young Senegalese’ investment in Baayfaa’lism is a way of reconfiguring social power relations and constructing the self as a new moral subject through a religious expression in the modern Senegalese society. (Audrain 2004.)

Senegalese Murid migrants’ lived experience has been taken into account for instance in Riccio’s (2001, 2004, 2008) studies that focus in Senegalese Murid migrants in Italy. He discusses the Senegalese migrants’ ambivalent experiences and migration models within transnational spaces as well as the foundation of religious and non-religious organizations in Italy. Riccio describes how the Murids’ transnational social formations are kept alive and new spaces are sacralised through rituals that symbolically recreate Touba. Religious organization, Riccio argues, is focal in the maintenance of transnational identities (2001, 595). Furthermore, the analysis on transnational Muridism is deepened by looking at the Murids’ discourses about Italy. With regards to the Senegalese migrants’ integration stances, their critical view on Italian society partially affects the unwillingness to ask for family reunions and thus the durability of a single manly transnational model of migration. However, mistrust on Italians is not shared by all Senegalese. A blend of moving and partial sedentarisation is named as the key to the success of transnational Muridism. (Riccio 2004, 939-941.)

A comparative study between the Ghanaian Christians’ (with an increasing emphasis on Pentecostalism⁷) and the Senegalese Murid Muslims’ transnational communities in Italy casts more light on the specific features of transnational Muridism. Despite differences, both transnational religious organizations have, for instance, a similar role in mediating

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⁷ For Ghanaian transnational Pentecostalism see e.g. Corten & Marshall-Fratani 2001; Lauterbach 2004; Van Dijk 2001; 2002.
between the communities and their new host societies. In addition, transnational practices
exist among the members of both communities. However, whereas the Ghanaians often
settle in Italy with their families, the Senegalese tend to migrate without their families and
identify rather more strongly within the project of return. (Riccio 2008.)

Mayke Kaag (2008) challenges the celebrations of Murid migrants’ transnational success
stories by pointing out how some Murid migrants struggle for everyday subsistence in the
margins of European society. Kaag conducted her ethnographic study in the Residence
Prealpino, a building declared uninhabitable in Brescia, Italy to capture the everyday
aspects of transnationality and locality. According to Kaag, the Murid local and
transnational links support the observed migrants’ coping in the Italian society. For many,
being Murid is in this context important in a psychological sense as it helps for instance to
ignore prejudice. (Kaag 2008.)

The Thesis at hand is motivated by the goal of the latest studies to disaggregate and
diversify the image of transnational Muridism. This is done by describing and comparing
Muridism as it is mobilized in a previously un-studied and even unconventional
environment that represents the Murids’ spread in more diverse locations in Europe.
Unlike Finland, most of the studied Murid locations share either a long-term historical or
linguistic connection with Senegal.

As the brief overview of the previous studies demonstrates, the economic, migratory,
organizational and political aspects of transnational Muridism have been taken into
consideration. These study interests most likely arise from the modern Murids’ economic,
political and organizational activity that sparks a requisite re-contextualization of the
brotherhood’s activities and related religious dispositions in the contemporary contexts.
Concrete transnational and local practices are essentially linked to individuals’ religious
experience, shared tradition and consciousness that give them impetus and meaning. The
Thesis at hand adds to the previous studies on transnational Muridism by returning the
focus on religion as it is experienced and remembered by individuals in the everyday and
collective ritual contexts. This inevitably denotes going back to the fount of Murid belief,
identities and social structures.
1.4 Research questions

This Thesis sets out to study the religious agency of Murid taalibes and cheikhs in the social context of the cheikhs’ visits in Helsinki. The Thesis structure is as follows: the Thesis begins with an introduction of Murid brotherhood in chapter 2 in order to provide the reader with necessary background information. Thereafter, the formation of the research data and the data collection methods are brought to the fore in chapter 3. This reflection on the research process is followed by definitions of the theoretical concepts as well as an account of the methods of analysis employed in chapter 4.

Since Muridism and Senegalese Islam in general are not well known in Finland, I first describe the Murids’ religiousness, organization and networking in Helsinki in the analysis chapter 5. The ethnographic description of the cheikhs’ visits serves for making the unfamiliar more familiar to the reader. In addition to describing the concrete events and networks I also analyze how the interviewed Murid taalibes and cheikhs impose meaning and order on the flow of events through their narrations of the cheikhs’ visits. Thus, an ethnographic description of the observed events and a narrative approach to these events are the two threads that carry through and take turns in the analysis.

Listening to the stories the interviewees’ tell enables an inclusion of aspirations, remembering and imagination to the scope of the research. These forms are less visible, yet they impregnate religious practices. The analysis chapter 6 discusses the cheikhs’ visits as a ritual space in the local Finnish environments. In this chapter, I discuss how and which kind of religious agency the Murid taalibes and cheikhs create through their actions and narrations in the context of the cheikhs’ visits in Helsinki. Altogether, their religious agency participates in the construction of a believer’s reality in the society of settlement. The research questions are as follows:

1. What kind of religious organization the Senegalese Murids carry out in Helsinki?
2. How are the Murid religious guides’ visits constituted in Helsinki?
3. How do the interviewed Senegalese Murids narrate the religious guides’ visits?
4. What kind of religious agency the interviewed Murids construct in the context of the visits?

Martikainen notes that religious specialists are rarely present in the initial phases of migrant religious organization. Their absence often leads to an increased role of the lay
people and transforms the forms of authority. (Martikainen 2013, 42.) In relation to the case of the Murid community in Helsinki, the *cheikhs’* visits mark a temporary presence of religious specialists. The visits are put into practice through cooperation between the lay migrant members and the religious authorities of the brotherhood. It is worth noting that in the context of the visits, the interviewed Murids’ agency is constructed in a specific religious sociality, in a relation between the *taalibes* and the *cheikhs*. To underline this sociality and the co-constructed nature of the visits, I have opted to discuss the *cheikhs’* views in conjunction with the *taalibes’* views.
2 THE MURID BROTHERHOOD

2.1 The early days of Muridism

Islam spread to the region of Senegambia first of all through Sufi brotherhoods. Actual Sufi brotherhoods were established in West-Africa in the 19th century although first connections to Sufism already occur in the 17th century. (Vikør 2000, 443.) The strength of the Sufi brotherhoods was their ability to provide means to accommodate practice of religion to local surroundings and at the same time enable extensive connections to the Islamic world (Villalón 1995, 64). Although Xaadir is the oldest Sufi brotherhood in Senegal, Tiijaan and Murid are today bigger and more influential (Villalón 1995, 65; Vikør 2000, 449).

Amadou Bamba (1853-1927), around whom the new brotherhood of the Murids was to emerge, had both Xaadir and Tiijaan affiliates in his family. As a second son of a Quranic teacher Momar Antasali, who himself belonged to the Xaadir, Bamba received religious upbringing from his father. Later he was initiated to the Xaadir by a prestigious Mauritanian religious guide Cheikh Sidiya Baba. Both his father Momar Antasali and mother Diarra Bousso descended from maraboutic families well-known in the Wolof states. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 42.)

During Bamba’s lifetime, the French colonial conquest transformed Senegalese society in myriad ways. The colonial forces, for instance, deposed Wolof rulers who were in their disfavor. Lat Dior, a Wolof ruler to whom Bamba’s father was closely associated, was one of these chiefs. On one instance when Lat Dior was allowed to return in power, Bamba’s father decided to found a new village called Mbacké-Kayor in Lat Dior’s region. As Bamba settled in this village he created a close association to Lat Dior’s court. Despite this association, Bamba was not of like mind with Dior’s warlike plans against the French alien rule. In order to follow his own ideas and to escape the French supervision of Lat Dior’s circles Bamba decided to leave Mbacké-Kayor. First he moved back to the village of

\[ \text{Senegal and Gambia.} \]
Mbacké-Baol, which his grandfather had founded, and settled shortly after that to Darou Salam. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 39-40; Marty 1971, 224.)

Around 1891 in the village of Darou Salam, Bamba experienced a Prophetic revelation (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 41). A Murid legend tells that angel Gabriel appeared to the founder when he was alone in the wilderness and announced a place where the holy city should be built (Robinson, 2000, 213). The Murids call Cheikh Amadou Bamba often Sērīñ Touba (W), the Master of Touba, according to the city of Touba that Bamba decided to found according to the revelation. The construction project of a great mosque was authorized in 1926 and today the mosque of Touba is the largest mosque in Sub-Saharan Africa (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 47; Riccio 2004, 930-931).

During Bamba’s time in the villages of Mbacké-Baol and Darou Salam, the number of his followers started to increase rapidly. The disciples came to serve him in the search not only for a spiritual but also a political leader although their master merely continued to teach Quran and write religious verses. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 40-41.) The growing importance of Amadou Bamba aroused anxiety among both French and Wolof rulers (Searing 2002, 85) who feared plans of a holy war and thus tried to disperse Bamba’s followers from Darou Salam (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 42). Even though Bamba could not be charged of planning a military uprising, the French administration was concerned about the ex-warriors and Wolof rulers’ followers presence among Bamba’s disciples to such extent that they sentenced Bamba to exile in Gabon from 1895 to 1902 (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 42; Robinson 2000, 214-215).

While Bamba was in exile his position grew stronger; stories of his trials spread out and his writings were organized in a hagiographic collection (Robinson, 2000, 216). On his way to Gabon Bamba was said to have prayed upon the ocean as the French refused to give him a permission to pray onboard. Other miraculous stories still remembered and revered today tell for example how Bamba, during his exile in Gabon survived imprisonment with a hungry lion; a burial in a deep well; and isolation on an island inhabited by snakes and devils. (see e.g. Cruise O’Brien 43.) As Bamba was allowed to return to Senegal after seven years in exile, his reputation only continued to grow which led to the colonial authorities’ decision to exile him once again, this time to the camp of the Xaadir guide Cheikh Sidiya Baba in Mauritania. During the second exile from 1903 to 1907 Bamba adopted his own initiation prayer wird that traditionally distinguishes Sufi brotherhoods. A wird is ritual prayer formula that may consist of the different names of God. Dhikr is a
shortened prayer formula. Even though the Murids in general address greater importance to Bamba’s religious poems called *xassida*\(^9\) than the *wird* that is not commonly known, the creation of a specific *wird* may be regarded as a move towards the founding of the *Murid* as a separate new brotherhood. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 44, 50, 87.)

Furthermore, during the second exile in Mauritania the brotherhood’s organization became more specified as Bamba gave orders on the distribution of duties inside his circle of acquaintances. Bamba’s relatives, advisers and assistants took care of the practicalities and developed the brotherhood’s economic orientation. The second time Amadou Bamba was allowed to return to Senegal was in 1912, to live under the surveillance of the French administration in the village of Diourbel where he stayed until his death in 1927 receiving pilgrims and offerings in streams. Bamba’s move to Diourbel marks the beginning of good relations to the colonial government. The subsequent years were characterized by the maintenance of these relations and the brotherhood’s geographical expansion through disciples’ agricultural settlements in the new lands. By the time of Bamba’s death his followers numbered some 100,000. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 38, 46–49.)

The arrests and deportations of Amadou Bamba started to serve as a shared history of a time when the *Muridiyya* was created in contrast to the colonialist atmosphere as local option, a response to the provocative transformations in society (see Babou 2002, 152). Bamba was a mediator of enormous social change even though he was distant from the worldly things: he refrained from public appearances and concentrated instead in reading and writing religious works (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 38, 57).

Bamba’s religious teachings do not diverge significantly from the *sunna* and the *Xaadir* Sufi tradition in which he was trained. In various poems he proclaims the five obligations of Islam. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 49.) What has been regarded as specific for his teachings is an emphasis on the religious value of work and equality (Villalón 1995, 69).

Bamba made work a factor in personal salvation but it was his principle disciples who gave the religious teachings an economic application. The societal transformations caused by the French conquest in the Wolof society had dismissed chiefs and displaced the lower-class groups in particular. Members of these groups headed in agricultural estates in Diourbel and Touba as Bamba’s principle disciples “made it known to the *talibé* that he who

\(^9\) Plural. Singular: *xassaid*. 

18
submitted to a *shaikh*, obeyed him, worked on his groundnut farm, and gave generously would be certain of paradise.” (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 56). Bamba taught that the only difference that can be made between people is in the degree of humility and submission to God (Searing 2002, 247) thus de-emphasizing class and caste, which appealed to the lower-class members in the new maraboutic estates (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 56).

One of Bamba’s first and most devoted disciples was in particular central in proclaiming the religious value of work. Cheikh Ibrahima Fall was a member of the slave cast soldiers who approached Amadou Bamba when the latter was not yet widely reputed or venerated as a teacher. Unlike other pupils, Fall did not come to learn the recitation of Quran. Instead he searched for a religious guide whom he could start serving. As Ibrahima Fall received a hoe and an axe from Bamba he started working in the fields and transformed this physical labor into his foremost religious observance. Intensive work for Bamba and his pupils, which did not leave him time even for praying, would guarantee him salvation. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 141-144.) Most of Cheikh Ibrahima Fall’s followers who became to be known as *Baay Faals* (W) similarly replaced education and even the Islamic daily prayers and fasting with agricultural work for a *cheikh* according to his example (Villalón 1995, 69). The way of Cheikh Ibrahima Fall was thus established as an extreme, rather unorthodox alternative of Islamic practice for the followers inside the Murid brotherhood (Searing 2002, 238-239; Cruise O’Brien 1971, 141). Deriving from the first encounter with Bamba, Cheikh Ibrahima Fall introduced a new a principle to the *Muridiyya*: that of the disciple’s absolute devotion and submission to his guide. Although Fall’s eccentric beliefs and slavelike behavior first aroused suspicion, his principle of submission gradually became a norm. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 141-144.)
2.2 The structure of followership

Although the disciple’s submission to a spiritual guide is generally emphasized in Sufi theology, Muridiyya includes an exceptional emphasis on this devotional relation (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 83-85). Cheikh Ibrahima Fall was the first person to pronounce jebbalu, the formula for the act of submission that the Murids still use as they declare submission to a chosen cheikh: “‘I submit myself to you, in this life and in the next. I will do everything that you order me. I will abstain from anything you forbid me.’” (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 143). The relation between a taalibe and a cheikh is characterized by ndigal, a categorical order given by a religious authority that should be followed according to Murid belief system (Searing 2002, 133).

Submission to Amadou Bamba’s successors guarantees the disciples an ability to benefit from Bamba’s power to redeem souls (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 51). In a mystical sense Cheikh Amadou Bamba is the “creator” of all Murid cheikhs (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 53). Benefitting of the barke, divine grace that Bamba and his succeeding cheikhs mediate may happen through indirect or direct physical contact, for instance through touching the cheikhs’ clothes or eating their leftover food (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 97). When still alive, Bamba’s public appearances attracted crowds of followers some of whom were plunged

Figure 1: The only existing picture of Cheikh Amadou Bamba has been continuously reproduced in posters, murals and pendants.
into “hysterical outbursts” (Marty 1917, 265-266). Adored for his outpourings of barke, Bamba was in popular terms regarded a saint (wallīyyu), even a God (Yalla) by Murids even though he only called himself the Servant of the Prophet (Khādīm al Rasul) and did not even claim genealogical descent from the Prophet. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 49, 53-54; Marty 1971, 266.)

Nowadays the highest position in the brotherhood belongs to khalīfa-général who is the closest and oldest male descendant of Cheikh Amadou Bamba. He is considered as the leading living cheikh of all Murids. Since July 1st 2010 the head of the brotherhood is Sériñ Sidi Al Moukhtar Mbacké. The five first caliphs were sons of Amadou Bamba, and Sériñ Sidi Al Moukhtar Mbacké is the second grandson of Bamba to take the position of a khalīfa-général. Also the Baay Faal branch has a caliph. This descendant of Cheikh Ibrahima Fall has nominal authority over other Baay Faal cheikhs. Historically the lack of unity has persisted among the brotherhood’s numerous leaders although all of them share a strong sense of common obligation that is manifested in financial contributions and the collective work done for the khalīfa-général. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 153-156.)

In the brotherhood’s religious hierarchy the most revered Murid cheikhs belong to the Mbacké-Mbacké-family, which means that they are directly related to Amadou Bamba. Even if descent plays a central role in the nomination of the cheikhs, “…popular recognition was always the decisive factor in the attribution of the title “shaikh”.” (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 53, 108.) This guarantees certain latitude in the structure of Murid religious authority. Moreover, as several researchers have pointed out, the actual relationships between the guides and their followers, regardless of the ideal of a disciple’s total act of submission to a cheikh, may be diversified and reciprocal or eroded in comparison to the early days of Muridism (Babou 2002, 153; Cruise O’Brien 1971, 98-99).

The cheikhs first of all communicate the redeeming power of Cheikh Amadou Bamba to the taalibes but their field of operation caters also multiple other ritual and secular functions. A great cheikh may be a commercial farmer who is able to guarantee material security and loans for his community as well as bunch his followers’ votes and thus act as a political agent. A cheikh may similarly be a trader. He often fulfils a leading role in ceremonial occasions, chooses imam for a mosque, represents the villagers as well as teaching or healing depending on his rank. Specialization in healing and preparation of amulets is nevertheless traditionally attached to religious specialists who do not carry the title cheikh. (Cruise O’Brien 1071, 103-105.) Donal B. Cruise O’Brien categorizes that the
main difference between the titles *marabout* and *cheikh* is that the latter has personal disciples (1971, 101). In this Thesis I use the word *cheikh* as I refer to the religious Murid guides. The word *cheikh* that the interviewee Murids of this Thesis use interchangeably with *marabout* and *sëriñ*, brings into mind the religious guides’ relatedness to Cheikh Amadou Bamba.

What more comes to the terminology, in order to understand the religious dispositions of the *Muridiyya* there is a need to distinguish between the two meanings of *tarixa*. Whereas *tarixa* is often translated as an order or a brotherhood¹⁰, which has connotations of an organization with a degree of brotherly solidarity between its members, in early Sufism *tarixa* referred first to a training method of an individual teacher or a path that a Muslim can follow to reach God (Vikør 2000, 442; Knysh 2000, 172-173, Hämeen-Anttila 2002, 12). Also in Wolof, the most widely spoken African language in Senegambia, *yoonu murid* translates to both Murid religious group and a Murid way or path. In everyday speech *yoon* means way, path, travel, rule or justice (Diouf 2008, 408).

A metaphor of Sufism as a path is widespread (Hämeen-Anttila 2002, 15, 29). Also Cheikh Amadou Bamba used this metaphor for instance in one of the numerous texts in which he writes that “I have not formed a brotherhood (*tarîqa*)…” (University of Dakar). This quote thus suggests that Bamba concentrated in “clearing” and “rehabilitating” “the path” of the Prophet and was less interested in the practicalities of establishing a religious organization.¹¹ To give a simplified definition, Murid is the one who follows the path of Cheikh Amadou Bamba by following the religious guides of the *Muridiyya*. In linguistic terms, the word Murid is derived from the Arabic word *murid* that Amadou Bamba generally used. *Murid* signifies “the one who desires” from the Arabic root “willpower” or “self-esteem” (see Monteil 1962, 89).

2.3 From rural to urban and overseas

In addition to the Murid *tarîxa* being a religious framework in which the “seekers after God” (Robinson 2000, 213) follow their guides, the brotherhood is an influential political

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¹⁰ Same linguistic root *brother* is present in French *la confrérie des mourides* and here suggested Finnish translation *Muridien veljeskunta*.

¹¹ “Je n’ai point formé une confrérie (*tariqa*)...”. Cited in French in an essay written in the University of Dakar provided as background material by a research participant.
and economic actor in Senegal. For instance the current and former presidents of Senegal, Macky Sall and Abdoulaye Wade, are both affiliated with the Murid brotherhood. The Murids’ current intense presence in businesses, street view and popular culture does not go unnoticed for a visitor in Senegal.

According to Riccio, the Murid training and solidarity system has proven its capacity to transform in relation to socioeconomic changes and even of crisis on various occasions (2004, 931). Muridism was first accommodated from the rural areas to urban spaces and while the brotherhood’s principal economic activity peanut farming lost some of its significance, the Murids started to take part on international trade.

First, in the rural environment the brotherhood was socially structured in daaras, working groups around the cheikhs. In daaras young unmarried men cultivated land in the service of a cheikh. Cruise O’Brien positions the working daara as “the Murid brotherhood’s major organizational innovation… probably the single institution which has most contributed to the brotherhood’s success.” (1971, 163). Whereas James F. Searing argues that the Murid daaras were modeled on Wolof Quranic schools, and thus not a completely new innovation. Searing also reminds that work and moral discipline were not the only ways of following the Murid path but followers could decide whether they desired to work, study or combine these two practices. (2002, 238-239.) In the wake of the Second World War, Murid migration to towns started to increase (Babou 2002, 156).

Second, in the context of cities, another social institution dahira, was created. The creation of the dahiras, local circles, responded to the new socio-economic setting that the Murids with rural origins were confronted with. Importantly, the move to urban environment risked loosening the central cheikh-taalibe-ties as the taalibes escaped the immediacy of the cheikhs. In dahira the followers of a same cheikh gathered together for religious practice and assistance in the integration of newcomers. (Coulon 1981, 132-136.) The dahiras were modeled of Xaadir- or Tiijaan-related groups who gathered for religious singing. In addition to recitation and prayer, the Murids also collected money for the cheikh and the dahira activities in meetings thus adding an economic orientation to the dahira. (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 251; Villalón 1995, xvii.) The dahiras thus fulfilled both religious and secular functions and soon gained a status of a key social institution of the brotherhood. Gradually gender, occupational and geographical lines started to play a role in the formation of the dahiras as well and these associations took on new functions such as assisting in the organization of pilgrimages and baptisms (Babou 2002, 155, 157).
Similar to the way Murids once constituted a minority in the Senegalese cities (see Babou 2002, 155), Murid traders faced a minority position as they started to migrate to European countries in the late 1960s. Droughts during the late 1970s and the early 1980s combined with the fall of the price of peanuts accelerated the movement of West African migrants to Europe. In addition to European countries, the United States became another popular destination for Murids in the 1980s. (Babou 2002, 158.) The Murid disciples in Europe and in the United States became known for their economic activeness and joint organization along *dahiras* once again, helped to rebuild communal solidarity. (Villalón 1995, 69; Vikør 2000, 449.)

Some of the new *dahiras* were modeled on international NGOs. For instance, Hizbut Tarqiyya was founded on the campus of the University of Dakar in 1975, Matlabul Fawzaini in 1975 by migrants living in Italy and Spain and Maam Jaara Buso by Murid women in New York. In 2001 some thirty Murid *dahiras* that were organized on the basis of a *cheikh*’s affiliation were to be found in New York. (Babou 2002, 155, 162, 164-165.)

In the cities of the world, the absence of personal *cheikh*s, RESPONSABLES OF *daarass* (*jawriñ*) and other chiefs gives often an important stature for the person elected as the president of the local *dahira* (Bava 2003, 153).

Not only the Murid disciples but also the *cheikh*s have adjusted to the new configurations of the brotherhood, namely to international migration, in that they have likewise started to travel (Bava 2003, 161). According to Bava, Murid *cheikh*s started to pay visits to migrant *taalibes* outside Africa from 1980s onwards. The first country of regular visits was France from where the custom soon spread to Italy, the United States and Spain. These visits not only brought material benefits for the travelling guides but also influenced the formation of migrant Murid communities. The *cheikh*s’ visits are especially gratifying for the migrant Murids because in Senegal it is rather the *taalibes* who travel to meet their guides and not the other way round. (Bava 2003, 152.)
3 RESEARCHING MURIDISM IN HELSINKI

3.1 Unprecedented encounters create the field

The data of this research consists of 13 interviews and participant observation, both conducted in Helsinki. From the beginning, the research became co-oriented by the research participants and thus data-based instead of a theory-based project. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 28-29) points out, the order of defining the research questions and the research settings is not fixed but the research questions may emerge from an opportunity to investigate an interesting group of people or situation. Listening for initiatives from the “field” led this research towards some of the most transnational personalities of the Murid brotherhood, the itinerant cheikhs. My original plan of data gathering included sole interviews with Murid disciples who had migrated to Helsinki. Anyhow, the first attempt to interview a Murid taalibe resident in Helsinki resulted instead in a meeting and a short interview with an itinerant cheikh who was visiting Helsinki.

After this first encounter I received invitations from the Murid disciples to meet visiting Murid guides in the disciples’ homes and elsewhere, and thus I decided to update my initial research plan and let unforeseen topics and methods, namely observation, to emerge. I had the opportunity to meet altogether eight itinerant cheikhs at relatively short intervals during a period of two months that were situated in October, November and December 2012. Three of the cheikhs I met in Helsinki belong to the Mbacké-Mbacké-family whereas others are Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s brothers’, Cheikh Ibrahima Fall’s or Amadou Bamba’s mother’s Mame Diarra Bousso’s families’ descendants. “Do your best to visit the cheikh before he leaves Finland.”12 I was often told before meeting a visiting guide of the brotherhood. This reveals the significance the Murid disciples attach to their religious guides.

Altogether, seven travelling cheikhs of the Murid brotherhood were interviewed. All cheikh interviews were conducted at Murid disciples’ homes except for one cheikh interview which was conducted in a café. Five cheikh interviews were recorded and transcribed and

12 Telephone conversation, fieldnote.
from the two unrecorded interviews written notes were taken. The interviews with the cheikhs were conducted in French, English and Wolof and later translated into English. The interview quotes are marked with an identifier “cheikh” and an abbreviation of the original language of the interview in parentheses. Communication with the cheikhs was mediated by a disciple translator in four cases. In three cases, no translator was needed. The need for a translator was usually a consequence of my insufficient competence in Wolof but sometimes also partly related to questions of status.

Each encounter in the field was unique and required adaptation to changing situations. In most cases, I did not have precise before-hand information of whom I would be meeting and I thus discovered the cheikh’s age, language preference, status inside the brotherhood or orientation as a guide, all aspects that influence the formalities of the interview, only in the interview situation. The traveling cheikhs I encountered are from the Murid as well as from the Baay Faal branch of the Murid brotherhood. All interviewee cheikhs are men and their ages vary from twenties to sixties. Even the youngest of the guides interviewed seemed experienced in travel as religious guides since they had started to travel at an early age. Some had commenced regular travelling in other African and especially West-African countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroun and Gabon. The geographical orientations of the cheikhs vary. Regular visits to European countries such as France, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Germany, Portugal, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Estonia are usual. One of the interviewed cheikhs pays annual visits of two to four months to the United States whereas another one mentioned the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Morocco as his regular travel destinations.

Moreover, the durations of the cheikhs’ stay in Helsinki varied greatly from the most usual one or two weeks to several months whilst the shortest visit I participated in lasted only for 24 hours. One of the reasons that allowed fieldwork specifically in the context of the cheikhs’ visits is that the initiation of the data gathering was done before the most important annual celebration of the Murid year, the Grand Magal of Touba. The Grand Magal is an extensive collective celebration which commemorates Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s departure in exile. It is celebrated in the city of Touba in Senegal as well as in all migration destination countries of the Murids. As the most important annual gathering it has a significant religious as well as economic importance for the whole brotherhood. Almost all of the interviewed cheikhs told that they would be returning to Senegal for the

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13 For language abbreviations see 9.1 A note on orthography.
18th day of the Islamic month of Safar, which fell on 1st of January in 2013, to celebrate the Grand Magal in the city of Touba.

The data gathering thus coincided with a “rush period” of the Murid cheikhs to Finland before both the most important annual celebration of the brotherhood and the Finnish Christmas holidays during which some of the migrant Murids may have an opportunity to travel to Senegal as well. The timing of the visits is an example of how the Murid calendar and the activities in Touba influence the religious activities in Helsinki. Additionally, travelling to visit migrant disciples is often only one of the cheikhs’ occupations and therefore also various other factors influence travel arrangements. For instance, an interviewed cheikh who is also involved in agricultural work mentioned that he plans to stay in Senegal for cultivation and harvesting during the rainy season, which lasts approximately from July to October, before setting off again.

The interviews with the cheikhs were centred on their travel, their tasks as religious guides and their views of the situation of the Murids in Finland. Sometimes the conversation meandered around different themes such as international politics, the basis of the Murid doctrine, different Murid branches, migration, the Murid communities in other European countries or the Finnish culture. The interview situations often diverged since some—not all—of the cheikh interviews were held in a collective social setting which influenced both what was said and what was asked during the interview. This together with the fact that the cheikhs had differing schedules that allowed for shorter or more in-depth conversation between receiving the local Murids, had an effect on the topics discussed. On several occasions, I met a visiting cheikh first in the evening with local Murids and then returned during the next day in order to conduct an interview when there would not be as many disciples visiting. Once I waited, as late as after midnight, until almost everyone else had left and the cheikh indicated that he would be ready for a discussion.

In addition to interviewing the visiting cheikhs, using participatory observation as a data gathering method became relevant when I chose to deviate from a fixed research design and develop a more exploratory approach in selecting a case for inquiry. This kind of an approach is characteristic to ethnographic research. Participatory observation systematically focuses on people’s accounts in the everyday contexts instead of conditions created or highly structured by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 3-4; Lindisfarne 2002, 404). As a method it enables the researcher to study actual practices and lived realities instead of texts’, experts’ or even practitioners’ formal suggestions of how
religion ought to be (Harvey 2011, 217-218).

As a participant, the researcher may attempt to observe from the margins, with minimal influence on the events, what happens when people enact religion whereas on the other extreme, the researcher may seek to experience “the fully sensual, embodied, imaginative, ecstatic and/or ordinary performance of religious life” (Harvey 2011, 219) and thus appear undistinguishable from the religious practitioners in his or her behavior. My involvement in participant observation was to be found somewhere in-between the extremes. At times, I indeed situated myself in the margins as a ‘mere’ observer of ritual practice which means that I did for example listen from the side the chanting of the xassida during the gathering of the dahira. I did not approach the cheikhs to seek prayer or guidance as most disciples would do but if a cheikh would pray for me in the end of an interview I would receive the prayer. Even if I did not act as a full practitioner of religion in the field, I necessarily participated at various levels: exchanging greetings, engaging in informal conversation, sharing meals and the opening of palms to receive collective prayers from the cheikhs. Most importantly, I would seek the ‘proper’ behavior in the visits’ settings which did self-evidently involve acting to and developing my sense of social hierarchies inside the group in question. The cheikh-taalibe-social order is the most visible of these hierarchies.

In the limits of a Master’s thesis study, I did not involve in extensive fieldwork but instead focused my observations in a series of cheikh visits. Ethnographic fieldnotes were produced of seven evenings or afternoons of participatory observation in Senegalese migrants’ homes during the cheikhs’ visits. In two instances, these evenings also included attending a gathering of the dahira, once in a rented location. ‘Fieldwork’ meant thus moving back and forth in the social world that was not geographically separable from my everyday environment of study and life, producing fieldnotes immediately after the visits and reflecting my observations and experiences of the study. Typically, an in-depth ethnographic study is facilitated by a concentration on a single or few settings and the data is analyzed to interpret meanings in these local or wider contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 3).

The Murid cheikh interviews and the ethnographic observations provide an invaluable source of information of the research context: of the social environment and networks of the Senegalese Murids in Helsinki. While creating a sociological perspective on religion, there is a constant need to contextualize the research subject in order to situate individual experiences in specific social and temporal circumstances (McGuire 2002). The contexts in
terms of which the research participants act in mobilizing Muridism are not to be considered as physical locations but as social constructions (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 39). What comes to the sampling of time inside the research contexts, the cheikh gatherings as observed moments represent a more extraordinary than a routine social space in the migrant Murids’ daily distribution of time. As a source of data the reflexive observations of these moments does by no means form an exhaustive statement of the practitioners’ religious life but they do, however, provide a view to collective ever-changing settings in which experiences, practices and representations situate. (see Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 35-37.)

3.2 The Murid disciple interviews

In addition to mapping a phenomenon previously unstudied in Helsinki, interviewing the cheikhs and attending their visits as a participant observer fortified a common ground for discussions on Muridism in Helsinki with the migrant taalibes. Having conducted almost all interviews with the cheikhs and attended their visits as a participant observer, I moved on to conducting interviews with the local Murid taalibes. Six Senegalese Murid disciples who lived in Helsinki at the time of the research were interviewed. The interviews were conducted mostly in places chosen by the research participants in order to make the interviews practical for the research participants. Five interviews were conducted in cafés and one in the interviewee’s home.

The oral interviews of the Murid disciples were conducted in French and in English. Also the Murid interviewees’ first language Wolof, together with Arab and Finnish, features in the interviews. All Murid disciple interviews (eight hours) were recorded and transcribed. Most of the data is originally produced in French and the French interview quotes have been translated into English. In translating the interviews I aimed at rigor in structures and significations. While analyzing the interviews, I resolved the issue of the variety of languages by keeping the original French transcriptions of the translated quotes on display until the final phases of writing in order to cross-check my interpretations. The carrying out of the interviews in multiple languages was a practical necessity but also justifiable in a sense that I wanted the interviewees to choose a language in which they would be most comfortable to be interviewed, in order to get as expressive a data as possible. The Murid
disciple interview quotes are marked with an identifier “taalibe” and an abbreviation of the original language of the interview in parentheses.

The sampling of the disciple interviewees complied with the following criteria. First, the interviewees should identify in being Murid. All the interviewed Murids participate to some extent in the Murid activities in Helsinki. Second, I opted to focus my study on Murids who have migrated to Finland from Senegal or to Finland from Senegal via other countries so that all the interviewed Murid disciples have experienced some kind of a migrant situation. Therefore, I have not interviewed non-migrant Finnish Murids or migrant Murids from other countries than Senegal even if there are some in Helsinki. With this criterion as a basis, I intended to reflect the heterogeneity of Murid religious dispositions by choosing different kinds of interviewees inside a limited group of people. I will further clarify this process in the following chapters.

All interviewee Murid disciples are men and their ages vary from twenty to fifty. During my observations in the field no migrant women would regularly participate in the cheikh visits – the clear majority of Murids in Helsinki seem to be Senegalese men. To enhance the multiplicity of Murid migrants’ experiences in the study, I intended to choose interviewees who had resided in Finland for varying periods of time. All Murid disciple interviewees had arrived in Finland during the 21st century but the duration of their stay in the country varied from few months to more than a decade.

The interviews with the Murid taalibes were carried out as open thematic interviews. One of the most important premises for using interviewing as a research method is a desire to emphasize the subjectivity of the researcher and the interviewee participants in the research conditions (cp. Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 35). Interviews as conversations may give considerable freedom for the teller and the listener to develop meanings together and to clarify uncertainties that without exception emerge in human communication (Riessman 1993, 55). An interview is an interactive encounter in which the interviewee and the interviewer get hold of an imperfect view of each other’s world of experience. Despite the openness of a thematic interview, discussion in the interview is goal-oriented at least for the researcher. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 41-42.)

Thanks to the interviews’ length, prepared nature, the absence of great distractions and the interviewees’ motivation, the Murid disciple interviews resulted in in-depth data which I consider as a primary source of narratives in this study. The Murid disciples’ interviews often started from notions of how the interviewee had become Murid and proceeded then
to other themes such as the *cheikhs*’ visits, Murids’ organization in Helsinki, the interviewee’s migration story, transnational practices and future plans. However, a variety of other topics emerged considering life in both Finland as well as in Senegal and other countries. With the passage of the research process I learned to ask the right questions from the research participants.

3.3 Ethical considerations

In the absence of institutional review processes the researcher may begin to fulfill the elementary requirements for responsible research realization by following research ethics guidelines. The six core principles of *Framework for Research Ethics 2010* of the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council refer to:

- Integrity and independence of the research.
- Research participants’ voluntary and informed consent to take part in the research.
- Confidentiality of participant information as well as protection of the participants’ anonymity.
- Analysis of risks to avoid harm to the research participants at all stages of the research.

(ESRC 2010)

In my view, questions regarding the ethicality of the research cannot be solved at once but they require ongoing reflection and cross-checking of both the way we, as researchers, treat the research participants and the way we produce and communicate knowledge about the research participants’ religious life to other audiences (see Bird & Lamoureux Scholes 2011, 81). In the following chapter, I shall begin by placing the key ethical principles under scrutiny and then proceed in a more comprehensive discussion on research making.

Despite its exploratory nature, the current research was designed keeping the dignity and autonomy of the research participants in mind and anticipating conditions that might disturb the integrity of the research. The independence of the research is here made explicit for the reader as well as it was communicated for the research participants during the fieldwork. Both integrity and independence of the research are related to an objective of impartiality. This objective became a topic that was discussed with the research participants and a principle that was consciously executed in the collection of the data in ways that I will elaborate further in the next two chapters.
The voluntariness of participation presumes a possibility to consent or refuse in participating in the research after being informed of the purpose, methods and uses of the research (Bird & Lamoureux Scholes 2011, 87). In order to conduct overt participant observation I intended to discuss my research with as many participant disciples present as possible. The *cheikhs* were mainly informed of my position as a university student conducting a Master’s thesis research on Muridism in Helsinki beforehand by the Murid disciples. What comes to the migrant interviews, I intended first of all to interview only those who seemed motivated to dedicate their time for an interview. All migrant interviewee candidates were contacted directly. To assure the voluntariness of participation I did not for example repeatedly ask for an interview from a candidate who did not respond to my enquiry as it could be interpreted as an indirect refuse. Second, an informed consent form in French and in English was used in order to communicate precisely about the voluntariness and confidentiality of participation in the beginning of each migrant interview.

Reading and signing the informed consent form had a positive effect on the interview situations making them somewhat more formal. After all, an open thematic interview is not an ordinary discussion even if it might occasionally resemble one. With the help of the form I discussed the interviewees’ right to withdraw at any moment and a right not to answer questions. In addition to the basic information of the thesis research project, the informed consent form also included my contact information and an encouragement to ask questions and make clarifications after the interviews.

As researchers are called upon to protect the privacy of the research participants (Bird & Lamoureux Scholes 2011, 86) specific personal information such as name, age, migration route, education, profession, residential area, marital status and other possibly identifiable information is not included in the study. Safeguarding anonymity is, however, not enough since “…investigations of religious phenomena can directly or indirectly occasion heightened reputational risks for those we are studying.” (Bird & Lamoureux Scholes 2011, 87). As this thesis research touches members of a small and previously un-researched group inside what can be called a “visible minority”, the Senegalese born residents in Finland, the researcher has to pay special attention to avoid communicating potentially too sensitive issues or unbalanced representations which might cause reputational harm. Again, the reader of this Thesis may be reminded that the accounts of this study cannot be generalized to the religious lives or migration experiences of all
Senegalese migrants in Helsinki, the majority of whom do not, in my estimation, actively participate in collective Murid practices in Helsinki.

How am I then able to estimate that the majority of the Senegalese migrants in Helsinki do not, at the moment, regularly participate in the collective Murid activities? It is worth noticing that my study interest originally arises from encounters within the Senegalese spheres in Helsinki as well as in Dakar, Paris and Bamako. In the first place, I negotiated and gained access to the research field of this Thesis through few Senegalese acquaintances that I had become acquainted with through recreational activities. What comes to my academic studies, I had conducted two interviews with Murid disciples in Helsinki in 2010 for my Bachelor’s thesis (Peltonen 2010).

In addition to being a remarkable practical advantage for the research, the prior familiarity with the phenomena under study generates a need to shake and bracket one’s preconceptions and to define limits for the information used in the current Thesis study. As a response to the question posed above, my estimation was indeed initially based on a preconception of the Senegalese migrants’ participation rate in the Murid activities in Helsinki. However, this preconception was tested in the interviews and supported by the field observations. At worst, researcher’s preconceptions are misleading yet they may also be used as a tool once they are consciously tested or suddenly discovered and overcome. I hold as a positive sign the fact that during the fieldwork of this Thesis I did not experience solely familiarity within recognizable modes of social interaction and practices, but the chaotic and ever-changing nature of the social realities challenged me to rethink and think about my preconceptions.

As a general rule, the analysis draws upon information that has been retrieved either from the fieldwork observations of the cheikh visits or from the interviews conducted specifically for the purpose of this study. In these situations, my position as a researcher was premeditated and communicated. Other information, first of all ordinary observations or discussions with Senegalese migrants or non-migrants before, during and after the gathering of the data, is not used as ethnographic material but is instead excluded from the analytical scope as confidential. I consider this limitation of the data as an ethical necessity.

At present, new questions considering the limits of information use constantly come to the fore as religious practitioners, experts, associations and groups use modern technologies, for instance social media to display their daily lives and share information. The Murids of
different countries also have a wide presence on the web which is not surprising given the transnational dimensions of the brotherhood. Out of respect of privacy, electronic information can either be used as ethnographic evidence without the consent of all parties. What the new technology does more simply enable, anyhow, is the extension of interaction on research issues with the research participants post data gathering. I was for instance contacted online by few *cheikhs* after their travel had continued in another country.

### 3.4 Representational decisions

As various social science theories such as feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial theories have concluded, an image of the researcher’s neutrality can no longer be sustained. Researcher as a speaker cannot transcend the location from where he or she speaks and this location has always an effect on what is said. (Alcoff 1991, 6-7, 12.) My location as a researcher among Senegalese Murid men in Helsinki differs from the research participants’ location not only in ontological terms but also in diverse social terms. Thus it may be said that I am speaking of others’ experiences in two senses. Since experiences other than one’s own cannot be directly researched, the analysis of others’ experiences is, in the last resort, the researcher’s own construction of meanings (Sakaranaho 2001, 7-8) that is informed for instance by Western scientific concepts. In other words, the interpretation of others’ experiences is always mediated and not an “act of discovery” of “true selves” (Alcoff 1991, 9). Rather, the researcher is building a representation of the researched others and confronting numerous decisions in the course of this process (see Riessman 1993, 8).

First, as a researcher I am part of the Finnish ethnic “majority” and the research participants in contrast belong to an ethnic “minority”. This juxtaposition gives impetus for addressing questions of power and responsibility. The legitimacy and competence of academic students to speak for others has to be questioned. However, a complete withdrawal from speaking of cultural others does not provide desired solution, and is probably not even possible in the increasingly interconnected world (see Alcoff 1991, 21; Hirsiaho 2005, 62-64). Second, researching Islam in a cultural context that has been subjected to colonialism from a Western White non-Muslim location stirs a methodological challenge to avoid *orientalist* views and to go beyond the production of a uniform typology (see Sakaranaho 1998, 26-31). In naming Western researchers’ views as
orientalist, the Saidian critique is based on Edward Said’s (1978) publication *Orientalism* and refers to an inability to encounter and comprehend Islam and the Muslim East as a cultural and religious sphere other than one’s own.

Now that silence is already counted out as an option, what remains is a definition of an alternative for the reductive approach. This approach may be created through “efforts undertaken out of respect, interest and appreciation of the diverse others” (Bird & Lamourex Scholes 2011, 84). In this Thesis, these efforts include enhancing a perception of the research participants as autonomous social actors and remaining open to critique. Ethicality of the research means also to put considerable effort in cultural immersion, studying languages and histories of a tradition in order to produce insightful representations. (Bird & Lamoureux Scholes 2011, 88-89.) The hybridity and interculturality of the research field of this Thesis manifests in its multilingual research environment, which produced a necessity to manage simultaneously French, Wolof, English and Arabic in a Finnish language area. The researcher’s linguistic competencies are a prerequisite for a nuanced understanding of the social, cultural and historical layers of the researched setting. In addition to the three other languages, even my elementary sense of Wolof added to this understanding by facilitating communication, enabling identification of word choices and by enhancing situational sensitivity. Most importantly, from the beginning my aim was to build a dialogical relation with the interviewees.

In the interview dialogue, for instance Muslim/non-Muslim-positioning surfaced in at least twofold explicit manners. In some interviews I was located as an interviewer representing a non-Muslim position, the interviewees expressing their appreciation for the opportunity to engage in an interreligious or intercultural dialogue. On one occasion in the beginning of an interview with a *cheikh* I was similarly positioned as a non-Muslim interviewer but the interviewee, unlike the previous interviewees, expressed concern about the supposed difficulty of talking about Muridism with a non-Muslim interviewer who might not believe in his explanations on Sufism, a concept that in his words is “not easy to believe in” (*cheikh*, E). However, once the conversation advanced this barrier was somewhat crossed and the discussion resulted in one of the longest and most in-depth interviews of the visiting *cheikhs*. Some interviews were naturally more dialogical than others but almost all interviews comprised sections in which diverse counter-questions were asked not only on the purposes of the research but also on the researcher’s religious convictions and personal views.
Finally, despite the above discussed “othering” and an elaboration of the researcher’s as well as research participants’ differing locations, the basis for dialogue was built on the similarities and shared experiences between the researcher and the interviewees. For instance, an interview with a cheikh was usually first facilitated by an intermediary of a Murid disciple who would make an introduction that I often complemented. Without exception, a discussion with a cheikh started with the interviewee cheikh’s question whether I had visited the city of Touba in Senegal. I was able to give an affirmative answer to this question from which point the conversation moved forward. Part of the mutual trust that allowed for interviews with the cheikhs was thus built through a shared experience of travel and the Senegalese center of the Muridiyya. The fact that I was reasonably familiar with West-African living environments thanks to my sojourns in four countries in the area formed a common ground for discussion with the disciple interviewees as well. To summarize, I see an establishment of a dialogical relation that is based on shared linguistic grounds and mutual trust as a partial solution for the methodological problem of representation. In practice, the dialogical relation led to different kinds of negotiations of involvement and representation.

3.5 Navigating between different positions

One characteristic of ethnographic fieldwork is that the researcher has to navigate between various given and taken positions. Mira Karjalainen who has conducted ethnographic fieldwork researching freedom discourses among contemporary Finnish sailors pays attention to the researcher’s gender in relation to an insider or outsider position in the field. Karjalainen notes that in the manly shipping world, a woman researcher “onboard” may threaten or reinforce masculine orders and ideals (2007, 173).

The interview situations of this Thesis may be framed as cross-gender but gender-related issues such as masculinity or fatherhood were not primarily at stake in the discussions (see e.g. Rios Sandoval 2009 for cross-gender interview dynamics in discussing fatherhood). Differing from Karjalainen’s (2007) work, my position as woman researcher was negotiated in an interplay of ethnic, national and religious positions and thus I do not see gender alone as a decisive factor in the creation of the data. The intersection of different social factors in the gendered researcher position allowed for a considerable leeway. Thus, the questions specifically related to gender were mostly of practical nature such as wearing
a headscarf in the presence of a few of the oldest visiting cheikhs as advised in the hallway. Otherwise, I did not percept that my presence as a woman researcher would have significantly threatened or reinforced the gendered order or masculine sociality.

What deserves more reflection than the position of a woman researcher in a man-dominated field in this context is what Graham Harvey headlines “not converting in fieldwork”. A specific feature of the study of religions is that a researcher often receives an invitation to religiously immerse in the researched community. (Harvey 2011, 223-224.) As my interest in converting was inquired and at times very overtly recommended, I had to accentuate that despite my high appreciation of Muridism and aim, to a limited extent, to get involved in it for the purposes of this study, seeking for a personal religious guidance is not the aim of this qualitative exploratory Master’s thesis study. According to René Gothóni it is not possible to develop a perceptive view and communicate substantial information of people’s experiences and religiosity from a completely detached perspective. A researcher conducting fieldwork needs a capacity to alternate between an involvement in the researched issue and a detachment from it in order to gain academic perspective. (Gothóni 2000, 45-46; 1997, 141-143.)

Recognizing that the researcher is also a research instrument, an experiencing and sympathizing human being goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement that the research participants may also reflect on religious activities, ideas, experiences and representations in an analytical and/or critical manner instead of being mere believers. This latter recognition led me to consider the interviewees to some extent as co-researchers. (see Harvey 2011, 221-222.) I was lent publications, sent hagiographic texts as well as scientific articles and web-site addresses that would offer information on Muridism. The insightfulness and helpfulness of the research participants enriched the discussions but it also produced a need to retain a sufficient level of independence to define and critically discuss the study topic. As I was at some point positioned as a person who could promote Muridism in Finland I could not, for instance, approve of a suggestion to write this Thesis in Finnish. Nevertheless, I promised to consider writing an article in Finnish. Neither did I approve suggestions on drawing information exclusively from religious authorities instead of also familiarizing with the views of ordinary practitioners.

Consequently, the dialogical relations pushed me to be more clear about my study interests and motivations. It required a determination to hear a large scale of voices in order to construct a balanced view of the topic that could contribute to the academic debate.
Ultimately, this study cannot be about “giving voice” for the Senegalese Murid disciples in Helsinki. Instead it is about hearing, recording and interpreting voices that are produced in a dialogical relation (see Riessman 1993, 8). During the fieldwork process I started to view my task as a researcher as a describer of the multiplicity of voices. Therefore, a conscious representational decision was made to select both guides and disciples, both with and without Baay Faal affiliations, as interviewees. This decision resulted in a multi-voiced data.

The practitioners emphasize a uniformity of all Murids. Rather than to distinguish and separate the Baay Faal voices from others I seek to take into account the heterogeneity that coexists with the uniformity of Murids in the diasporic location. The dahiras and daaras are often organized along cheikh, branch, gender, study or locality lines. Whereas in the context of a relatively new location, such as Helsinki Murids irrespective of age, ethnicity, personal cheikh, religious background and Senegalese birthplace tend to form a dahira together.

Tuula Sakaranaho notes that while conducting research in Turkey among Kemalist women, new feminists, as well Islamic women, the act of oscillating between different groupings’ ideologies was not a simple task. In contrast to the research on the issue of women in Turkey, the different interview groups in this Thesis, the disciples and the travelling cheikhs, both of whom comprised of Murids and Baay Faal Murids, were in friendly terms with each other. (Sakaranaho 1998, 76-77.) Nevertheless, one should not ignore the question of who has the right to define the religion under research. Interviewing religious practitioners and experts of different positions most probably brings about also disputed issues that most likely exist in every religious community. In discussing religion, the interviewees brought forward not only their subjective and practical experiences, but also normative remarks, that is to say what in their view Muridism should or should not be about.

In the clearest manner, the normative remarks were made with regards to the Baay Faal orthodoxy. This is not surprising given the history of the Baay Faal position in which communal stigmatization and deviation from the norm have been part of the formation of the branch (see Pezeril 2008, 791). Already in the time of Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibrahima Fall, the latter was criticized or even referred to as Bamba’s “madman” (Cruise O’Brien 1970, 145) because of his radical behaviour and refusal to pray and fast. A more recent normative discourse that I came across during the interviews makes the
division between the ostentatious undisciplined “false” Baay Faals (interview, *baay faux* in French) and the humble, hardworking and disciplined “real” Baay Faals. Pezeril takes note of the category of “false” Baay Faals (*baay faux*, Fr) that emerged as the associations and modes of religious adhesion began diversifying and individualizing. In the Murid branch’s internal negotiations of legitimacy some of the new ways of religious adhesion were contested. (Pezeril 2008, 792-793.) Still today the Baay Faals are sometimes criticized by other Senegalese Muslims (see e.g. Riccio 2004, 942; Audrain 2004, 150). Despite the normative remarks, the interviewees of this Thesis, however, principally highlighted the unity of all Murids irrespective of their affiliations in Helsinki—and around the globe.

With regard to the normative statements, my aim does not differ from the overall aim of the research which is to listen to multiple voices without taking a stand for one voice or the other and to produce a comprehensive view of the topic. My last note on research making touches again on the independency and authenticity of the representation: the informants should be able to recognize themselves in the accounts of them which does not, however, signify that they should be of same opinion about everything that the academics write (Bird & Lamoureux Scholes 2011, 88-89).
4 ANALYZING NARRATIVES OF TRANSNATIONAL ISLAM

4.1 The relationship between transnationalism and diaspora

The language used to describe the migrant experience has undergone substantial changes along with the prime of migration as a global phenomenon. In the past two decades scholars have abandoned the old perspective on migration that assumed sharp breaks with countries of origin and a singular path of assimilation in the new countries of residence. The new compensatory migration perspectives cast light on the complexity and fluidity of international migration. These perspectives intend to better reflect on migrants’ lives that usually are not unambiguously segmented between two countries. The approach called ‘transnational’ emerged to capture the simultaneousness and multi-sited nature of migrants’ experience. (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc 1994, 8; Brubaker 2005, 8; Castles & Miller 2009, 20; Levitt & Jarowsky 2007, 130; Vertovec 2009, 13.)

In one of the most prevalent definitions, Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc initially defined transnationalism as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (1994, 7). First, transnationalism thus referred in a relatively limited sense to the migrants’ ties and in a wider sense it referred to networks, groups and organisations that cut across nation-state borders (see Faist 2010, 9). On the whole, transnationalism requires being anchored in several places.

The first applications of the transnational perspective in particular have been criticized of overgeneralization and inaccuracy –most migrants maintain some kind of relations outside their new country of residence yet if most migration is called transnational without considerable distinctions, the concept loses its descriptive usefulness (Boccagni 2010, 202; Levitt & Jarowsky 2007, 131). To avoid inaccuracy, Paolo Boccagni, for instance, argues for the need to differentiate between public and private transnationalism (2010, 186). The potentials of significant public transnationalism should not be overestimated when it comes to a relatively recent and slightly structured migration flow (Boccagni 2010, 196), such as the Senegalese migration to Finland. Transnational practices may remain private even if
they are supported by a shared sense of belonging or obligation inside ethnic or religious community.

Recent scholarship, for instance, looks at transnationalism through multi-sited and multi-layered social spaces or social fields that are continuously reconstructed by those agents embedded in said spaces (Levitt & Jarowsky 2007, 131). In a discussion on the implications of transnational Islam, Eugenia Siapera takes Murids as an example of “transnational Islam as operating in transnational circuits” (2007, 99). Although both migrants and non-migrants participate in the formation of transnational social spaces not all live their lives within a transnational social space. In addition to mobility between individuals in the sending and the receiving societies, those who are involved in transnational sociality often experience asymmetries in moralities, access to information as well as to material resources. These asymmetries are bound to the way different localities shape social relations in the transnational social field. Therefore, an understanding of human dynamics including both solidarity and conflict is crucial in the perception of migration processes. (Carling 2008; Castles & Miller 2009.)

In regards to religion in transnational social fields, migrants who follow particular saints or religious teachers may form imagined global communities of connection (Levitt & Jarowsky 2007, 141). The term diaspora is used here to refer to this type of imagined connectedness. It serves to discuss the consciousness of globality peculiar to the group under study and responds to a need to define the transnational optic more accurately since different migrants’ transnationalisms vary considerably (see Levitt & Jarowsky 2007, 131). Diaspora as a concept is linked to transnationalism yet it demonstrates a distinct dynamic in the transformation of religion that is enacted transnationally (see Vertovec 2009, 128, 136; Levitt & Jarowsky 2007, 130).

Following Steven Vertovec’s theoretical distinction between the two concepts, I refer first to transnationalism as “the actual, ongoing exchanges of information, money and resources –as well as regular travel and communication– that members of a diaspora may undertake with others in their homeland or elsewhere within the globalized ethnic community” (2009, 137). Second, I refer to diaspora as an imagined connection to the place of origin and to people with similar origins (Vertovec 2009, 4-7, 136-137; Brah 2007, 76). In other words, in this study transnationalism refers to concrete practices whereas diaspora is not considered as a tangible entity but more of a type of consciousness, an idiom or a claim (see Brubaker 2005).
In previous discussions on diaspora, the Jewish dispersion was seen as the “pragmatic case” which defined the term diaspora. Until recently, the conceptualization of the Jewish diaspora echoes in the term especially through the reference to a conceptual homeland. (Brubaker 2005, 1-2; Safran 1991, 83.) According to the classical criteria of diaspora conceptualized by William Safran there are six common features that characterize diasporic groups: 1) dispersal from an original homeland to two or more regions 2) retaining a collective memory, vision or myth about the homeland 3) partial alienation from or lack of acceptance in the host society 4) an idea of an eventual return to the ideal homeland 5) idealization of a collective commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland 6) continuous relation to the homeland in one way or another which importantly defines the ethnocommunal consciousness (1991, 83-84). Robin Cohen has further developed this criteria by emphasizing a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement and the possibility of a distinctive life in host countries with a tolerance of pluralism (2008, 6-7, 17). Behind a group’s (self)-definition as a diaspora there is a desire for survival as a group instead of completely assimilating into other collectivities, forgetting connections or distancing themselves from the origins (Clifford 1997, 310; Vertovec 2009, 131).

The term diaspora has been used in a plethora of contexts, for instance when referring to people with African origins as the “African diaspora” in Finland (see e.g. Rastas 2010). Nevertheless, in regards to research on Senegalese migrant Murids, transnationalism as a theoretical concept is used more often than is the concept of diaspora (nonetheless see Evers Rosander 2004). Just like the case of the concept ‘transnational’, a proliferation in the use of ‘diaspora’ in both academic writing and different communities’ self-definitions has produced a need to define the concept case-specifically (Brubaker 2005; Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk 2005; Vertovec 2009; 129-131). In this Thesis, I understand diaspora as a type of consciousness that is created in a communal religious context.

4.2 Dimensions of religious agency and collective memory

Instead of considering religion as a matter of the past, or a whole that can be understood once and for all, Danièle Hervieu-Léger positions change in the core of the research on religion. She argues that a researcher is to tackle the “lines of transformation” around
which religion reconstructs itself in order to remain meaningful in the modern world. (2000, 69.) It is through observing the ways individuals and collectives “are agentic in both reproducing and producing” (Leming 2007, 75) religion that these lines of transformation can be observed.

Negotiation and change are indispensable and peculiarly visible outcomes when religious practices are settled in an entirely new environment. In this study, I discuss religion in the intersection of change and continuity with the help of the concept of *religious agency*. According to Laura M. Leming it may be understood as

…a personal and collective claiming and enacting of dynamic religious identity. As *religious* identity, it may include, but is not limited to, a received or an acquired identity, whether passed on by family, religious group, or other social entity such as an educational community, or actively sought. To constitute religious *agency*, this identity is claimed and lived as one’s own, with an insistence on active ownership. (2007, 74.)

As Leming points out, an active claiming of an identity characterizes religious agency. Religious agency refers to the individuals’ actions and choices, claims and aspirations that participate in the gradual transformation of religious institutions and other social structures. Religious agency may be thus used as a lens to observe change. (Leming 2007, 74.)

Participant observation as a research method and religious agency as a conceptual lens interconnect: they both privilege a view of religion as action, as something that is done. From this viewpoint, some insight into the lived realities of religion is a prerequisite for understanding religion and theorizing about it. (see Harvey 2011, 222.) To observe religious agency, I adopt first a working definition of religion as a way of believing. This engenders talking, like Hervieu-Léger, rather of believing than belief, and paying attention to action and structure in addition to the content of belief. Hervieu-Léger suggests that “…believing is belief in action, as it is experienced”. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 72.)

Believing is both conscious and unconscious action that takes place in temporal dimensions. Past, present and future become engaged as the lived-out religious identities are “powered by memories, hopes and choices” (Leming 2007, 77). At the conscious level, religious agency may be enacted through individuals’ strategic behaviors and performances of dynamic religious identities. These identities may be directed towards chosen goals. (Leming 2007, 74, 89.)

Today, individuals may choose and engage in belief from a more voluntary basis than before to draw practical implications to their lives. Transformations take place in the
modes of believing, that may be shaped as individualized and diffuse, but belief as a formalized body of convictions still gains its validity in its ability to give meaning and coherence to the individuals’ experience. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 72-74.) It may be stated that, in general, individuals’ distance from the all-embracing institutions of belief has grown. Nevertheless, economic, social and cultural determinations still weigh on the symbolic activity by limiting and enabling belief (see Hervieu-Léger 2000, 74-75, 167) – in other words, contemporary religious agency is still constructed within specific social contexts. Departing from the notion of socially constructed identities (see Baumann 1999; Hall 1999; Hylland Eriksen 2002; Joseph 2004; Martikainen, Sintonen & Pitkänen 2006), the observation of religious agency enables the inclusion of not only social groups but also references to any other relevant relationship in the scope of the research. These references may be made for instance to supernatural powers, historical personages or contemporary secular entities. Second, the understanding of religious agency in this Thesis is informed by Hervieu-Léger’s view on religion as a chain of belief. In Hervieu-Léger’s words

It is not the continuity in itself that matters but the fact that of its being the visible expression of a lineage which the believer expressly lays claim to and which confers membership of a spiritual community that gathers past, present and future believers. (2000, 81.)

By approaching religion as a chain of belief, the researcher is able to direct attention to the way “belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled.” (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 82) and to the type of religious agency that is produced in the construction of a membership. Remarkably, producing a chain of belief requires a process of sharing the past with others, in other words a mobilization of a collective memory. Often, long-lasting forms of co-operation and social solidarity cultivate a collective memory. However, according to Hervieu-Léger, “In the heightened tension between the unrestrained globalization of social phenomena and the extreme fragmentation of individual experience” (2000, 166) groups possess less capacity to assimilate a collective memory (2000, 123). Consequently, engagement in the processes of memory cannot be taken for granted. Instead, it often requires specific religious agency from the believers.

It is precisely in the vacillating societies of memory that a need for the experience of continuity may emerge. Differentiation of memories into categories, such as national, family and class, and the instantaneousness of experience may engender appeals to reproduce the past and evoke a religious memory. This happens not least because an
imagination of continuity is a prerequisite for collective identities. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 127, 141.)

When a collective memory is produced, an authority of a tradition is usually invoked in the support of the act of believing (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 76). Even if religion and religious agency become thus anchored in tradition they are not removed from the world of change. Tradition contains a creative power; it is open to interpretations and revision. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 86-87; Hylland Eriksen 2002, 72.) One representative statement of this is Leming’s study in which she analyzes how woman-conscious Catholic women produce a link in the chain of belief by reaffirming important aspects of the Christian story, not only using existing resources of tradition but also strategically shaping new approaches to everyday religion (2007, 78, 88). Religion is required to incorporate the needs of the present to tradition if it is to maintain its topicality for the believers. In the Thesis at hand, the religious “tradition in the act of becoming itself” (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 127) is approached through the research participants’ religious agency. Their actions, claims, performed identities and engagements in the modes of memory form la religion en train de se faire (Fr) (see Bava 2003b, 163), religion as it is lived in the present.

4.3 Narrative method of analysis

The research data was collected using two methods, participatory observation and thematic interviews. These two methods enable the inclusion of at least two different perspectives. Whereas ethnographic observation steers attention to events and action, in the interviews, attention may be directed towards the way individuals create stories about these events and simultaneously construct a believer’s reality through language (see Riessman 1993, 5; Hovi 2004, 383). Consequently, two types of methods of analysis were used in conjunction in order to approach the data.

In the first place, a qualitative data analysis program Atlas ti was used for organizing and coding the interview data thematically. Altogether, organization into themes was used to trace similarities and differences and to complement the fieldnotes from participative observation. A thematic analysis serves for providing views of the Murids’ religious organization and an ethnographic description of the cheikhs’ visits as events.
As I wish to go beyond a thematic approach and listen to the interviewees’ individual voices, I read the Murid disciples’ and guides’ interviews also as sources of narratives. Narratives are often seen as organizing principles of human action. Indeed, the interviewees of this Thesis held the floor for lengthy and meandering stories. Riessman argues that this type of narrative should not be fractured, which often happens when pieces of response are edited out of context in order to make generalizations (1993, 3-4). I use the method of narrative analysis to “unpack” the language of the interviews to see how the interviewees make sense of the social interaction of the chosen events, how they claim agency, impose order on experiences and engage in imagination (see Riessman 1993, 2).

Narrative inquiry is a cross-disciplinary product of 20th century in social sciences. It holds within a variety of conceptualizations instead of a sole binding theory on narrative. The narratives may be detachable units with clear beginnings and endings but often locating them in an interview is a highly interpretive process that involves researcher’s active decisions. (Riessman 1993, 13, 16-18.) Keeping this insight in mind, I extend the scope of analysis from the traditional first-account topic-centered stories that narrate past events for instance to hypothetical narratives that engage in imagination. Selecting memories from the past, making choices in the demands of the current religious context and envisioning desired outcomes all work on different levels of time. In their narratives the interviewees do not simply tell what happened in the past but act in relation to the past, present and future. Thus their religious agency has to be elaborated in reference to these dimensions. (see Leming 2007, 77.)

Lack of past tense, resolutions and closure is obvious in a narration of something that is still happening or imagined (see Riessman 1993, 48). In addition, I scrutinize counter-narratives and second-account narratives in order to reveal agency and experience that are closely related to social interaction. Therefore, instead of choosing only clear-cut stories, more fractured and diversified narratives are analyzed to give prominence for the interconnectedness and fluidity of human action.

What characterizes narrative analysis is the analyst’s attention to the interview text’s sequences of action. In the current Thesis this means paying attention to how the substantive topics develop through structural properties, verb tenses, key metaphors as well as key words in the selected interview narratives. (Riessman 2008, 11, 52.) In addition to focusing on the sequences and language of the narratives I intend to go beyond the text to make inferences about the contexts of the speech. The interview narratives are situated in
social, cultural and institutional contexts and discussions which must be taken into account to interpret them (see Riessman 1993, 61). However, to be able to look at these contexts one must depart from the limited scope of the research. As Leming points out, “Seeing how strategic action of individuals effects change requires close attention to micro situations and interactions…” (2007, 77). By limiting the research focus in the case of the cheikhs’ visits in Helsinki I analyze what the individual interview narratives reveal of their social, institutional or cultural contexts. Knowledge is thus produced in a process that departs from interpretations in the micro-sphere and advances to reflections on the macro phenomena in the field of religion.

The two sources of data of this Thesis not only merge in each other but sometimes they also challenged each other in different ways. What I observed in the field was not always in obvious relation to what I was told in an interview. What comes to the participant observations and the questions I proposed for the interviewees concerning the visits, the analysis started already during the interviews as I asked the interviewees’ opinions on my interpretation to make self-corrections (see Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 137). Thus the reflexive information retrieved from the participant observation could be compared and triangulated with the interview data (Harvey 2011, 219).

A single event can be narrated in various different ways depending on the narrator’s aspirations, interests and relations to the contexts of the event –a personal narrative is therefore not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened (Riessman 1993, 64). Furthermore, Meredith B. McGuire reminds us that “At the level of the individual, religion is not fixed, unitary, or even coherent. We should expect that all persons’ religious practices and the stories with which they make sense of their lives are always changing, adapting and growing.” (2008, 12). Thus, the narratives may not only create coherence and order in regards to events but they can also express the discrepancy and variability characteristic to everyday religion. Also, it is important to note that in the last resort, the interpretation of a narrative is a worldly creation typed by the researcher. The narrated meanings are co-constructed by the teller, the listener/analyst and the reader (Riessman 1993, 42). In the following, let us begin the analysis chapter by looking at how the Murid religiosity is constructed in the actual interview narratives.
5 THE MURID RELIGIOUS GUIDES VISIT DISCIPLES

5.1 Migrant men on the Murid ‘path’

The thing is… at the age of 13 years, 14 years you tell yourself I see them do it so I do it also but you… grow with the Murid and after you tell yourself, wait a minute, it’s not anymore that I follow my father, my mother, it’s me myself…you are inside something and you see it alive… There’s a truth…how you can civilize yourself, let’s say in the society... Here I install myself in a new society, I install myself in a new culture. But how can I adapt myself in this Finnish culture that is not mine and that is for example, not at all similar to what I’ve grown with. A lot of effort is needed from me… But well they (the Finnish people) cannot think that… it’s because of Muridism or because of my belief, my religion that gives me… a capability to settle in any society. (taalibe, Fr)

This account of a Helsinki resident Murid disciple illustrates first a childhood socialization into Islam in Senegal. The interviewee uses the expression to “grow with the Murid” to describe his religiousness as a youth in the family sphere. The Murid men chose passive expressions such as “to grow with the Murid” or “to be born inside Muslim” (taalibe, Fr) to describe their religious upbringing. Similarly to Helena Kupari’s research on Karelian evacuee Orthodox women’s religiousness, these expressions portray the subjects’ own religion, in this case Islam, “as a nurturing environment or a natural outcome”. (Kupari 2011, 203, 206.) The disciples’ families being Muslim, they often went to Quran schools or received Quran teachers at home as children. Second, the interviewee of the quote above narrates a progress of personal and embodied engagement in Muridism that transcends the following of the family members’ example thus positioning the interviewee as an active religious subject. Muridism is depicted as “alive” and thus capable of providing meaning for the interviewee. Both interviewees with and without Murid family origins seem to be able to track a particular moment when they have become Murids or developed a more personal engagement in Muridism.

From childhood socialization and subsequent personal engagement, the narrative cited advances to an ongoing process of adaptation to a new society and culture. I would like to pay attention to how the interviewee thirdly refers to Muridism as a relevant system that is able to provide advice and strength to him as an immigrant in the Finnish environment that he depicts as culturally considerably distant from his origins. At an individual level, religious doctrine may offer spiritual points of reference. They may be used as guidelines
or even as a safe haven during difficulties that a migrant may face in a foreign environment (see Riccio 2004, 935). The interview account refers both to “belief” as an individual engagement and “religion” as a larger shared system as factors that provide him with the capability to settle in a new country. Last, the end of the account portrays Finnish peoples’ unfamiliarity with Muridism. Thus it reveals the Murids’ marginal position in the Finnish religious field –even as a minority inside the Muslim minority.

According to some of the interview accounts, solitude is one of the factors that characterize the Murid interviewees’ religious lives in the new society. In these accounts, life in Helsinki is compared to the everyday life in a Senegalese city. Solitude was experienced in both positive and negative terms. On one hand it was viewed as a type of peacefulness that affords time for religious practice, meditation and reflection of one’s own religiousness. Whilst on the other hand, it was also viewed as a kind of depressing loneliness that impregnates all spheres of life and is contradictory to the everyday modes of life in Senegal. Some interviewees articulated a clear change in developing an active relation to Muridism post-emigration. Even few interviewed Murid guides noted that becoming Murid in the migration situation is not unusual. Again, for some interviewees emigrating meant less time for participating in Murid activities if for example the interviewee Murid disciple’s everyday life had been closely attached to a cheikh’s surroundings or if he had been very active in Murid associations in Senegal.

The interviewed Murid men often utilized a metaphor of Muridism as a “path” that they are following. Becoming more conscious or finding Muridism as a personal “path” in an new environment is not a self-evident outcome since migration and settling in a non-Murid environment could also have a distancing effect on religiousness. The former account contains an expression “you can civilize yourself, let’s say in the new society”. This expression demonstrates how the interviewed Murid men not only mobilize their previous knowledge of Muridism in Helsinki but they depict continuous study and further search on their religious “paths” as actualized in changing situations.

Often, the move from the majority to a minority position produces a need inside the religious community to reflect on ones origins and faith, which may be viewed as part of the process of continuous definition of the self in new environments. Due to the migration process, religious practices that used to be taken-for-granted demand a new type of attention. As members of a religious group organize themselves as a minority religious community they often seek to become increasingly knowledgeable of their religion not
only to be able to practice their religion but also to be able to explain it to others and gain community acceptance. Building this type of capacity may include for instance more elaborate explanations of the religious doctrine or rituals than what the members were used to in their country of origin. In various countries and religious contexts, part of the religious practices is performed in languages that the ordinary practitioners do not fully understand (for example Ancient Chinese used in Buddhist practices in Vietnam). In new environments languages are often diversified. (Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000, 34-36.)

Moreover, travel and the subsequent settling process in a new environment does in some cases result in a need to reactivate religious knowledge. One of the Murid guides who arrived in Helsinki during the fieldwork decided to stay in town for a few months and using his expertise, he started to teach the local taalibes Arabic and the Quran. A Murid disciple’s Arabic and Quran studies in Helsinki provide an example of how new religious activity is created in the migration situation:

Before I could read (Arabic) but with the travels, with the… I’ve forgotten but at the moment I’m about to learn again. There’s “a cheikh” who comes to our home who teaches us, to read Arabic, the Quran. (taalibe, Fr)

Generally speaking, the Murids’ local religious practices in Helsinki include for instance annual celebrations of the Grand Magal, Tabaski\textsuperscript{14}, Korité\textsuperscript{15} and Tamxarit\textsuperscript{16}. The local dahira gathers for recitation of the xassida, praying, organization of religious donations and discussion. Daily Islamic prayers or occasional Baay Faal zikrullah, ritual recitation with or without the accompaniment of specific percussions are practiced depending on the disciples’ individual religious orientations and Murid affiliations. Also transnational religious practices exist. They include for instance pilgrimages to Touba, Murid taalibes’ visits in other European Murid communities, keeping in touch with the cheikhs through phone calls, remitting for Murid associations’ projects as well as to cheikhs in Senegal, and of course the organization of the cheikhs’ visits in Helsinki which is the focus of this Thesis.

Some of the interviewed Murid taalibes have made a commitment to a personal cheikh by pronouncing the traditional jebbalu in which they give themselves to a cheikh while others are not committed to a particular cheikh. As belonging to the Murid brotherhood, also

\textsuperscript{14} Eid al-Adha, also called the festival of sacrifice is an important Muslim religious holiday.
\textsuperscript{15} Eid al-Fitr is celebrated in the end of Ramadan.
\textsuperscript{16} Ras as-Sanah al-Hijriyah marks the Islamic New Year.
committing to a *cheikh* is mainly considered as a personal decision and the opportunity to choose a suitable *cheikh* for oneself guarantees considerable latitude for the practitioners. A *taalibe* interviewee describes in the following quote the beginning of his commitment to a *cheikh*.

Yes I’ve chosen my cheikh through intermediary of a friend. I have a friend who had a marabout\(^{17}\) and all the time he spoke of him... I got interested and I went to see him and I followed him almost for years. I assisted to his conferences when he spoke, his behavior ... I followed him, I studied him. And finally I told myself that really, this one, I’m satisfied with him and I can take him as a marabout... I watched well and got assured that this one practices truly and I went to meet him. (*taalibe*, Fr)

The interviewee describes his *cheikh*, whom he has carefully chosen on the grounds of the previous quote, as a “good advisor” on his side who is informed of his plans, needs and concerns. The following quote of the same interviewee illustrates the personal profundity and reciprocity of the transnational relation between the interviewee disciple in Finland and his *cheikh* in Senegal.

 Interviewer: Do you call him often?

I call him when I need advice or when I miss him, when I stay for a long time without hearing him. I feel a longing in me. It’s... he completes me, I need to talk to him to have my feet on the ground. I call him often.

Interviewer : He calls you also ?

Yes, he also calls me. (*taalibe*, Fr)

At times, the physical distance between the disciples and their guides momentarily disappears as the Murid *cheikhs* travel to the proximity of the Murid *taalibes* in Helsinki. The *taalibes* also attend visits of other *cheikhs* than their own since not everyone’s personal *cheikh* travels outside Senegal. An interviewee explains: “And we all will gather to go to see him, to benefit from his advice. We believe in everything that is Murid. We follow all the Murids. All we have our personal marabouts but if a marabout comes here he doesn’t come only for me. He comes for all the Murids.” (*taalibe*, Fr). Relations to travelling guides are generated in Helsinki in addition to a possible commitment to a personal *cheikh*. To pay a visit in Helsinki, a *cheikh* does not even need to have his own disciples in town. He may also have “inherited” disciples from his father or grandfather or come to guide Murids in general.

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\(^{17}\) Other word for religious guide.
5.2 Travelling guides foster consciousness of a Murid diaspora

I work in three domains. I travel on account of my business affairs. For example someone who does things to earn money, that’s on account of my business affairs, in businessman. That’s one. Two: I also travel a lot in the Arab countries. For example Arabs who ask me to come to help them in the prayers but also to help them in the relations between Senegal and the Arab world. Who are interested in Senegal, who want to know better Senegal. Three: I also travel to visit my grandfather’s disciples who are everywhere, they are English, French, everywhere, that’s it. (cheikh, Fr)

As itemized in the account, during their travel the cheikhs may take part in several activities at once ranging from enhancing business relations and meeting representatives of other religious communities to guiding Murid disciples and negotiating with local municipalities. According to one interviewed cheikh, well-known cheikhs, and even some less well-known cheikhs as the interviewee himself was, often hold diplomatic passports that grant them mobility. What comes to the cheikhs’ activities that take place in Senegal, some of the research participant cheikhs are land owners who are involved in travel when they are not occupied with cultivating the land and breeding cattle.

Part of the travelling cheikhs upholds daaras or dahiras in Senegal and during their travel in Europe they collect donations from the Murid disciples for conducting these activities. The local Murids in Helsinki coordinate collective donations for the support of the cheikhs’ communities and projects:

For example at the moment, there’s a cheikh who constructs a big mosque in Touba… and he asks us to participate in that… we give him a sum. (taalibe, Fr).

The religious-ethnic environment of the visits clearly encourages a sense of a transnational obligation. However, according to the overall view of the interviews, even if individuals may consecrate notable resources towards Murid ends, the donations at the moment seem to be mostly coordinated on an individual than a highly collective level. Also, large-scale public transnational initiatives such as creating specific Murid associations oriented to the goal of development have not emerged in Helsinki.

The sense of a transnational obligation to contribute to the development of Touba and to the subsistence of Murid community members is articulated as part of the Murids’ global collective efforts for their desired ends. Naming these transnational practices as shared with other migrant Murid communities creates a possibility to identify within a larger,
diasporic whole. The communities’ interconnectedness through common goals contributes to an emergence of a diaspora consciousness.

The city of Touba, which unites all Murid communities abroad, may be regarded as the center of the imagined religious diaspora. The interviewees bring up the point that the construction of the biggest hospital of Touba, Hôpital Matlaboul Fawzaïni, for instance, was financed by migrant Murids (for the creation of the hospital see Foley & Babou 2010). The grandeur of the city thus symbolizes not only the brotherhood’s success but also the commitment and diligence of the migrant Murids.

Most of the interviewed cheikhs have their houses in Touba. Their travel to Helsinki connects the local Murids to the religious center through the above mentioned concrete practices but also in terms of Murid ideals and morality as the city represents what is right irrespective of location:

…So we Murids, we consider always, for example Cheikh Amadou Bamba tells us: always wherever you are, consider that this place is like Touba for you. What you cannot do in Touba, you cannot do elsewhere. (taalibe, Fr)

The cheikh visits constitute a social space in which the connection to the religious center is strengthened and personal religious paths are maintained and renewed in connection to the principles of the holy city. Globally, Touba is a source of identification with regards to the religious organization of migrant Murids. The names Murids tend to give to their religious associations are often combinations of the name of the holy city and the host city such as “Dahira Touba London” or “Dahira Touba Indianapolis”. Touba-prefixed dahiras project Touba’s spiritual meanings onto a given locality and at the same time the sobriquet ‘Sērīñ Touba’ given for Cheikh Amadou Bamba creates an inextricable link between the Sufi cheikh and the holy city. (Ross 2011, 2933-2934; Diouf 2000, 694-695.) Moreover, the central minaret of the five minarets of the Great Mosque of Touba is named after Cheikh Ibrahima Fall’s sobriquet “Lamp Fall” (W) as he is depicted as the “light of Muridism”.

The naming of the Murids’ association in Helsinki follows the global pattern, but instead of the city of settlement, the country of settlement has been chosen to define the “Dahira Touba Finland” association. There is so far, only one dahira in Finland. The Murids in Helsinki have rather recently started to organize themselves more officially by occasionally renting a local hall, for example, for the gatherings of the dahira. The inscription of Muridism in the Finnish environment is, however, not completely new since

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according to the interviewed Murid taalibes they received the first cheikhs in Helsinki already back in 2004.

5.3 Transnational network reaches Finland

A Murid taalibe’s answer to a question on how the cheikhs’ visits are organized in Helsinki leaves the researcher puzzled: “…it’s not organized, they just come like that.” (taalibe, Fr). Luckily, the observations in the field cast more light on the organization of the visits. During the fieldwork a revered Mbacké-Mbacké18 cheikh called a Murid taalibe in Helsinki to tell him that he would be coming to Finland for one week. Information of the cheikh’s planned arrival then spread by word of mouth to other Murids who live in Helsinki.

This particular visiting cheikh was accommodated in a Murid taalibe’s apartment where other local Murids came to visit him mostly in the evenings after their working days but also during the day or in the mornings for example to prepare breakfast for the cheikh. In the evening few dozen taalibes gathered to meet the cheikh to receive prayers and guiding. Alternatively, the cheikh was escorted from one city district to another to visit Murid taalibes in their own homes. At the moment of the fieldwork, the visits in Helsinki took place almost solely in private spaces. Consequently, participation in the visits required acquaintanceship with Murids who receive or at least frequent itinerant guides. Often, the cheikhs’ arrivals seemed rather unforeseen and indeed, because of the visits’ informality they did not seem to demand a lot of planning in advance.

Initial contacts between cheikhs and taalibes are often created in Senegal or during travel and residence in other European countries. Yet acquaintances with the cheikhs may also be made by phone or online through friends and family. As some of the interviewed cheikhs have more than 20 years’ experience in travel and many of the interviewed taalibes have lived in other countries before moving to Finland, the possibilities for creating links are various. Thus it may be concluded that Muridism as a dynamic and resourced transnational system is not based solely on Senegalese Murid disciples’ emigration but also on more diverse forms of mobility. An interviewee disciple describes that before, “the people

18 The Mbacké-Mbacké family leads the Murid brotherhood.
stopped in Sweden but now they say Finland is not far from Sweden... why not, let’s go there.” (taalibe, Fr) Finland as a “hidden country” (taalibe, Fr), as an unusual destination for Senegalese emigrants benefits from the cheikhs’ travels to larger European Murid communities. Helsinki was never the single travel destination of the cheikhs encountered but each of them had set off to cover multiple countries at once. Most of the eight cheikhs whom I met in Helsinki during October and November 2012 were visiting Finland for the first time. Yet few itinerant Murid cheikhs have already turned a visit to Helsinki into an annual convention. One of the interviewed Murid cheikhs has visited Helsinki every year since 2007.

An encounter between a cheikh and a taalibe during a visit frequently ends with an exchange of telephone numbers, skype names or email addresses. Consequently, a contact created between a cheikh and a taalibe during a visit in a new society of settlement may lead into keeping in touch and other reciprocal visits in Europe or in Senegal may follow. As the following quote demonstrates, the cheikhs’ visits enable the Murids in Helsinki to develop their Murid networks both in and outside Senegal.

Interviewer: And you participate, you go to see them…

Yes, there’s also friendship that emerges, I’ve never seen this cheikh, I take his phone number, I go to Senegal, I’ll go to see him until his home. So it means that it grows, let’s say that even your environment expands, your knowledge grows. (taalibe, Fr)

In some cases, the transnational connections with the cheikhs are held as valuable because the cheikhs are perceived to be in influential positions in the country of origin. Nevertheless, this does not seem to be the primary motivation for the generation of the transnational relations. The preceding quote implies that some of the migrant taalibes and the itinerant cheikhs’ relations may be defined also in more equal terms even as a “friendship” that evolves during shared moments in societies outside Senegal.

The interview data of this Thesis is in line with Evers-Rosander’s notions on how the Murid guides’ visits are dedicated to building networks and exchanging information with dahira members about national and international politics and economy as well as about other issues that currently concern Murids in different locations (2004, 83). The cheikhs’ mobility grants them the ability to further information from other Murid host countries to the Murids in Helsinki. As an example of the dissemination of information between the countries of settlement, an interviewed cheikh made a comparison between Finland and
Greece where the situation of migrants has been reported to have degenerated considerably ever since the economic collapse of the country revealed in early 2010, that is, before the fieldwork of this Thesis commenced (see e.g. Human Rights Watch 2012, PICUM 2013):

It’s tough… here the crisis is not very tough like in Spain or Greek, here they go better and better than those countries like Spain or Greek. I was in Greek two months ago. Hee, that country, it’s very tough inside there... *(cheikh, E)*

Although this type of information mediated by travelling guides seems to in most cases first of all build awareness of Murid communities in other locations, it may at times have also a more direct effect. For instance, one of the interviewees identified Murid *cheikh*’s advice as a thrust in his decision to move to Finland in the wake of the European economic crisis and scarce employment opportunities in other European countries. Religious networks sometimes constitute a trigger for departure to an unknown country which has no significant historical or current ties with the country of origin (Martikainen 2013, 41).

…Finland, I never dreamed of coming to a country like Finland. And to tell you, one day a cheikh came *in another European country*… and this cheikh said to us that it would be better for us to go to Finland, because there, there aren’t a lot of Murids… Well, I said to myself why not but before I go to see what is Finland, I went to the internet, I searched, I saw that Finland has a border with Russia, it was cold, I said ‘ouff’, I will not go there… *(taalibe, Fr)*

Despite his initial suspicions of an unknown cold country, the *taalibe* in question decided to move to Finland. Like him, many of the interviewed Murids who lived in Helsinki at the time of the fieldwork have taken part in Murid activities including itinerant *cheikh*’ visits in other, primarily European Murid communities. They seem to capitalize on this first-hand experience as they mobilize Muridism in Helsinki. Another source of information on the common organization patterns is the transnational network, namely the travelling guides. In the case of the Murids, these first-hand and mediated transnational connections “function as bridges to religious innovations and models” (Martikainen 2013, 59) in the new society of settlement. The transnational connections build bridges to the existing migrant *dahiras* that have been created in relation to the other countries’ organization models and accessible resources. The religious models from other contexts may be further recreated in the Finnish religious landscape. The fact that the migrant Murids have already established organization models in other countries combined with the efficiency of the transnational network considerably facilitates “the extensive work of establishing new
communities and starting from ground zero” (Martikainen 2013, 59) in a new country of settlement.

Nevertheless, the Murid social formations abroad are not direct copies of each other. Already the societies of settlement and their religious contexts vary. In addition, different actors of the transnational network transmit different registers of Muridism and of its organization as a communal form to the disciples. Bava notes that for example a Murid religious guide Sëriñ Mourtada Mbacké encourages tradition and continuity in migration destinations through a suggestion to install Kër Sëriñ Touba (W), a community center literally meaning the “House of the Master of Touba”, whereas some other travelling cheikhs bring forward Muridism that is economically efficient and conquering in a proselytizing mission (2003, 161). Kër Sëriñ Toubas are Murid associations that, unlike the local circles dahiras, necessitate a distinct building and thus a higher level of organization and accumulation of capital from the community (Ross 2011, 2938-2939).

It may be anticipated that the advice given by the itinerant cheikhs for the organization of the Murids well also from the needs and differing life situations of the migrants. For example, the cheikhs’ advice for the Murid community in Marseille encourages having a local for the children’s religious education. The local dahira members have been reported to contemplate on the necessity of buying a Kër Sëriñ Touba which would serve for a locale for transferring Islamic faith to children. Some of the dahira members have families in Marseille, whereas other members’ families live in Senegal. As well they might, members without children in France consider an investment in a Kër Sëriñ Touba as less profitable than the ones who are raising their children in France. In their priorities, investing in Senegal is more crucial than investing in the society of settlement. (Bava 2003, 154, 159.) Because of the immigrant religious institutions’ often contradictory task of simultaneously building continuity of religious practice and responding to change through adaptive strategies, conflicts are not rare among their members. The above described differences in the nature of transnational family relations based on the place of residence of one’s children is only one example of the potential divisive issues inside an immigrant religious community. Also authorities’ and members’ differing emphasis of institutional missions may form a challenge that must be resolved. (Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000, 134.) Negotiations on religious organization and related investment take place as the migrants’ life situations and orientations to the homeland as well as to the country of settlement differ and evolve.
Acknowledging the small number of Murids in Finland compared to other countries, the interviewees depict in their accounts that Muridism in Finland is in an “initial stage” (taalibe, Fr) and that the cheikhs’ visits have happened thus far on a small scale. Aspirations of a wider, more settled and organized Murid community come through the interviews.

Well, if you compare the situation to the Murids in Spain or the Murids in Italy you can say that a lot remains to be done… because the Murids in other countries like Spain, Italy or France, they receive marabouts of very high dimension. The marabouts who come there, they cannot go to homes...What we want is to receive a direct grandson… of Cheikh Amadou Bamba… There are the bigger cheikhs when they come… it’s the community, when they come for example in Italy, it’s the mayor of Rome who himself comes with the police to escort his car, the Murids follow behind, it’s big you know. Until we have that, it can be said that a lot remains to be done. (taalibe, Fr)

The quote above gives an example of how the interviewed taalibes in various connections refer to other European Murid locations where cheikhs’ visits are extensive. Moreover, it presents an idea of how the stage of Muridism can be evaluated according to how “high dimension” cheikhs the taalibes in Helsinki receive. A succesfull performance of a prestigious visit may be taken as a proof of the taalibes’ unity. Riccio describes that in Italy, “Besides the visits of important (‘big’) marabouts, there also exist temporary visits of less important (‘small’) marabouts.” (2001, 595.) A part of the Murid guides that have visited Helsinki so far come from the ‘smaller’ rank of cheikhs even if they belong to the Mbacké, Fall or Bousso families of the brotherhood. For example, due to their very young age some visiting guides seem to be still in an active and mobile phase of increasing their experience and influence. Even if a bond that originates from the ancestral and mythical identification with Cheikh Amadou Bamba exists between the disciples –and one could add between the travelling cheikhs as well– Riccio says that this does not signify that the taalibes would self-evidently support all cheikhs of the brotherhood in Senegal and abroad (2004, 932). The visits of two ‘bigger’ Mbacké-Mbacké cheikhs in Helsinki during the fieldwork seemed eminently remarkable for the local Murids. These visits were understood as steps towards receiving cheikhs of a higher rank who hold responsible and esteemed positions in Touba. Also, the growing number of short visits of ‘smaller’ cheikhs was in the interviews taken as further proof of the existence and advancement of Muridism in Helsinki.
As was earlier noted, the word on the cheikhs’ visits gets around from one Murid taalibe to another through unofficial channels. Even in Marseille, one of the first destinations for the travelling Murid guides, the events related to the cheikhs’ visits remained very discreet until the year 2001 when a local taalibe informed the press about a visit, asked for a hall from the local government office and arranged an endowment from Western Union. At this time, the number of taalibes who participated in a single event during a visit exceeded 400 in comparison to the few dozen participants in Helsinki. (Bava 2003, 152-158.) As for Tenerife, Evers-Rosander describes that the Murid guides are “put up at expensive hotels at the cost of the Murid community members. Food is prepared by a few of women and carried to the hotel suite of the marabout, where he receives the male disciples… He also presides at the collection of addiya from the Murid community members in Tenerife.” (2004, 82; see also Ebin 1996.) Despite of the small scale of the Murid cheikhs’ visits in Helsinki compared to many other migrant Murid communities, the visits seem to bear noteworthy meaning for the local taalibes.

5.4 Prayers prevent from ‘getting lost’

In the first part of this chapter, I highlighted the interviewee disciples’ view on Muridism as a consciously adopted personal ‘path’. Building on the metaphor of a ‘path’, several interviewed taalibes relayed that the visiting cheikhs prevent them from “losing direction” (taalibe, Fr) or “getting lost” (taalibe, Fr) in the Finnish environment that is perceived as distant from the religious center as well as entailing less social control and “more temptations” (taalibe, Fr) compared to Senegal. The following quote of an interviewee taalibe relates to how the temporary presence of the travelling cheikhs gives the taalibes a chance to reflect on one’s position in the Finnish social environment.

These cheikhs they are travelling to continue the work of Sheikh Amadou Bamba, Khadimou Rassoul. That’s why they come to travel to see, because the Baay Faal who live here also we believe only them and we cannot go to Senegal all the time to see them. That’s why they come to travel to visit us to giving us more break to see if we are wala we are not lost. (taalibe, E)

Korhonen concludes that Gambian Mandingo Muslims’ travels to Gambia had an

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19 Offering made to a cheikh on the occasion of a pilgrimage.
20 Or (W)
intensifying effect on their religiousness (1996). By the same token the cheikhs’ visits to Helsinki seem to encourage the Senegalese Murid taalibes to follow the guidelines that originate from the moralities of their country of origin. How do the cheikhs then guide the taalibes in the right direction and which measures are seen as influential in religious guidance during the visits? Prayers were often portrayed as the most influential guidance a taalibe may receive on his Murid ‘path’ during the visits. Thus, an attempt to understand the significance given to prayers is crucial. Simply put, a prayer received from a cheikh may give the taalibe strength to triumph over mundane adversity: “You tell him your problems, all that. It’s true that physically they can’t anything but they can (give) prayers that can give you force to surmount things.” (taalibe, Fr) By proposing the following question to the taalibe interviewees I aimed at further understanding the importance and meanings attached to religious guidance during the visits:

Interviewer: What do you think the cheikhs, what do they bring here when they travel?

What do they bring? Laillahaillalla! They bring many things, Marjatta, many things Wallahi. Xoolal21, they bring a lot of things… because what they have, I don’t know, maybe they themselves know, they know. But I don’t know but I know that they have something that Sëriñ Touba22 has given them. And this thing they have, they share it with the taalibes… to make prayers. Because a cheikh helps you, and how, you can see a person who doesn’t know his route, where he is going, he is a bit of a mess… he doesn’t know his direction. Every time he drinks, he takes money of someone else, you see… every time he does that. But one day… a cheikh helps him, makes prayers for him and one day you see the person who did that is completely... you see, the people say in Senegal: ‘I thank my cheikh’, in television, in the microphone: ‘I thank my cheikh because before I was a bandit, I drank every day, I took someone else’s money but today I do nothing, I just work and come home, work and come home.’ The cheikhs, that’s why they come from Senegal, only to help us, to give us good conditions and always to put us on the right path… because they see what you don’t see, that’s the problem, they see what you don’t see, what I don’t see, kii they see it… and they clean the things that are dirty in you and they put good things in you. And after you become clean, that’s why they come here, not for other reasons, just to help us… And me, I know that. I know it. Maybe the people say what they think but I know why the cheikhs come here. (taalibe, Fr)

The previous quote begins with an enthusiast repetition of the question posed to the interviewee: “What do they (the cheikhs) bring?”. In my interpretation, the question incites enthusiasm firstly because the interviewee holds the cheikhs as influential religious actors. According to the interviewee, the cheikhs introduce “a lot of things” to Helsinki during their visits. He seemed therefore eager to answer this open-ended question –even if it is not possible to do so in an all-inclusive manner because of the breadth of the topic. Second, the enthusiasm may be analyzed to mark the challenge of verbalizing religious experience that

21 Listen, look (W).
22 Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s sobriquet.
is related to the cheikhs’ visits for the interviewer.

After the first four phrases the interviewee proceeds to address the impossibility of providing an in-depth and direct explanation of what the cheikhs mediate for the taalibes in Helsinki. In his words “what they have, I don’t know…they have something that Sēriñ Touba has given them”. Through this turn of phrase, a mythical bond to Cheikh Amadou Bamba is brought to light. Cheikh Amadou Bamba acts behind the traveling cheikhs’ blessings that are for a migrant taalibe, “fundamentally important to the success of his enterprise” (Riccio 2001, 586). Due to the impossible nature of being able to give a direct account, the interviewee adopts an indirect form of telling and constructs a narrative of the influence of the cheikhs’ prayers.

A textual transition to this narrative happens when the interviewee starts to talk about “a person who doesn’t know his route, where he is going” in the third personal pronoun. The flow of the narration in third persona follows a pattern of a conventional conversion narrative. McQuire distinguishes between rhetorics of change, choice and continuity in conversion accounts (2002, 76-77). The account under scrutiny has an emphasis on rhetorics of change. Before the third persona was a trouble-maker and not determined to move in a particular direction. At a defined moment, “one day… a cheikh helps him, makes prayers for him”, the third persona receives prayers from a cheikh and a turn takes place. The cheikh brings about change: thanks to his prayers the third persona’s life takes a new course.

In my view, the story of the third persona is told to demonstrate the effectiveness of the cheikhs’ help and prayers. At the same time it is an example of the possibility of change. As if to back up the third persona narrative, the interviewee moves on the run to introducing how these types of experiences are told in Senegalese television programs. All religious communities have their conventions of telling about religious experience. These ways of verbalizing make experiences commensurable with other believers’ experiences. An individual’s ability to verbalize experiences according to the established forms of telling is crucial because it enables an integration into a common world of experience and supports the maintenance of convictions. (Hovi 2004, 386.) The narrative spoken “in television, in the microphone: ‘I thank my cheikh because before I was a bandit...’” provides a particular confessional form for the community. At the same time it is a public narrative that proves the effectiveness of prayers and has thus an impact in the Murid
community.

After the interviewee has given a demonstrative narration of the cheikhs’ influence as religious actors he closes the narrative by returning to the original context, the cheikhs’ visits in Helsinki: “The cheikhs, that’s why they come from Senegal, only to help us, to give us good conditions and always to put us on the right path…”. The central message of the narrative is that the prayers communicated by the cheikhs for the taalibes are influential and as a form of guidance, they are full of meaning for the interviewee in question.

Another conclusion that can be made on the grounds of the previous quote is that the metaphor of ‘getting lost’ or ‘falling from the path’ is not exclusively related to religiousness in the new countries of settlement. Instead, this metaphor may be related to the lived religion in Senegal also. Riccio notes that the cheikhs’ frequent visits from Senegal to Murid communities abroad play a role in controlling potentially deviant behavior (2001, 594) although they seem to possess little concrete measures for achieving this. In the following chapter, the focus will be shifted from the taalibes’ points of views to the cheikhs’ views on their ways of guiding and advising the Murid community of Helsinki.

5.5 Advice articulated by the religious guides

In short, the interviewed itinerant cheikhs’ general answer to a question on the most central aspects of Muridism is somewhat similar to this: “To work, always work and still work 23. One. To pray well also, to be a good Muslim, you have to practice also. Two. To respect people. Three.” (cheikh, Fr) The cheikhs’ articulated views of Muridism are very uniform as they refer to the basis of the doctrine: as worship of God, work, cooperation, tolerance and discipline are emphasized. Yet the diversity of religious practices emerges when the researcher looks beyond the articulated doctrine to the cheikhs’ different emphasis on how to guide the taalibes. An interviewee Murid taalibe confirms my perception on the heterogeneity of the cheikhs in the field:

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23 The former president of Senegal Abdoulaye Wade, had a slogan “Il faut travailler, encore travailler, toujours travailler” (Fr) (You have to work, still work, always work). President Wade also belongs to the Murid brotherhood.
Yes, there are differences… Everyone has their way of managing their taalibes. There are those who take all their time to talk to the taalibes, to talk them of the Cheikh. Others take all their time to teach Quran. They are different, that’s sure.” (taalibe, Fr)

The concrete differences in guidance reflect the cheikhs’ diverse religious affiliations, skills, personalities, travelling experience and educational backgrounds. The higher the ranking of the cheikh the more influential guidance his mere presence is considered to communicate. The most respected cheikhs’ presence and physical contact mediates barke, divine power which may be understood to transfer to the taalibe’s body (see Evers-Rosander 2004, 83). While some travelling cheikhs concentrate on giving prayers, talking to the Murid community and telling historical stories of Cheikh Amadou Bamba during the visits, others teach Quran and Arabic, discuss with the taalibes and share concrete advice tête-à-tête.

The observations and interviews with the cheikhs in Helsinki fortify the view that in general, the brotherhood may be seen to be supporting the migrants in respecting the rules of the receiving context (Riccio 2004, 935). A travelling cheikh’s quote displayed below demonstrates a typical two-fold view in which the importance of integration into the new country and preservation of Murid, ancestral and family values overlap.

Interviewer : What do you do with your disciples when you are in Europe ?

I have come to encourage them also. To give them advice… But it’s really important to integrate well also, for example you have to enter the system. And also I have come to give prayers. I have come also to explain that you have to maintain our values. Like for example you have to behave well, you should not abandon the cultures and respect we have in Senegal because since years… our grandfathers they are respectful people who are correct. If you come to Europe, because there’s no difference here and Senegal, it’s eight hours of time, seven hours. It’s not different. You have to always be correct and respect the people, to know the rights and duties. All that you have to do you have to do it but also all that you have to have in this country, you have to go there to take care of that. (cheikh, Fr)

As a further definition of integration the interviewed cheikh refers first of all to the integration into the local labor markets. In Helsinki the visiting Murid cheikhs seem to interact so far only directly with the local Murids whereas in other European countries they may also be in contact for instance with municipalities. The interviewed cheikh gives an example from Torino, Italy where he, before coming to Finland, discussed the organization of the trading businesses of Senegalese migrants with the mayor. In contrast to Italy, where trade and informal street selling is seen as a prevalent part of the labor of Murid migrants, all those interviewed Murid migrants who had stayed in Finland for more than a year had
entered the formal Finnish labor market.

When it comes to the sphere of family, Babou notes that a *dahira* in New York has not been able to solve questions related to the migrants’ family lives which may be partly explained by the *dahiras*’ gendered membership (2002, 154-158, 163). Although the Murid brotherhood does not generally seem to control its migrant members’ family relations unlike for example the Ghanaian Pentecostal Church (for Ghanaian Pentecostal Church see e.g. Van Dijk 2002, 179-181), the visiting *cheikhs* in Helsinki seem to be ready to receive wives, children and friends of the disciples. According to one interviewee *taalibe*, a visiting *cheikh* may act as an intermediary in reconciling couples but the emphasis of the visits is clearly elsewhere. Now that I have provided a broad introduction to the interviewed Murid *taalibes*’ religiousness and religious organization including the *cheikhs*’ visits in Helsinki, it is time to proceed in observing Muridism in the context of the *cheikhs*’ visits from a more precise perspective.
6 LIVING OUT IDENTITIES AND MOBILIZING MEMORY

6.1 Visits as a ritual space

The metropolitan public space of Helsinki as an everyday living environment gives little clue of Islam let alone Muridism. Even at the level of other European countries, a great part of the Muslims’ religious practices take place in the private sphere (Dassetto & Nonneman 1997, 203). In contrast to the mundane life in the city, the travelling cheikhs’ visits create a religious space with a ritual dimension in the migrant Murids’ homes and the locations rented for these purposes.

Being involved in the ritual space that is evoked during the visits, I observed how the disciples act in the presence of the visiting religious guides as well as tried myself to act accordingly to what an interviewee called the “unspoken rules” (taalibe, Fr) of these social situations. Through this engagement in the field, I began to view the visits as an occasion for the migrant Murids to live the part of a taalibe corporeally. Here, I seek first to shed light on how the social order of the visits manifests through different bodily positions and behavioral strategies. Second, I look at the meanings that are given for this order in the interviews and the way religious agency situates in it. I begin with borrowing a description from the 1970s which still holds true with regards to the way the taalibes approach the most revered Murid cheikhs in Helsinki:

Submission is eloquently expressed in the physical bearing of the disciple in the presence of his master. The talibé is usually on his knees when he addresses a shaikh, and when silent he remains sitting or kneeling on the floor, his head inclined forward and his eyes fixed on the ground. Neither footwear nor headwear can be worn in the presence of a shaikh. In greeting a shaikh, the talibé presses his forehead to the back of the marabout’s hand, a gesture drawn from prostration in prayer (sujūd A). (Cruise O’Brien 1971, 87-88.)

The taalibes’ and the cheikhs’ behavior during the ritual occasions is regulated first of all in the hierarchical relation. In the following hypothetical narration of a visit by an interviewee taalibe, “discipline” is highlighted as the organizing principle of these occasions. It is in this narrative framed as the specific factor that through practical, lived
Murid it’s Muslim but in the Muslim there is Murid. And the Murid, it’s discipline. Murid first of all if you are with your cheikh, before everything what he does it’s the discipline. Because Murid it’s discipline. You have to have discipline with all the people. Because if you see it, I don’t know if you have noticed it or not… if there’s a cheikh and the people have come, like if I invite because here you do that… So if he comes for example in my home, I invite him and I invite all the Baay Faals. If he comes, you feel that there is a discipline there, everyone sits down, and the cheikh also, if you notice how the people speak and how they make their actions, you feel there is a discipline. And it’s there the discipline you feel. You are not told, but you see. I tell you the discipline but it’s you… you could tell me that in the Murid there’s a discipline… Because you see it automatically, if a cheikh has come, you see them sit on the ground and they speak like… discipline. (taalibe, Fr)

More than just addressing the importance of hierarchical behavior as per the previous quote, the interviewees also gave justifications and meaning to the visits’ prevailing “discipline”. Both Murid disciples and guides articulated a conscious adoption of the role of a taalibe and the role of a cheikh in the context of the visits. In the interviews, the taalibes “sitting on the ground” were portrayed to embody the role of Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s devoted disciple Cheikh Ibrahima Fall while the cheikhs sitting on higher seats were thought to follow the example of “the Cheikh”, Cheikh Amadou Bamba. As Kupari notes “The ability of the body to store cultural content in the form of habit-memory is the foundation of any habit.” (2011, 218). I state that through these roles grounded in the past, the behavior that is adjusted to the religious hierarchy during the Murid cheikhs’ visits brings into mind the shared Murid history. Since the above-described role-behavior bears remarkable cultural content, the cheikhs’ visits may function as a ritual setting in which the Murid collectivity is recreated in connection to the religious history.

Collective memory is often activated in ritual occasions. It may be mobilized and passed on in different ways depending on the religious sociality peculiar to the group. Also, it is legitimized in different ways depending on the prevailing type of domination and different members’ level of authority to engage in its activation. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 126.) The religious sociality proper to Murids in the context of the cheikhs’ visits is obviously the relation between the cheikhs and the taalibes. In this sociality, the performance of hierarchy engages the individuals in the activation of a collective memory. Through embodied, lived roles the remembering becomes corporeal.
The roles that the participants adopt seem to be valued and claimed as one’s own. On the grounds of the interviews, the research participants perform these roles, and thus develop and maintain their belonging to the particular Murid chain, consciously rather than from a customary basis. To cite Leming “Essentially, when religious agency is operative, religion is performed as well as practiced; it is consciously, rather than repetitively, enacted.” (2007, 74). Instead of repeating a learned model or simply behaving as one ought to behave, engaging in lived out religious roles of a cheikh and roles of a taalibe was seen as voluntary, personal and meaningful. In other words, this engagement may be viewed to grant the participants noteworthy religious agency.

Indeed, while we approach the performance of religious roles through the concept of lived religion as subjectively grounded, the roles’ retrieval from history to the present seems to contain a considerable potential for religious expression and agency (see McGuire 2008, 12). However, one must not ignore religious history’s common role in justifying and perpetuating existing social structures and dominations. In the following quote an interviewed cheikh underlines that he has not himself invented the rules of behavior for the cheikhs and the taalibes but the origin of these roles is found in the Murid history. By constructing a link to history, the cheikh proves adherence to a continuing line of descent that gives justification to the religious sociality in the present (see Hervieu-Léger 2000, 125).

That was a part in the Muridism, special part, Cheikh Ibra Fall. That one was I can say the messenger… of the Cheikh. He made people to know that we have to keep our Cheikh like what we like the most, what we want the most…That’s why when you come here you see us, for example, I sit here and all other people sit in there… it’s not my work, it’s the work of Cheikh Ibra Fall. He brought that rule in Muridism… That’s why we do that culture. (cheikh, E)

In the quote, the cheikhs’ position is primarily legitimized not by the disciples’ act of believing or behaving but rather by the authority of tradition. The social order of the present is grounded on the specific relationship between Sheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibrahima Fall whom represent the social authority of the past. By establishing relationships to social authorities of the past and claiming lineage through believing, the research participants act as religious agents. What matters most in the process of “doing religion” according to Hervieu-Léger is the “link which across time establishes the religious adhesion of members to the group they form and the convictions that bind them” (2000, 81).

The foundational moments of a lineage are often expressed in rites. In this type of action,
the recalling of the past and the producing of continuity transcends history. (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 125.) During the cheikhs’ visits, the link across time is expressed in the form of a genealogy that cuts across the role behaviors. The genealogy to the brotherhood’s founders as a source of the foundational moments’ myth is produced first in symbolic terms. Second, also a naturalized genealogy is evoked as the visiting Murid cheikhs in fact belong to the families of the brotherhood’s founder and his circle of acquaintances.

In the particular case of the Murids, the ritual evocation of the chain is symbolically rich and emotionally intense (see Hervieu-Léger 2000, 127) which may be considered to facilitate producing and reproducing a collective memory in a new social environment. As the subsequent quote demonstrates, emotional intensity is connected to the pursuance of a link to the mythical personage in the present. Yet ordinary language of the interview situation falls short of reflecting the personal profundity of what sight and hearing communicates for the taalibe.

You were there. You saw how the Murids came there. You saw how the ambiance was, it’s because his dimension is more elevated than the others.

Interviewer: His visit went well?

Yes yes yes. From all the cheikhs who have passed here it’s that… that impressed me most. Yes.

Interviewer: Why?

For many things. When I see him, I see his father. When I see him, I see Sëriñ Touba24. When I hear him talk I see in him things that really I don’t know, really I … I cannot explain. Anyhow, it’s his visit that impressed me the most. (taalibe, Fr)

This type of description of seeing at best, Cheikh Amadou Bamba in the visiting cheikhs is typical for the taalibe interviewees. The pursuance of a link to the past may be viewed as an involvement in mysticism peculiar to Sufi Islam. In the everyday language unexpectedness and passivity often characterize our ideas of religious experience. However, religious experience does not inherently lack a sense of agency. Especially on ritual occasions the faithful commonly facilitate religious experience by the use of different means such as religious language or music. (Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis 1993, 153.)

Sufi schools are remarkably advanced in techniques and exercises used for inducing mystical states and the reception of divine grace. The remembrance of God’s name, dhikr

24 Cheikh Amadou Bamba.
as a prayer formula attributed to Cheikh Amadou Bamba is frequently used, either silently or aloud, individually or collectively. Amadou Bamba taught several litanies that consist of verses of Quran and other pious invocations. Bamba’s religious verses, the xassida, are most commonly recited for instance in the gatherings of the Dahira Touba Finland. The recitation involves a strong voice and a kneeling bodily posture in which palms are at times brought to cover ears as if to tune the pitch of the recitation. (Cruise O’Brien 25, 49-50; Knysh 2000, 314-325.)

In addition to expressing a link to the founding personages, the Murids often express symbolic and emotional involvement in the ritual occasions through a link to the holy city founded by Cheikh Amadou Bamba. For example, a Murid taalibe interviewed in Helsinki expresses his content on a Murid occasion by referring to the city of Touba:

Ooh, the athmosphere was like in Touba, I swear, it was like in Touba, it was like, like in Touba… The people came, they dressed like Murids. The Murid dresses are very ample, the grand boubous25 there haha. And then we made the dahira, we made the kurel26, the circle. We chanted the xassaida of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, eat, everything, to speak about everything, everything, everything. Really it was very very… (taalibe, Fr)

In the previous quote the taalibe thinks back to a Grand Magal that he celebrated in another European Murid community. The memory of the Murid atmosphere is very warm because of the great number of taalibes, their Murid dress and organization. Also Riccio notes that during Sëriñ Murtada’s27 visit in Italy in 1996, “a subtle ritual inscription in foreign (Western) space is at stake, through which Touba is recreated through ritual that temporarily sacralises space without the need to produce another new center.” (2004, 936-937, see also Ebin 1996).

6.2  **Agentic orderings of time**

Interviewer: And where do you learn his model?

I learn him from history and from feeling also. I learn him from history because every history they talk for Mame Cheikh Fall28, I know Mame Cheikh Fall was doing these things and these things I all the time want to follow those things, to do same what he was

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25 **Grand boubou** is a name for an outfit that consists of a flowing wide gown that is worn over trousers and shirt of same color in ceremonial and religious occasions in various French-speaking West-African countries.

26 Circle for chanting the xassida.

27 Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s youngest son.

28 Refers to Cheikh Ibrahima Fall.
doing. I know I can’t do same what he was doing but I will try my best to do that action. Because I know it’s only that action that can help me one day. (taalibe, E)

The previous quote is one among several interview quotes in which the taalibes consider Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibrahima Fall as models and thus build normative dimensions for their religious lives. In the quote, the taalibe says that he follows Cheikh Ibrahima Fall’s model without a possibility, anyhow, to reach his level of devotion. Fall’s model for religious action is thus considered as an ideal. As the interviewee remarks he may be informed of Cheikh Ibrahima Fall’s model “from history and from feeling also” he constructs a combined engagement to the collective tradition and to individual experience and emotion. The religious history is not only learned from others’ speech or texts but it is also felt and lived in continuous interpretation. I view that in the previous account, religiousness appears as activeness, something that is done and applied in concrete acts. In the end of the account, the interviewee constructs a projection to the future. Religious action that is modeled by the authority of the past, is thought to be helpful “one day” which refers to hereafter and the promised salvation in this context.

In the framework of the visits, caring for the cheikh is considered as a valuable religious action. Ideals retrieved from the central personages of Muridism encourage the taalibes’ submission to the cheikh. As especially taalibes with a Baay Faa affiliation, but also others, eagerly adopt a serving role during the visits, submission manifests in concrete acts. As I noted in the introduction, the Baay Faal are traditionally replaced the daily prayers by acts and thus given religious value to work towards a social end. An interviewee cheikh explains that providing food for the Murid community constitutes as one of the primary religious occupations of the Baay Faal: “It’s them who went to work to bring food for Cheikh Amadou Bamba and for his taalibes… on the day of Tabaski29 they bring the sheep, they bring food during the whole year.” (cheikh, W). In Senegal, the Baay Faal are responsible for instance for organizational tasks in Touba. An interviewee disciple ponders what it means for him to be a Baay Faal:

…for me, it’s to be God’s servant through people… You try to serve God through people. You see someone who is in need of something, you will just help him in what he needs because you want to do good for God, because God loves humanity. He loves the human being. So if you see someone who has a problem and you can help him, you just do it. It’s like a prayer for you, you know. (taalibe, Fr)

29 Eid-al Adha.
As the quote demonstrates, not only discipline in the form of submission to the *cheikhs* but also fostering solidarity in the horizontal relations between the *taalibes* may be included in the ideal forms of “serving” in the social sphere of the visits. The readiness of the Baay Faals to adopt the role of servants and general coordinators together with their flamboyant style of patchwork dressing, ebony necklaces and pendants with *cheikhs*’ pictures make them especially visible in Murid occasions.

In practice, when a Murid *cheikh* arrives in Helsinki the *taalibes* devote him time and effort. As a Murid disciple describes, the *taalibes* intend to give the *cheikhs* “…all that they want, all that can be done for a person to please him, to make him happy you know.” (*taalibe*, Fr). Unconditional care taking of others’ for instance in the form of cooking is often attached to women’s religiosity (see e.g. Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000, 90-92; Evers Rosander 2004, 85; cp. Tiilikainen 145-151). Self-sacrificing serving and submissiveness become, however, a central element of also Murid men’s religious action during the visits. The *taalibes*’ homes turn into meeting points where Senegalese food such as *ceebu jen*\(^{30}\), the national dish of Senegal, is cooked and served by the local disciples and eaten together from large shared plates. The preparation and consumption of traditional foods during new congregations’ social events is often crucial in the reproduction of ethnicity (Ebaugh & Chafetz 2000, 87-90). The Senegalese Murids in Helsinki are not an aberration to this. Senegalese sweet tea or *Café Touba*, a special blend of coffee procured all the way from the city of Touba is prepared and served first for the *cheikhs* and then for the visiting *taalibes*. An atmosphere of generosity prevails. Depending on the ranking of the *cheikh* in the *taalibes*’ eyes, serving of the *cheikhs* reaches different levels. An act of serving may be for example kneeling to help a *cheikh* to put on his shoes but services may also be more modest.

Submission and a complete devotion are emphasized as ideals in the relationship between a *taalibe* and a *cheikh*. This devotional relationship is informed by a derived Sufi formula attached to Cheikh Amadou Bamba: the disciple should be like a corpse in the hands of his master, the “mortician” (Diouf 2000, 686). Even though the actual, lived *cheikh-taalibe*-relations are likely to appear as more nuanced (see e.g. Pezeril 2008) bringing together agency and the Murid disciples’ adoption of a hierarchical structure seems at first paradoxical.

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30 Rice and fish (W).
Audrain tackles a similar paradox that he names “l’assujetissement affranchissant” (Fr), which can be translated to a “liberating subjugation”, in the context of Senegal. According to Audrain, the conversions of Senegalese youth to the Baay Faal branch and thus subjugating under the orders of a cheikh constitute an emancipating construction of the self as a moral agent inside Islam. Senegalese families frequently disapprove of the youth’s investment specifically in Baayfaalism which may therefore cause discrepancies in familial relations. Audrain states that converting to Baayfaalism does not emerge from a will to escape forms of communal solidarity or Islam as religion. Instead, conversions can be seen as a turn towards a new form of solidarity from which the Baay Faal taalibes may together deny the importance of hereditary networks or reconceptualise participation in said networks into an individual choice. The act of choosing one’s own religious orientation instead of accepting hereditary liaison to a cheikh of a certain branch provides the young taalibes with a sense of authenticity of belief and an experience of immediacy in their relation to God. (Audrain 2004, 150-154, 162.)

Precisely from the cursorily paradoxical combination of submission and agency emerges the need to look at the social actors’ way of engagement in the social structure. The interviewed disciples stress the voluntariness of their actions and forms of participation during the cheikhs’ visits. As Audrain points out, submission may lead to emancipation if the individual’s decision to submit takes place before a commitment to a cheikh and his orders (2004, 153). The taalibes’ statement of a premeditated voluntariness of the social engagement to the cheikh-taalibe-structure does not, however, reveal enough detail of their religious agency. Following Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische’s line of thought the structural contexts are not analytically separable from the capacity of human agency. Their separation would imply denying social actors’ capacity to transform their relation to social environments. Instead “the structural environments of action are both dynamically sustained by and altered through human agency”. The unfolding of the structural environments may be perceived through the lens of different temporal orientations and their recomposition at stake. (1998, 964.)

The interview narratives reveal how the Murid taalibes and the travelling cheikhs are, as social actors, embedded simultaneously within various temporalities. In their accounts, the interviewee taalibes depict that what is given by physical efforts or donations to the cheikhs during the visits is actually given to Sériñ Touba, Cheikh Amadou Bamba in their minds:
We do that and we don’t do it because the cheikh is this cheikh or that cheikh, we do it for Sëriñ Touba, we do it for God and for Mohammed, sall Allahu ālāy-hi wa-sallam. (taalibe, Fr)

According to Emirbayer and Mische, the dynamic possibilities of human agency lie in this type of overlapping orderings of time. As the social engagement between the taalibes and the cheikhs that leads to the taalibes’ acts of serving and submission is “analytically situated within the flow of time” we may capture the agentic dimension of the taalibes’ engagement. (1998, 963.) With regards to the past, this engagement produces an access to the valued sources of religiousness in the founding personages, Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibrahima Fall.

Cheikh Amadou Bamba is often thought of as a vital source of identity or even of existence: an interviewee taalibe referred to him for instance as “the one who created us” (taalibe, Fr) making his position undoubtedly important. Bamba acts as a link to the sacred through the present cheikhs. Orientation towards him forms a link to the past that enables a co-reproduction of the religious tradition in the present. Simultaneously, providing in the present for the visiting cheikhs has to be also regarded as an action with an orientation to the present as it is situated in the immediacy of the hierarchical yet reciprocal relationship between the cheikhs and the taalibes. In this relation, the cheikh in question is able to provide instant guidance for the taalibe in the form of prayers and advice for religious as well as mundane questions that trouble the taalibe’s mind. As for the taalibe, he may support the cheikh’s position through hierarchized behavior and hospitality, networking and donations that enable ongoing as well as planned projects.

As we have now moved from the past to the immediacy of the present and the aspired future, it is time to proceed in elaborating the resources that the Murid taalibes gain access to through their religious agency in the diasporic situation. In the previously introduced study (Audrain 2004) on Senegalese youth’s engagements in Baayfaalism the young Murids are imminently in the sphere of influence of their families and Senegalese societal actors. In contrast to the context of Audrain’s (2004) study, Helsinki as an environment in which the religious projects embed poses different kinds of demands for the taalibes.
6.3 Valued identities and contested stereotypes

The taalibes often talked about the cheikhs’ visits to Helsinki with a great deal of pride, not only at a personal level but with reference to collective identities. In the following account, the Murid cheikhs’ visits accentuate the possibility to produce and maintain religiousness and ethnicity despite migration. In the quote, identifications such as “African”, “Senegalese” and “Muslim” are evoked. Thus the quote reflects how the cheikhs’ visits are considered as a reminder of not solely religious but also ethnic and national identities. Furthermore, these different identifications intertwine in the meanings given for the visits.

The interviewee taalibe notes that migration may bring about change to individual identifications. However, he presents that a return to the imagined point of departure, the original source of identifications, which is connected to the moralities of the Muridiyya and the Senegalese family, is always possible.

They all belong to rich families but they want to come to Europe to talk to their faithful taalibes so that they wouldn’t lose their tradition. They come here to remind us at every moment that we are Senegalese, African and we have to practice our religion and we have to help our parents and one day we have to return to Senegal, do something there. It is thanks to them that we feel proud to be African, to be Senegalese, to be Muslim. It’s a reminder, they remind us who we are because there are people who lose completely, who don’t visit marabouts… who go to nightclubs, who do whatever. They don’t call their parents, they don’t even go there, they are completely misguided. If a cheikh speaks to them he can regain them, make them understand that it’s never too late to, in this life we can always change and return towards the family, return, to become who we were before.

(taalibe, Fr)

In this quote, the maintenance of religious, ethnic and national identities in the religious sphere encourages certain kind of action or behavior: the phrasing “and we have to practice our religion and we have to help our parents and one day we have to return to Senegal, do something there.” leaves little space for interpretations in this regard. The practice of religion, support to the transnational family and to Senegal as a home country even in the form of an eventual return are introduced as common obligations. Transnational family obligations were highlighted also by the visiting cheikhs as part of the values that the taalibes should sustain while abroad. As a matter of fact, all interviewee taalibes expressed an idea of an eventual return to Senegal (for the Senegalese migrants’ project of return see Jacques 2009, 189). The idea of return to the original homeland, which is considered as a central feature of a diaspora consciousness, does not always lead to preparations of actual departure but may also be reflected foremost in an expressive behavior (Safran 1991, 83-
In addition to the narratives that favor Murid-related identities and resources, be them religious, ethnic or national, the visits were also narrated against unwanted stereotypes in the Finnish and Senegalese social environment. These latter narratives reveal how the research participant Murids experience some lack of acceptance or recognition in the environment where they practice religion. Somewhat troubled relationship with the society of settlement what comes for example to the construction of identities is regarded as a common feature of a group’s diaspora consciousness (Safran 1991, 83; Cohen 2008, 17). I have chosen to display the following narrative because it resonates to two different discourses that the Murid taalibes seem to, to varying degrees, contest in the interviews. The first discourse depicts the travelling Murid cheikhs as actors primarily motivated by economic concerns. The second discourse positions the Senegalese Murid disciples as passive receiving ends and as part of a homogenous whole called the “immigrants” in the Finnish society. The narrative’s flow from the first discourse to the second deserves a closer look.

The cheikhs who travel, they are well off financially, they move, they contribute to the Senegalese economy and they have their salary every month which means that they don’t think for example that coming to Finland is for earning a lot of money. No, when they come here, from ten to fifteen people who give five euros, what they get from us is finally not even their flight ticket. It’s not even the flight ticket, so it’s not even the fact, the idea, there are many who think it’s because of money but it’s not that.

Interviewer: And already I think if they come to Finland, they have done other countries in Europe. So it’s a lot easier to take a ticket from France than to come from Senegal.

So it’s not the idea of them come to Finland because to tell the truth, what many people don’t know about it is that for example the immigrants, if me for example according to my own experience if you ask me for example what do you think for example of Finland, has it developed for example your life or things like that, I would say no. It’s me, I have contributed to Finland but it’s not Finland that has contributed to me.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting.

And the reason why I say that is that if you ask me how much your tulo\(^31\), your income a year… I cannot even save like 2000 a year. The whole money stays again in the country. And I’m paying the transport…and stuff so it’s not Finland who is giving me but I am the one who gives to Finland. It’s not only me, all other foreigners the same thing. So that’s why like sometimes I tell myself, sometimes there are a lot of people who don’t understand, they don’t understand what is the image, the existing image is derogatory in an indirect way… Let’s say that a lot of people would say that yes the Africans, they come here because their country is poor, things like that and they have come to Finland…of course they exist, you cannot say that does not exist. There are some who have come to Finland because their let’s say it developed their life because they lived in a

\(^{31}\) Income (F).
state a lot more inferior to the state where they are but it’s not everyone. And this image still exists inside Finland. Let’s say that the mentality hasn’t changed. I have lived here… soon ten years but the Finnish mentality is always stuck in it. It hasn’t changed. (*taalibe*, Fr)

The interviewee *taalibe* begins the account by giving justifications for the Murid *cheikhs’* motivations to travel to Finland: according to him the *cheikhs* do not visit Finland in order to primarily collect money from the *taalibes*. This view was shared by all interviewees. The first discourse of the *cheikhs* as economically motivated actors is primarily present among the Senegalese population. As Evers-Rosander summarizes, money spent on Murid guides has both highly agentic spiritual dimension and an important relation to social status inside the Murid networks whereas outside these networks, in Senegal or abroad, part of the non-Murids may consider the donations merely as misspent money (2004, 83-84).

Another interviewee *taalibe* explains that offerings and engagement in the Murid activities does not follow a secular logic in which economic profit can be calculated: “There are people that are so logical that you see the logic is always ‘one, two, three, four’. But God is not one, two, three, four…” (*taalibe*, Fr). Instead, the act of offering is a “self-motivated” and “self-transforming” act, whereby the *taalibe* is transformed into a recipient of *barke* ultimately thanks to the divine legacy of Bamba (Buggenhagen 2001, 384).

Even if economic conditions may be at times harsh, the interviewee *taalibes* emphasize their strength and reject interpretations of them as forced in their actions. They stress the spiritual weight and voluntary nature of their donations to the Murid *cheikhs*.

Often, the countries of settlement are pictured as providing opportunities for the migrants who are consequently able to provide for their home countries through for instance remittances. In the previous account, the interviewee *taalibe* contradicts this image by saying that “I have contributed to Finland but it’s not Finland that has contributed to me.”. He pictures that the main profit of his work in Finland stays in Finland. By the same token, the *cheikhs* are depicted as providers of resources during their visits in Finland. The view of *cheikhs* as the giving party therefore contests the usual direction of resource flows from European countries to African countries. On the grounds of the research data, the *cheikhs’* visits are a positive reference of the religious network’s resources and mobility in the midst of the tightening of migration policy towards non-EU citizens in Europe. The visits’ realization underlines the fact that transnational flows of resources are often twofold and include a reciprocal relation between the sending regions and the country of settlement (see Faist 2010, 29).
In the previous extensive account, a significant narrative transition happens as the interviewee takes the floor for the second time and links the negative discourse of the visiting *cheikhs* as actors motivated primarily by economic concerns to a prevailing negative image of the immigrants as a burden to the Finnish host society: “for example the immigrants, if me for example according to my own experience if you ask me for example that what do you think for example of Finland, has it developed for example your life or things like that, I would say no.”. During this transitional phrase the interviewee-interviewer roles blur as the interviewee starts to both pose and answer questions.

Furthermore, the first discourse of the visiting Murid *cheikhs* as actors primarily motivated by economic aspects stirs up a discontent with a loaded, stereotypical image of the “African immigrant” that is presented in the account as the Finnish “non-immigrant” majority’s view. The interviewee experiences this public image as derogatory and unbalanced as it lumps together all Africans in Finland under the “poor African immigrant”-label. What comes to the recognition of the Senegalese migrants’ public identities, various interviewee *taalibes’* notions on the Finnish social environment’s unfamiliarity with the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity inside Africans in Finland correspond to a common view of the “African” as an ethnic category in Europe even if this “group” consists of hundreds of mutually exclusionary categories (see Hylland Eriksen 2002, 61; Rastas & Päivärinta 2010, 46-47).

In my view, Islam does not define the Senegalese migrants’ public identity in Finland as decidedly as for example in the case of the Somalis, Kurds or Arabs according to Martikainen (2008, 67). Instead, the social categorization from outside happens rather according to color and the “Africanness”. Migrants with Black African origins often need to redefine their identities not only in relation to national belonging but also in relation to a shared “blackness” in European societies (Dorsch 2004, 105). This identification may be approved as part of the group identity even if it is a categorization set from outside (see Jenkins 1997, 81). Thus not only the immigrant position but also different kinds of images of Africa and the Africans in Finland may be identified as factors that define the individual’s scope of action. At the same time, migrants may act in their everyday or occupational lives to diversify the stereotypical images. (see Rastas & Seye 28-35.) In contrast to the public perceptions that cater first of all broad identifications such as “African”, specifically Senegalese ethnic and Murid religious elements are manifested in the contexts of the *cheikhs’* visits. The social proximity between the participants in the visits results in an environment in which social identifications’ nuances gain accurate
meaning and the shared religious origins may be discussed in detail.

6.4 Cultivating a religious memory

As I discussed earlier in this Thesis, the interviewed Murid taalibes and cheikhs co-mobilize a collective memory through conscious adoption of religious roles that inform their actions during the cheikhs’ visits. In addition to these corporeal ways of reproducing the religious tradition, the collective Murid history is also explicitly remembered and brought forward during the visits. During the fieldwork of this Thesis, one particular occasion of remembering was led by a revered Mbacké-Mbacké cheikh, a grandson of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of the Murid brotherhood.

This occasion took place on a Sunday evening in one of the taalibe’s living room where the local Murid taalibes and two other visiting cheikhs had gathered around the visiting Mbacké-Mbacké cheikh. The Murid taalibes placed themselves on the carpet and the visiting cheikhs sat on the armchairs and the sofas to listen to the cheikh as he read about as well as explained “the marathon of Cheikh Amadou Bamba during exile” (taalibe, Fr) in Wolof. The so-called conference was filmed by mobile phones and the videos were later shared. Overall, the Murid taalibes seemed especially content with this evening. One of the interviewee taalibes returned to this occasion in an interview as a sign of the Mbacké-Mbacké cheikh’s visit’s success.

On this particular occasion, the production of a continuing tradition through remembering was led by an authority allied to the line of descent of the brotherhood’s founder. Thus, the Murid tradition was produced not only in a symbolic but also in a genealogic relation to the past. Yet the capacity to continue and develop the Murid belief through rediscovery of the tradition in the present is not limited to authorities who belong to the founding Murid families, but history-telling and remembering are also part of the ordinary practitioners’ religiousness. Processing the collective history, or in an interviewee taalibe’s words “talking about Cheikh Amadou Bamba” among the taalibes, takes place even when the cheikhs are not present. By getting involved in oral conversations about Cheikh Amadou Bamba the Murid men personally engage in the continuum of memory and enact collective religious agency in the process.
The importance of conversation and everyday-remembering also surfaced in the *taalibes’* initiative and ease to hold lengthy speeches about Cheikh Amadou Bamba during the interviews. To some degree, this speech functions as a religious performative even in an interview situation, as it constructs and fortifies the speaker’s identity of a believer. Moreover, the stories told of Cheikh Amadou Bamba during the interviews enhance both the interviewee’s and the interviewer’s understandings of the Muridism, which may be regarded as a desirable outcome for the interviewee Murids in a religious and missionary sense. (see Hovi 2009, 402.)

The specific remembering of Bamba’s exiles, which consist of coerced departures, spiritual elevation through struggle during the exiles and a triumphant return to Senegal, may provide some points of reference for the present migrant conditions. Similarly to Bamba’s time away from Senegal, persistence and continuity may be seen as ideals in the present-day Murid migrants’ religious lives. Despite the possible relevance that the disciples’ international migration may bring for the remembering of Bamba’s exiles in the 21st century, no direct correlation can be established between the remembered and revered histories of exiles and the present migration situations. The saga of Cheikh Amadou Bamba was already actively narrated by the early Murids to establish themselves in the Senegalese cities, for instance in glass painting introduced in Senegal by the Lebanese (Diouf 2000, 690).

The remembering of the collective history in its different forms provides a platform for “…incorporation into believing community and differentiation from those not from this lineage” (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 81-82). In other words, reproducing a collective history may construct an understanding of the group’s identity not only on the grounds of its origins but also in relation to others who do not belong to the religious lineage. A diaspora consciousness emerges rather by a differentiation from surrounding homogenous wholes than by an aim to merge into them (Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk 2005, 30). This type of differentiation is reflected in an interviewee taalibe’s explanation of his motives for maintaining the Dahira Touba Finland in Helsinki.

We are Murids, we have to gather… we have something in common… it’s Cheikh Amadou Bamba, we have to meet each other, talk about him… that’s what helps us a lot because every time we feel that we belong to Cheikh Amadou Bamba, that thing helps us to every time think that we are not like others, if I say others it’s we are not free to do whatever we want… (*taalibe*, Fr)
The quote begins with an identity marker that is typical to the research data: “We are Murids…” This identity marker functions as an active claim of belief. Thereafter, the interviewee defines a Murid group identity through belonging to Cheikh Amadou Bamba, which in turn differentiates the Murides from “others”. Various tendencies are present in the definition process of the group boundaries through remembrance of the religious history which revolves around the founder of the brotherhood. Bamba who in his time bore the main consequences of the French colonial administration’s policies against Muslim guides, became a symbol of the anti-colonial struggle. Already during the period of the brotherhood’s organization that followed Bamba’s death in 1927, the Murid identities were constituted in a participating but not assimilating relation to the prevailing structures of the French colonial administration. The Murids’ stance on other Muslim groups with a more universalist and scriptural Islamic practice was similar: participating but not assimilating.32 (Diouf 2000, 685-686.)

In the more recent Murid locations the Murids’ “ambivalence between entering the receiving society and closure” brought out by Riccio in the context of Italy may be viewed as a customary prerequisite for the Murids’ establishment of their specific religious agency and multifaceted Murid identities. Differentiation from others does not forcibly lead to isolation from others. In the interviews, Muridism was seen to promote tolerance of other religions and worldviews. Although Senegalese affiliations and Wolof as the main language of practicing remain strong in the Murid occasions in Helsinki, the interviewed taalibes also expressed openness towards Murids of other national origins. Similarly, the visiting cheikhs highlighted that part of their taalibes have their origins in other countries than Senegal.

In the interview narratives, the interviewees –both taalibe and cheikh– locate the Murid collectivity in a larger story and identify within it (cp. Leming 2007, 83). I have first noted here that this mobilization of religious history produces definitions of collective diasporic identities through identification and differentiation in the unfolding present. Second, I highlight the way religious agents are constructed in the remembering process through a narration of continuity.

Hervieu-Léger formulates that “at the source of all religious belief…there is belief in the continuity of the lineage of the believers… It is affirmed and manifested in the essentially religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the

32 For articulations of Sufi-identities in different contexts of Islam see Evers Rosander 1997.
future.” (2000, 125). In the following quote, an interviewee taalibe uses a metaphor of a building to describe the continuity of the body of Murid convictions established by Cheikh Amadou Bamba. The interviewed taalibe portrays the tradition as eternal and unchangeable on one hand, and as fluid and recurrent on the other: “each time this building needs renovation, they can do it by themselves” refers to the Murid followers’ capacity to reproduce the religious tradition.

...Because he came... we can say that... you find an old building, you come, you remodel33 it. You remodel this building and you do it in a way that the people can live in it and each time this building needs renovation, they can do it by themselves. Let’s say that it’s an eternal science. Until the day the people... we’ll die the science stays, because he has written and he has left, and this science cannot be burned for example, you put it in the fire and it flames, it’s a science that continues. And it continues from generation to generation... (taalibe, Fr)

How do the interviewees then position themselves as continuators of the religious lineage in their narrations? First of all, the establishment of a religious community in Helsinki is not only seen as a practical measure to ensure continuity in religious practicing but also as a fulfilment of the vision of the brotherhood’s founder Cheikh Amadou Bamba. In addition to the taalibes themselves, an interviewed cheikh positions the Helsinki resident taalibes as active continuators of the religious lineage: “They are on the way... to just do the command that Cheikh was given to every community” (cheikh, E).

The taalibes’ dreams and actual projects to develop the Finnish Murid community as well as the Senegalese Murid homeland, which may be seen as the preeminent sanctified region of origin from where the Murids reach the rest of the world (see Diouf 690-691), builds a vision of the taalibes and the cheikhs as active in projecting the chain of belief to the future. It seems that as the interviewees express their desire and commitment to continue the work of the brotherhood’s founder, they also envision themselves as entrusted with the task of extending the Murid chain. By doing so, they create simultaneously binding responsibility and voluntary agency in formulating a religious project with unforeseen outcomes. (see Hervieu-Léger 2000, 130.)

The religious projects take place in the nexus of dispersed Murid communities. The global connectedness of the Murids strengthens the universal missionary ambitions of the brotherhood. Expansion is facilitated by the Murids’ strong religious identity, efficiently coordinated political and transnational networks and by the financial resources that

33 Renouveler (Fr).
emigration offers. (Evers-Rosander 2004, 73.) Travel is one way of guaranteeing the continuity of the Murid lineage of belief, since the itinerant religious guides fortify the dispersed communities through their visits abroad.

6.5 The ‘gift’ of travel

The *cheikhs*’ travel is looked at from two different angles in the interview narratives. On one hand, their travel is narrated as different from worldly travel as the travelers’ religious mission and spiritual consciousness is highlighted. Buggenhagen notes that in the Murids’ long history of migration, “Travel has been richly symbolic as a means of obtaining knowledge of this world, the inner self, and ultimately the divine.” (2001, 378-379). On the other hand, the narrations on the *cheikhs*’ travel contain also elements that do not refer to the *cheikhs* as exclusively religious figures and thus primarily situate their travel in a religious framework. In the following account of a *taalibe*, the *cheikhs*’ travel is portrayed as different from the ordinary people’s travel.

I give an example. Someone who is normal like me, if I want to go for example in Norway, I ask myself first the question how much the hotel costs. If I go to Norway, what am I going to do. I go to visit there, I go to see some museums, to see how Norway is, is it beautiful. Which means that I ask myself a lot of questions. But the cheikh he doesn’t need to ask a lot of questions. The cheikh, what he needs to ask, it’s first of all, he asks himself if there are Murids in where I’m going… If he knows that there are Murids in there he doesn’t need a hotel because he knows that… he can be with the Murids and the Murids will receive him with wide open arms. Because the Murids have the level… to understand why the cheikh comes. But for example a Finnish police officer you tell him that the cheikh he comes to the airport, he is stopped, you are told: ‘Why do you come to Finland?’ He says that ‘There are taalibes who are there’ and ‘Which taalibes, what are their names?’, ‘I don’t know but anyhow they are taalibes, they are there’. But the Finnish police officer says to himself yes he mocks us. Because the Finnish police officer doesn’t know… those are things that he doesn’t understand. (*taalibe*, Fr)

Towards the end of the account above, the interviewee *taalibe* forms a hypothetical narrative that consists of a dialogue between a Finnish police officer and a travelling Murid *cheikh*. This narrative succeeds the explanation on how the Murid *taalibes* approve and internalize the special logic of travel as they receive the *cheikhs* “with wide open arms”. The Murid *taalibes*’ understanding of the *cheikh’s* motivations and modes of travel are compared against the Finnish authority’s conceptions. The imagined police officer’s questions belong to the secular realm in which the fact that in the specific Murid system of travel, the *cheikh* may be in reliance of on an unknown group of disciples in the new
country, is not recognized as legitimate. In order to fulfill the visits, the Murids must take into account the discrepancy between the Murids’ and the surrounding environments’ ideas of travel.

Whereas the previous account refers first of all to the social realities of the cheikhs’ travel, the following account of another taalibe links the cheikhs’ travel more closely to the spiritual realm. A common thread between the two narratives is that they point to the absence of questioning and calculation with regards to travel. Especially in the following narrative, travel is seen as a search for an unknown which may result in unexpected matters: “…Because nobody knows where is my chance… but you have to go to check where is your chance you know, you can meet some other things.” In this narrative, travel is labeled by uncertainty and creativity. Getting involved voluntarily in uncertainty through travel brings about agency. Referring to Murid mysticism, the interviewee taalibe depicts the way travel may provide the traveler with various “gifts”.

Interviewer: They really get some support when they come to travel? Because you also have to have the ticket and…

They have but those things it’s not important, those tickets, it’s sacrifice you know… Because nobody knows where is my chance, if I knew my chance every day I wake up I just go there and take it… but you have to go to check where is your chance you know, you can meet some other things. Sëriñ Touba also he has travelled, they have taken him, the France people have taken him everywhere. And the cheikh also they want to travel like Sëriñ Touba, how he was inside Muslim also there is some profit when you travel. God has tell something about travel you know, and when you want to be higher cheikh you must travel. Everything is inside Quran and they follow those things that’s why they choose to come here to visit, to check the people, that’s why they come…

Interviewer: What is the profit you get from travel?

The profit what you can get from travel is many. You can learn many things from travel and you can see many things from travel you know. And you can have many gift from travel you know. That is the secret of travel you know. Because maybe you can see some of your people inside the travel and they were lost and you put them inside the right way, also they come back to the right way you know. (taalibe, E)

In the fourth line of the interviewee’s first floor he brings up Amadou Bamba as an example to the present-day cheikhs’ travel (for similar interpretations see Ebin 1996). The interviewee depicts travel as profitable in a religious sense: in addition to elevating the level of the cheikh, travel may benefit the cheikhs’ spiritually as they strengthen the religiousness of the taalibes’ they encounter. In addition to narrating the cheikhs’ travel in religious terms, especially the younger cheikhs’ travel is also depicted as similar to

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34 Sëriñ Touba in the quote.
ordinary travel as the travelers “learn” through travel. An interviewee taalibe explains that:

…Muridism, it’s like what I say to you it lives. And these cheikhs also when they come to Europe to see the taalibes, of course they come to see the taalibes and things like that but they also come to learn. Because Murid is someone who learns always, from today to tomorrow. Also them, when they come to Finland they learn a lot of things. (taalibe, Fr)

Mapped under the “Murid”-identification in the previous quote, both cheikhs and taalibes travel to “learn”. This view is fortified by an interviewed cheikh’s explanation of his travel through interest in familiarizing with different religions and cultures:

…That kind what you do it’s very important. Just to know each other to know everything, to go somewhere and, that is a study. That is very important. That’s why me I like travel. I go everywhere just to see and then learn more and more about things that are going on in the world. It is very important. (cheikh, E)

While some interviewees point out that the model of the cheikhs’ travel originates from Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s travels, others remind that a construction of a correlation between the Murids’ travel and Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s travel overplays the Murids’ mobility as “there are non-Murids who travel, there are other Africans who travel” (taalibe, Fr). The view of the Murids as people who “think of their travels in terms of exile and pilgrimage, underlining hard work, suffering and sacrifice as religious duties.” (Evers Rosander 2004, 73) should not be hastily generalized to avoid a view of religious history as the sole decisive or explaining factor of the Senegalese Murids’ travel and migration.

Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s exiles and the miracles and difficulties inherent in his experience form a backbone of the library from where the Murids draw religious points of reference to their travel, everyday life and promised success (Diouf 2000, 699; Evers-Rosander 2004, 89). This religious library informs also the interviewed Murid taalibes’ and cheikhs’ consciousness of different types of travels. However, also other, social, economic and political libraries co-exist with the religious body of references. Consequently, as religious references are mobilized to give meaning to the cheikhs’ travel and stay, other interpretations are not overridden.
7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Key findings and discussion

This Thesis has provided an introduction to Muridism, a Senegalese form of Sufi Islam, as it is settled in the Finnish religious landscape by Helsinki resident Murids and the Murid brotherhood’s travelling religious guides. Unlike many dahiras that are founded around a specific branch or religious guide in Senegal or even abroad, the migrant dahiras in Helsinki gathers together Murids within various religious affiliations, geographical, educational and professional backgrounds. One of the aims of this Thesis was to communicate the diversity inside the Murid religious field in Helsinki through listening and interpreting the voices of both Murid and Baay Faal Murid taalibes and cheikhs.

The interviewed disciples formulate an active stance to religiousness as many of them depict a continuous study in their personal religious Murid “paths” that they follow in Helsinki. For some, settling in a new country that is often viewed as culturally distant from the country of origin has led to new religious activity and reflection. The development of new religious knowledge and doctrinal capital may be encouraged by the absence of permanently settled religious authorities which results in an increased role of the ordinary disciples in the establishment of a communal form of Muridism in a new location (see Martikainen 2013, 42). In their religious organization, the Murid disciples in Helsinki seem to capitalize on their first-hand experience from other Murid communities and associations in Senegal and abroad as well as on the information and guidance provided by the transnational network, as represented by the visiting cheikhs. At the moment of this Thesis research, most of the religious practice related in specific to Muridism took place in private spaces yet the interviewed Murid disciples expressed an intention to rent spaces more regularly for the Murid religious activities as the number of practitioners gradually increases.

When the interviewed disciples compare the Murid presence in Helsinki to Murid communities in other world cities, their religious organization appears for them to be in an early stage because of the small number of Murids and Senegalese migrants in general in
Finland. However, the first Murid *cheikhs* visited the interviewed working-aged Murid men in Helsinki already a decade ago. On the grounds of this Thesis, it may be concluded that despite the small size of its Murid community, Finland gets its fair share of the Murid brotherhood’s well-organized transnationalism with the mounting frequency of the brotherhood’s *cheikhs’* visits. This exploratory study has proven the efficiency of Murid transnationalism in supporting the individual believers’ religiousness as well as the communal religious settlement yet again in a new location at a grassroots level.

Through ethnographic methods, I have observed how the ordinary Murid *taalibes* and the Murid *cheikhs* constitute the *cheikhs’* visits in Helsinki and analyzed how the research participants experience these visits. The co-mobilization of Muridism in this micro-context reveals experienced and imagined sense of collectivity that shapes the Murids’ organizational models and transnational practices in the new country of settlement. During the *cheikhs’* visits in Helsinki, the *cheikhs* together with the migrant *taalibes* foster a specific consciousness of an inter-connected global community. This consciousness that is created in the communal religious space in Helsinki, and that I here call the Murid diaspora consciousness, may be summarized in correspondence to the classical criteria of a diaspora group presented in detail in chapter 4.1 of this Thesis (Safran 1991, 83-84; Cohen 2008, 17).

Why the traditional set of definitions of diaspora resonates with the research participants’ religious consciousness is that they first, identify within a Murid group that is dispersed in a number of countries and furthermore, they are remarkably aware of others who share a position of a migrant Murid abroad. Second, like Murids in general, the research participants have a tendency to sacralize the city of Touba in Senegal and therefore retain a special kind of relationship to a spiritual homeland. The collective myth of this homeland is mobilized for instance in connection to remembrance of the founder of the brotherhood, “Sërīn Touba”, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. Third, the interviewee Murids’ desire to foster a distinct collective identity against the Finnish social background where they have possibilities for communal religious practicing –yet their religious, ethnic and national identities rarely gain accurate public understanding– stems with the diaspora criteria’s item of a group’s lack of complete acceptance in the society of settlement. Fourth, all interviewee Murid disciples identified within a project of return to the original homeland even though this has not lead to a development of an actual return movement. Fifth, the interviewees’ highlight all Murids’ obligation to contribute to the maintenance and prosperity of the global center of the *Muridiyya*, the city Touba. Finally, the Murid
taalibes’ continuous relationship to the city and its people through remittances and pilgrimages as well as greetings and barke transferred by the visiting cheikhs mark their ethnocommunal consciousness. Additionally, the relation to the spiritual homeland is lived through an imagined connection to the holy city that may be ritually recreated in a foreign environment (cp. Riccio 2004, 936-937).

Altogether, the cheikhs’ visits differ from the migrant men’s routine distribution of time and create ritual contexts in the middle of the everyday life. I have observed the research participant Murids’ actual behavior during the visits as well as their interview narratives of these events. As Ebin notes, the cheikh’s arrival often activates a more formal order in the diasporic Murid community where some formalities and notions of social hierarchy vacillate because of the migrant condition (1996). In summary, the visits may be considered as one of the most conventional occasions for living up to the Murid discipline and hence evoking a religious memory in the new society of settlement.

Indeed, the receiving of cheikhs in Helsinki proves to be a fertile moment for mobilizing a collective memory and thus reproducing the Murid tradition in the “transnational extension of the taalibe-serign35 relationship” (Riccio 2001, 595). Collective memory is mobilized not only in explicit remembering but also through strategic behaviors and lived roles of a taalibe and a cheikh that are, according to the interviews, retrieved from the past. Remembering religious history thus becomes corporeal. Self-sacrificing serving and submissive behavior are central elements of the Murid men’s religious action during the visits. The taalibes hold the cheikhs as influential religious actors and they seem to perform the religious roles consciously rather than repetitively. The emotional and symbolic intensity of the ritual evocation of Muridism during the cheikh visits as well as the gatherings of the dahira where the xassida are collectively recited, facilitates the reproduction of a collective memory and thus a mobilization of Muridism in new social environment.

In the unfolding present, the mobilization of the religious history produces definitions of collective diasporic identities through identification in a collectivity and differentiation from others. Recreation of a religious memory serves also to narrate continuity as the interviewee taalibes are positioned as active continuators of a religious lineage who participate in fulfilling the vision of Cheikh Amadou Bamba. During the visits, the small community of Murids in Helsinki continually processes the data it retrieves from the past

35 Serign refers to cheikh.
thus granting religion a capability of “incorporating even the innovations and reinterpretations demanded by the present” (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 87). In the taalibes’ views Muridism “remains attuned to the times” as one interviewee taalibe put it. Not only the authorities but also ordinary practitioners involve at a personal level in the mobilization of collective memory thus “being part of a continuing tradition” (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 86). Therefore, it may be summarized that bearing religious history and cultivating memories impregnates the Murid men’s sphere of religious practicing in Helsinki. The Murid religious history seems to, on one hand, provide the ordinary practitioners considerable latitude as they may personally engage in its re-production through explicit remembering and corporeally lived roles in the diasporic location. On the other hand, it functions as a link to the social authorities of the past who justify existing social dominations and remind of the extent of the brotherhood’s structures of authority.

Moreover, in this Thesis I have analyzed religious agency in the sociality of religious experts and ordinary practitioners, the research participant cheikhs and taalibes. This denotes tackling the cursory paradox of locating religious agency in a relationship that is depicted, in ideal and doctrinal terms, as highly hierarchical. Looking at the Murids’ engagement within the cheikh-taalibe-social structure illustrates how religious actors’ may enact agency through embeddedness within various temporalities. In sum, the research participants’ religious agency is rooted in the past through an access that the social structure affords to valued identities in the founding personages of the brotherhood as well as being constituted in the immediacy of the present in the more or less reciprocal relationships between the cheikhs and the taalibes. The link across time to Cheikh Amadou Bamba and Cheikh Ibrahima Fall is produced in both symbolic and genealogic terms. Considerable variance in the current cheikh-taalibe-relationships relates to the visiting cheikhs’ different rankings, religious orientations and educational or professional backgrounds as well as their diverse ways of guiding the taalibes. In conclusion, the Murid taalibes find fuel to the religious action of the day both from the past and the present, they live up to ideal roles retrieved from the religious history to the present and they situate their actions in a religious framework that reaches far to the future –furthermost to the salvation promised by Cheikh Amadou Bamba in the next world.

In this world, the visits are considered by many research participants as reminders of the origins of not only religious but also ethnic and national identities. As such, the narrated cheikhs’ visits constitute a transnational social space in which the above-mentioned identities intersect in various ways. Hypothetically, increasing intercultural opportunities
might lead a group away from a diasporic space via multiculturalism and pluralism to more cosmopolitan prospects. However, “a return to the local and the familiar” through counter-global tendencies such as ethnic particularism and nationalism thrive in the midst of the anonymous, universalizing and bewildering globalization. (Cohen 2008, 147.) Despite of the fact that transnational theory challenges the idea of uniform nation-states by emphasizing people’s simultaneous involvements in social, religious or political fields of more than one nation-state, nation-states have not lost their position as prevalent operating units. Dispersed individuals and communities rarely identify primarily as “transnational” – instead they still make use of national identifications and belonging. Nations are not abandoned at once, but the so-called transmigrants’ presence and actions as nationals within various borders diversifies the conception of a nation-state. (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc 1994, 8; Glick Schiller 2010, 111.) The Murids’ transnational form of Islam in Helsinki provides an example of how migrants’ transnational practices do not merely question but they may also strengthen (and transform) national and ethnic identities. The migrants’ continual support to Touba crystallizes the manners in which dispersion and transnational practices may serve to strengthen the original homeland. From a historical perspective, Diouf sees concomitance between the Murids’ mobility and the construction of the city of Touba as a stable point of reference (2000, 698). By the same token, the Murids’ spread to more diverse locations –not only to the ancient colony or countries along language lines or bilateral migration contracts– creates a favorable basis for the evolution of a diaspora consciousness and -related religious networks (cp. Cohen 2008, 144).

Through the religious agency in the organization of the cheikhs’ visits the Murids foster a distinct collective identity and talk back to the negative images of the “Africans” they face in the Finnish environment (see Rastas & Päivärinta 2010). The narrations of the visits are accompanied by a great deal of pride and a rejection of unempowering images of African immigrants as the receiving end in the Finnish society. Despite of their travel and engagement in transnational social spaces, the lives of Murids’ residing in Helsinki, are anchored in Finland at various levels –a great part of the research participant Murid disciples are not for example “nonstop traders” (Ebin 1996) who would be just paying a visit in Helsinki. Accordingly, both settling and mobility need to be taken into account when hybrid religious innovations are discussed. What comes to the Senegalese Murids’ migration processes in Helsinki, the influence of religion should neither be downplayed nor overemphasized. For instance, in a religious sense, Amadou Bamba’s exiles may be regarded as “a memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the
great historical injustice that binds the group together” (Cohen 2008, 6) and accompanies a diaspora consciousness of dispersal from the original homeland. Yet the vividly remembered exiles do not alone define the Murids’ experiences of migration.

This Thesis has demonstrated the significance of religion in the social life of a specific Murid setting. The religious logics of this setting may be, and to some extent are, challenged by the Murids’ wider social environment as for instance the cheikhs’ modes of travel or motives for visiting the taalibes are questioned. The interviewed taalibes’ and cheikhs’ narratives that sustain some and reject other interpretations indicate that religious dispositions and identities need to be continuously negotiated and adapted to fluid social contexts. Religious agency as a concept perplexes a static conceptualization of Islam as a uniform system that defies all change (see Leming 2007, 74).

Thanks to travel, the visiting cheikh may be regarded as a “guarantor of continuity between different spaces invested by the members of the brotherhood”36 (Bava 2003b, 161). The transnationally extended social structure between the cheikhs and the taalibes is a particular aspect of religion that is touched by the transformative force of migration. Religion is remodeled as the migrant taalibes invite the cheikh to visit their homes in company of other local taalibes—a prevalent practice in the diasporic location but a rarity in the country of origin.

7.2 Further research

This Thesis has concentrated on the religious lives and specific practices of a small group of Murid disciples inside the Senegalese born residents in Finland. However, the religious affiliations and migration experiences of the Senegalese people do not limit to Muridism but instead, they are likely to be manifold and variable. A wider ethnographic research among the Senegalese and Gambian people would bring about a more comprehensive view of religiousness in these migrants’ spheres in Finland. In most cases, the ways in which individuals wish to define and put in practice already Muslim identities varies greatly inside migrant communities. The scale of religious affiliations ranges from indifference to culturalist approaches and from organized forms of membership to a distance from this.

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36 “garant de la continuité entre les différents espaces investis par les membres de la confrérie” (Fr)
type of forms. (Dassetto & Nonneman1997, 195-200.) Thus far, a great part of the African migrants’ religious communities in Finland have not received academic attention.

When it comes to the Muridiyya, this Thesis has provided an introduction to the Senegalese Murids’ presence in Helsinki from a few specific aspects. During the collection of the research material the Murid religious movement seemed to be continuously developing in the metropolitan area, which corresponds to Riccio’s observations on Muridism in Italy (2001, 594). The composition of religious practitioners in the Finnish Murid community evolves constantly at least because of newcomers and visitors that – moreover– influence local religious dispositions through their travel, settling, advice and networking. The dynamic and fluctuating nature of migrant Muridism underlines the fact that this Thesis remains a limited and time-bound study and therefore more thorough ethnographic work among the Murids could provide new perspectives for discussions on the contemporary migrants’ religious organization. I would also see a yet more intense use of research methods that involve the researched group in the research process as a desirable development. Multi-sited ethnography, including Senegal and other Murid sites would bring about new understanding on the nuances between Murid communities in different countries of settlement. Furthermore, the Murids’ influence on the societies of settlement has not received extensive academic attention. This topic could be discussed for example through conversions of people with diverse national origins, the Murid associations’ development initiatives, the migrants’ bi-cultural sphere of family or the Murids’ interaction with other Muslim groups.

Last, a specific aspect that would require attention in the field of transnational Muridism and migration is the use and influence of modern information technologies in religious practice, settlement and authority. Not long ago the recordings of the xassida or information on the Murid brotherhood’s khalifa-général’s orders circulated in the form of cassettes that the Murid traders or religious guides transported with them to the countries of settlement (Ebin 1996; Riccio 2001, 594) but today for instance a reservoir of xassida may be easily listened to online and downloaded in files regardless of location. The Murid brotherhood is widely represented in the internet through multiple websites and diverse content is shared by Murid associations as well as individuals. Based on the interviews, the use of internet for religious expression, information retrieval and communication is common also among the individual practitioners.
The defiance of geography makes internet a veritable transnational medium. Space created by the internet may cultivate certain ways of articulating Islam and its links to territories or localities. Internet may foster transnational Islam, and more precisely, transnational experiences and religious practices. (Siapera 2007, 97-98.) Kathrin Kissau and Uwe Hunger classified the researched migrant groups’ communication structures in the internet in three categories: transnational online communities, virtual diasporas and ethnic online public spheres. For instance the Kurdish migrants’ use of the internet demonstrated that their online activities serve to cultivate their diaspora identity. (Kissau & Hunger 2010, 257, 260.) In regards to the Murids, the brotherhood’s presence on the internet could be observed in order to trace the internet’s conceivable role in the emergence of a diaspora consciousness. Furthermore, internet’s potential in influencing the existing, or giving birth to new, transnational practices and migratory experiences could be analyzed through Murid followers’ and their associations’ projects.
8 REFERENCES

8.1 Sources

13 interviews with Senegalese migrants residing in Finland and visiting Murid guides conducted between October 2012 and February 2013:
Six recorded and transcribed interviews with Senegalese migrants. Five recorded and transcribed interviews with Murid guides, written notes of two unrecorded interviews with Murid guides.

Etnographic fieldnotes of interviews and participative observation conducted between October and December 2012 in Helsinki.

8.2 Figures

Figure 1 Cheikh Amadou Bamba. Accessed in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:AhmaduBamba.jpg#filelinks.

8.3 Bibliography


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8.4 Internet references


9 APPENDIXES

9.1 A note on orthography

I aim at consistency in the orthography in spite of few compromises. Names of persons and places are spelt in the French manner, which is that often used in Senegal. Transcriptions in quotations have not been changed.

As a general rule, I have chosen to use the Arab words as they have become known in the Wolof language and as they have been used by the interviewees. An aberration to the Wolof spelling of the religious vocabulary is the word *cheikh* that is spelt in the French manner which is that more generally used by the Senegalese than the Wolof *seex*. In the use of Arab words that are transliterated into Latin letters, I have minimized the use of diacritical marks and I have romanized words that have become known in the English language such as Ramadan or imam (see Martin 2004, xi).

Wolof is rendered into a phonetic form. I have avoided using accents in the Wolof words. The use of accents does not change the signification in Wolof words unlike in a number of tonal African languages. In the transliteration of Wolof, one letter corresponds to one speech sound. Most vowel sounds are pronounced as for example in Finnish. The pronunciation of some letters, especially consonants, differs from European languages: “k” responds to “c” sound as in “cat” in English. The letter “j” is pronounced like “j” in the English “Jane”. The consonant “x” is pronounced like the Spanish “j” and “ñ” is pronounced like “ny”. The Wolof “ö” is pronounced like the Finnish “ö” or as “e” as in the English word “her”. The so-called prenasalized consonants (for example “mb” or “nd”) are pronounced as one speech sound.

Bracketed initials indicate the original language in the case of citations and terms:

(A) for Arabic; (E) for English; (F) for Finnish; (Fr) for French; (W) for Wolof.
9.2 Glossary

**Baay Faal**: Cheikh Ibrahima Fall’s disciple (masculine) or branch. Feminine equivalent *yaay faal*.

**Barke**: divine power, blessing (from the Arab *baraka*).

**Daara**: (Quran) school, collective work group in service of a *cheikh*.

**Dahira**: association of disciples, local prayer circle.

**Dhikr**: shortened ritual prayer formula.

**Grand Magal**: the Murid annual celebration of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba’s departure in exile.

**Taalibe**: disciple.

**Cheikh (seeex)**: religious guide, used interchangeably with the words *marabout* and *sëriñ* by the interviewees. Cheikh is also a common forename in Senegal.

**Tarixa**: Sufi path, order, brotherhood.

**Wird**: ritual prayer formula.

**Xassaid** (pl. *Xassida*): religious verse written by Cheikh Amadou Bamba.

**Jebbalu**: act and ritual formula of submission to *cheikh*.

**Sëriñ**: spiritual chief or master, used interchangeably with the words *cheikh* and *marabout* by the interviewees.

**Sëriñ Touba**: literally the “Master of Touba” Murid name for Cheikh Amadou Bamba.

**Marabout**: religious guide, used interchangeably with the words *cheikh* and *sëriñ* by the interviewees.

9.3 Interview themes and questions for Murid disciples in English

**In Senegal: religious background, family**

How did you become a Murid?
When did you first travel outside Senegal?
When did you arrive in Finland?

**Muridism**

Who is a “Murid”? Who is a “Baay faal”?

**In Finland: religious organization, dahira**

How are the Murids organized in Finland? What is your role?
From where does your religious education originate (Quran school, dahiras etc)?
What can the dahir give the Murids in Finland?

Cheikhs and Cheikh visits
Do you have an own cheikh?
How did you get to know him?
Why are the marabouts important for the Senegalese for the Murids?
How are the visits of the cheikhs organized?
What is your relation to the cheikhs who visit Finland? How do you consider them?
How do you participate in the visits?
What is the meaning of their visit, what do they bring here?
How were the visits of the latest cheikhs for you, how did it go?
Which kind of guidance or advice do you ask from the cheikhs?

Personal practice of religion
How do you practice religion in Finland?
Is it different to be a Murid Baay Faal and to practice in Finland and in Senegal?
What does the recitation of the xassida mean to you?
Do you participate in the dahir?
Do you go to a mosque in Finland?
Would you say that you are a Baay Faal?
What does it mean for you to be a Baay Faal?
Are there different ways of being a Murid following Muridism?
How is the celebration of next Grand Magal prepared? / How was the celebration last Grand Magal?

Transnational practices
Do you collect money collectively or individually to send to Senegal or to finance events or projects in Finland or in Senegal?
Have you made investments in Senegal?

Work and religion, struggle and success
Where do you work?
What are the values that you would like to preserve in Finland?
Have there been hard times for you in Finland?

Migration story
What were your first impressions about Europe and Finland?
What motivated you to migrate?
What happened in your life in Senegal other country before you travelled to Finland?
Did you know some migrants in Senegal before coming to Finland?
What did you think about migration, Europe and Finland then?

Travel to Senegal, religion and family.
Do you have family outside Senegal?
Do you have some responsibilities towards your Senegalese family members?
Where is your home?
How often do you travel to Senegal or somewhere else?
How do you organize it?
What would be the ideal arrangement of living?
Do you visit Touba, cheikhs or mosques when you travel Senegal?

**Future**

Do you plan staying in Finland?
Where do you see yourself in the future?