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### **Translocal urban spaces: negotiating legitimacy through festive events**

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#### **Abstract**

Recent tendencies in migration studies go back to the very local rooting of transnational spaces: Ludger Pries analyses the “spatial spanning of the social”; Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çağlar develop a “theory of locality in migration studies”. In francophone social geography and sociology there is a similar research agenda on local-global embedding processes influenced by Gildas Simon and Alain Tarrus’ „La mondialisation par le bas“. By researching political and cultural events in a context of migration, I will show how the understanding of a specific event within an urban context can help us to recognize the rooting of transnational networks. Therefore, my epistemological focus considers festive events as platforms for the negotiation of inclusion/exclusion and transformation processes within migration in urban spaces. This choice avoids taking an a priori-defined ethnic, religious or sociocultural category as a key issue in the processes of communitarization. A political and social legitimacy is created by the participants through the festive event. The 1<sup>st</sup> empirical example will be the Murid parade in New York, where followers of a Sufi group get successfully integrated in the social and urban space in the United States. The 2<sup>nd</sup> example shows how origin works temporarily as a resource within festive events in Paris, which finally leads to the emergence of a *we-group* based on a common belonging to an urban territory.

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<sup>1</sup> The essay submitted is the work of only the individual whose name appears on the front page as the author; any parts taken from other sources are appropriately referenced in the essay.

This essay contributes two empirical examples addressing the **mutually constituted** local dynamics of migrants in two global cities, New York and Paris, **and the restructuration and marketing** of these cities. I focus on festive events as platforms for the negotiation of inclusion/exclusion and transformation processes within migration. I use political and cultural events in these two cities as the entry points to understand the different pathways of migrant urban incorporation in these places. This essay does not operate with an *a priori*-defined ethnic or religious group as the units of analysis; there is no assumption that people who share a religious or national origin settle as a community. By linking the scholarships on rituals and events and on translocal social spaces within the framework of glocalization (Robertson 1995) this analysis aims to draw attention to the innovative methodological instruments of action theory. The first case study the Murid<sup>2</sup> parade in New York, illustrates how the followers of a Sufi group have developed and sought multifaceted relations with local urban institutions and actors. The second case shows how ethnic origin, which is used as an initial resource within festive events in Paris, leads to the emergence of a place-based belonging facilitated not by cultural difference but by the efforts to restructure and market urban space. To explore the venues of migrant incorporation, I focus on the particular trajectory of a translocal<sup>3</sup> Sufi tariqa (brotherhood) of Senegalese origin, the Murids, founded by Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba in the 19th century. Some of the activities of contemporary Murid network are central to incorporative events and activities that link migrants to broader social fields within New York City and transnationally. In particular, a parade celebrates the visits that the religious leader of Murids, Shaykh Mourtada Mbacké, made to keep up ties to his pupils. Although based in Senegal, for fifteen years until his death in 2004, he visited religious communities overseas<sup>4</sup>. Muslims from

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<sup>2</sup> Murid is derived from the arab term for disciple within a Sufi-brotherhood. In this context, the word Murids stand for the members of a tariqa (arab: brotherhood, pl. turuq) founded in West Africa by Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba (1850-1927). Paris, New York and several Italian cities are important nodes in the translocal network of the Murids. The other important tariqa in Senegal is the Tijâniyya, founded by Cheikh Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Mukhtar Ibn Salim at-Tidjâni (1727-1815).

<sup>3</sup> I am using the term "translocal" in the context of this brotherhood for two reasons: although some authors within the transnationalism literature focus on local settings and manage to overcome methodological nationalism by observing emerging spaces that go beyond nations, others still remain in national containers and dichotomies like sending and receiving society. The second reason why I focus on local expressions of a world-wide network here is the fact the Sufi brotherhood pay high attention to places, especially holy places of birth or death of important spiritual leaders. In some cases, the name of a place becomes part of the name of a person. Eric Kit-wai Ma (2002: 131) also uses the concept of translocal spatiality in the sense of a "local-to-local" spatial dynamic". Taking the example of Hong Kong underground bandrooms, he assumes that "local spatiality absorbs transborder subcultural energies and re-channels them to become discursive resources for resisting local governmentality and the work-and-spent culture of transnational capitalist discourse".

<sup>4</sup> Another part of his activities was to work on a growing visibility of the Murids by giving conferences (at the UNESCO in Paris). The Murids are far from being the only tariqa (brotherhood) who entertains translocal links. The other important tariqa popular amongst Senegalese, the Tijâniyya, has also spiritual leaders who travel to their disciples, but they are far more discrete within public space during their visits. In the Senegalese shops and restaurant in Harlem, portraits of the main spiritual leaders of both turuq are visible. For Sufism in Western societies see Malik/Hinnells (2006), for the case of the Naqshbandiyya rooted in Turkey and Central Asia see Weismann (2007).

different *turuq* (brotherhoods) take into consideration the specific cultural and religious practices in their different countries of residence in order to become a part of the religious and political landscapes. According to the notion of opportunity structures developed in literature on social movements, these groups “embrace particular strategies in their quest to influence policy decisions...According to this argument, both stable and contingent factors outline specific opportunity structures (formally and informally) that social movements and interest groups can exploit when pursuing their goals” (Wilson/Rodriguez Cordero 2005: 326)<sup>5</sup>.

The local context of migration and the way that migrants organise themselves within the new translocal spaces is as important as the knowledge and customs from their original home. Therefore, we suggest including the notion of ‘translocal spaces’ in theoretical and empirical approaches to migration. Our recent empirical fieldwork amongst religious (Sufi) and political Senegalese networks in New York has shown how deeply these networks are rooted in the local social spaces, and how important local-to-local relations are within the network. Several individuals are members of both the Murids’ network and the network of the political opposition parties. A strong alliance of these networks contributed extensively to the victory of Abdoulaye Wade, a Murid, during the Senegalese presidential elections in 2000 (Salzbrunn 2002a; 2004). My objective is to open an alternative approach on migration studies that **sets aside the methodological nationalism of migration studies, which assumes migrant settlement that is contained within the boundaries of ethnic division. Instead I propose a methodology of actor networks within festive events that facilitates the study of new, inclusive groups within an urban environment. Such new groupings may contribute to and be facilitated by transnational social fields, which allow us a better understanding of “uneven power within which networks they trace are constituted. Much more research needs to be done on the way in which power is organized, structured, and exercised transnationally within social relationships” (Glick Schiller 2005: 455).**

The discursive and institutional opportunities available for Murid activities, settlement and transnational networks are different in France and USA. The state- religion relationship in USA and France differ considerably. **Whereas the secular French state discourages religious display, especially within public space, in the USA more community-oriented displays of religion are common place and religious references in the public sphere are often encouraged.** Consequently, the public visibility, acceptance, representation, activities and the group alliances of Murids differ to a great extent in USA and France. **But for a Muslim group such as the Murids New York City offers a public space more attuned to cultural diversity than many other cities in the country. And Paris as the French capital has a particular regime of surveillance of public spaces.** These differences explain partly the different local expressions and functioning of religious Sufi networks in **Paris** and in **New York**. Religiously defined

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<sup>5</sup> Furlong, Biggart and Cartmel (1996) have distinguished several dimensions of opportunity structures, analysing the interplay between individual attributes and contextual effects.

networks interact with other kinds of alliances, and these worldwide existing configurations manage to create specific local expressions that respond to the local needs of Murid migrants.

Migration studies have extensively dealt with networks, transnational spaces and migration fields during the last 15 years. Recently, researchers concerned with transnational migration have once again expressed a concern with “the local” and the term transnational social space has become popular.:Ludger Pries links geographic and sociological aspects by analysing the “spatial spanning of the social”; Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çağlar develop a “theory of locality in migration studies”. In francophone social geography there is a similar research agenda influenced by Gildas Simon’s poly-centred and multi-polarised migratory spaces (1996) and in migration sociology there are growing interests in researching local-global embedding processes, such as Alain Tarrus’ „La mondialisation par le bas“ (globalization from below). Tarrus (2002:18) stresses the primary role of the migration process itself. He speaks of the emergence of a “capacity to circulate.” By this he means a new capacity of being here and there at the same time, and not being here or there<sup>6</sup>. The interesting point of Tarrus’ approach is that he posits that the experience of circulation creates new cosmopolitanisms and the consciousness of a new identity. However, Tarrus’ focus on circulation leads to a problematic understanding of the migrant experience of localities of settlement. He speaks of a nomadic identity, assuming that these new nomads remain economically dependent exclusively of their place of origin<sup>7</sup>. This assumption is shaped by a part of the French migration literature and its engagement with French public policy debates rather than with empirical evidence. Several representatives of French social sciences have been concerned with independent migrant self-organization, assuming this indicated a form of empowerment and a political consciousness that was independent of the French nation-state and/or directed to the home country<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, despite any reference to the local, the thrust of Tarrus’s research and the literature it reflects has failed to examine migrants multiple ties to and participation in local institutions and social, economic, political, and cultural processes. However, Tarrus made an important point by underlining migrants’ capacity of self-organisation and entrepreneurship, underestimated by other sociologists. These aspects are lacking in the work of other representatives of French migration sociology: Focusing on immigrants who are part of the working class and who are geographically excluded by residing in downgraded suburbs, some of the sociologists influenced by Marxism and structuralism draw a general picture of immigration that victimized the immigrants. The social and economic structure was over-emphasized whereas the migrants’

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<sup>6</sup> Tarrus (2002:18): « Une capacité inédite d’être d’ici, de là-bas, d’ici et de là-bas à la fois se substitue à la vieille opposition entre d’ici ou de là-bas ».

<sup>7</sup> Tarrus (2002 :18) : « Ces étonnants territoires circulatoire confèrent de la sorte une identité nomade à des dizaines de milliers de migrants »... « Les nouveaux nomades, par contre, restent attachés à leur lieu d’origine et demeurent économiquement dépendants de lui seul ».

<sup>8</sup> This perspective was developed over the past twenty years by geographers from the “Migrations internationales” research group in Poitiers. As most of their members are geographers, they have very early linked geographical space to social space in their fieldwork but also in their conceptual reflections (cf. Simon 1996).

agency was underestimated<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, individual identification processes remained hidden behind collective categories used in research settings, which lead to a reproduction and essentialization of categories. Contemporary migration research in France<sup>10</sup> tries to overcome these differences and takes into consideration transnational social spaces and interethnic relations in the broad sense of Barth. I mention the history of French migration research here because the perception of immigrants by research and public policy has an impact on their self-definition and on the way they behave within public space.

Building on analysis of the transnational social networks of “transmigrants” (Basch et al 1994: 4; Glick Schiller et al 1992: 2) Pries (1996), studying migration between Mexico and the United States, identified as the transmigrant, a working migrant who is situated in pluri-local social spaces. These transnational social spaces are the result of new forms of delimitation and are different from geographic or national boundaries, transcending a simple coexistence of the two systems of reference (Pries 1996: 456). Pries speaks about pluri-local frames of reference and a relational social geographic space. He is close to geographers’ approaches with his focus on place-making and on geographic-spatial dimension of the Social. In my own work on Senegalese political networks, I have shown how these networks overcome ethnic or religious belonging by getting rooted into local and national geographic and social spaces, and attain their transnational political goal (Salzbrunn 2002a; 2004). Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001) have given an example for Haitian long-distance transnationalists who collaborated with US-American actors.

Caglar and Glick Schiller (Caglar 2006; Schiller and Caglar 2006a; 2007; in press) also speak of the local but their emphasis is not a general sense of multiple rootedness but a call for a specific investigation of the forces that shape the specific places. They are concerned with the localities from which migrants and their descendants leave, in which they settle, and to which they are connected by social fields, which often extend across the borders of nation-states. They build on Glick Schiller’s (1999; 2003; 2004; 2005a;b; 2006) concept of a transnational social field<sup>11</sup> as specific set of networks of ego-centered social relations that are linked to institutions situated within specific places. These fields contain social relations of unequal power constituted by differential access to forms of capital, military force, and means of discursive representation. This approach focuses on social relations and institutions---workplaces, schools, religious social, financial and political organizations that differ in their functioning according to their location and that can be empirically studied. The theorization of locality of which they speak is

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<sup>9</sup> This research perspective can also be explained by the strong involvement of these research groups, mainly from University Paris-VII and Nice, with public policies and research programs financed by the State or the Region.

<sup>10</sup> See the website of the migration section of the French Association of Sociology for an overview : [www.migrations.ouvaton.org](http://www.migrations.ouvaton.org).

<sup>11</sup> Gildas Simon’s concept of poly-centred and multi-sited migration spaces that emerge from world-wide networks (1996:223) is, although not referring to the same literature, close to Glick Schiller’s concept of transnational social fields. The latter goes further by emphasizing the relations of unequal power constituted by differential access to (military, economic, political, discursive) resources.

informed by the scholarship that uses a concept of rescaling to describe the contemporary neo-liberal restructuring of urban space.

Hence I suggest a definition of translocal social spaces as the result of new forms of delimitation that are partly consisting in, but also reaching beyond geographic or national boundaries. These translocal spaces become the new sources of identification and action within specific local and global reference systems. However, this does not mean a local determinist position denying any agency to the migrants. It is the migrants which also shape the conditions of the local. Migrants contribute to rescaling of certain cities and certain urban districts and zones. An entanglement of various subjective and objective rescaling processes is taking place. The visible diversity has become an important point in city marketing and worldwide competition of global cities for tourists and investors attracted by this diversity. Furthermore, the migrants themselves are in a subjective rescaling process of different locations, and adapt their life projects and objectives to the new subjective scalar hierarchy. Potential highly skilled immigrants also chose a new place to work according to the criteria whether there were open-minded citizens in cosmopolitan cities or not.

The importance of a whole city like Paris can change in a context of international competition amongst tourists who are in search of cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism: the official tourist guide of Paris nowadays includes districts with a high variety of national and ethnic groups. Ten years before, these districts were not recommended for tourists because of a certain type of criminality that occurred there. Furthermore, migrants often develop a subjective scalar perspective that creates a hierarchy of cities or countries based on their terms of reference.

In the Parisian district of Sainte Marthe, local political struggles are concentrated within the festive situation. Festive events are instrumentalised by the actors as a mean of resistance against urban restructuring projects and lead to a new, geographically defined, we-group that includes people from various and diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. In the 1980ies, the buildings in the quarter of Sainte Marthe, constructed around 1860 without foundations, threatened to crush because of their bad quality and the Mayor wanted to destroy the whole quarter in order to construct huge buildings, as he did in large parts of Belleville. This urban project was carried out just north and east of Sainte Marthe. The inhabitants were afraid of being expelled and invented different resistance strategies. The associations "Village Saint Louis Sainte Marthe" and "Les 4 horizons", organized banquets and festivals, accompanied by an important public relations and press work, in order to alert the public opinion and the politicians. The association's name<sup>12</sup> "village" is already a symbol for the invention of a territorial identity within a big city. The architectural, aesthetic value of the houses and the cultural richness of the inhabitants was underscored by these festive events and served as an argument to save this quarter. During the municipal election campaign in

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<sup>12</sup> Sainte Marthe is the name of one of the two parallel streets in the district; it also provided the name for the whole district. Saint Louis is the name of the hospital in front of the two streets. It was the first building in this area constructed under Henry IV in 1607.

1995, the defence of this quarter, as well as the stop of real estate speculation, was in the centre of the political campaign of the left-wing parties. The district elections were won partly thanks to that, and in 2001, the whole city of Paris was conquered for the first time by the left. However, only in 2003, the rehabilitation of the quarter was voted and the financial support for the house owners was offered. The history, the urban configuration and the homogenous and rare architecture provide a sense of belonging to a particular place. Today, most of the former workshops are occupied by painters, photographers, sculptures creators, music producers, fashion tailors, art shops and restaurants, which is a sign for a strong gentrification process. The variety of the inhabitants' origins also served as an argument to save a place where diversity works well, during the struggle with the local politicians. However, the social diversity of the inhabitants is threatened by exponential growing real estate prices that the poorer and even the middle class population cannot afford to pay anymore. The city of Paris and the new Mayor now proudly celebrate Belleville and Sainte Marthe: they now figure as attractive popular and cosmopolitan parts of Paris in the official guide distributed to tourists and investors.

Subjective rescaling processes go along with objective rescaling processes that are being researched. According to Saskia Sassen (2007: 16), "Existing theory is not enough to map today's multiplication of practices and actors contributing to these rescalings. Included are a variety of nonstate actors and forms of cross-border cooperation and conflict, such as global business networks, the new cosmopolitanism, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), diasporic networks, and such spaces as global cities and transboundary public spheres". A concrete operational definition of scale is given by Glick Schiller and Çağlar (forthcoming): "The term scale can be defined as the summary assessment of the differential positioning of cities determined by the flow and control of capital and structures of power as they are constituted within regions, states and the globe". By focusing festive events in two global cities, we have shown how rescaling processes are undertaken by various actors who have differential access to power.