Revised and Expanded

MAKING ROOM VS. CREATING SPACE

SENEGALESE TRADERS ON THE ROAD IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

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Introduction :

In this paper I will explore how Senegalese traders, who belong to the Mouride brotherhood, make claims on and use space during their travels in Europe and America. During the past ten years, this brotherhood which has its origins in rural Senegal has become what Cohen has called a "trading diaspora" (1971). Constantly traveling in search of new goods and clients, Mouride traders generally have neither time nor resources to transform their living quarters in any radical way. We shall explore just how they impose an identity on their surroundings. Like the puzzle about a tree falling in the forest, if no one is there to hear it, does it make a noise ? If there are no Mourides in a room, is the room, in any definable way, Mouride ?

Mouride History :

The brotherhood was founded by a local holy man, Cheikh Amadu Bamba (1853-1927), who attracted a following of landless farmers, as well as former rulers. Viewed by the French as a dangerous resistance leader, Amadu Bamba was repeatedly sent into exile which only served to enhance his popularity. Upon each return, he was greeted by increasingly large and devoted crowds (1). Cheikh Amadu Bamba gave the name Touba ("finest, sweetest") to the village which eventually became the capital of Mouridism (Cruise O'Brien 1971:47). In the early 1890's, he had a prophetic revelation at the site where the mosque of Touba was later built (Cruise O'Brien 1971:41). Its construction, authorized by the French in 1931, was undertaken by Amadu Bamba's

son who was then the Khalifa General. The mosque took thirty years to build and the collective effort - it was built entirely with Mouride labor and Mouride donations - provided an important focus for the community (Cruise O'Brien 1971:65).

It is the largest mosque in sub-Saharan Africa (Chi-Bonnardel 1978:869). The central minaret is 300 ft. high and is known as Lamp Fall because it can be seen from a distance and it is also the name of one of the brotherhood's major leaders, There are four lesser minarets, fourteen domes and two ablution baths. The cost, not including the labor, has been estimated at one million pounds (Cruise O'Brien 1971:137).

Now that the mosque in Touba is completed, Mourides do not demonstrate much interest in building other mosques. Dakar has only one Mouride mosque though the other brotherhoods have built their own mosques throughout the city. As an explanation, they cite Cheikh Amadu Bamba who said that a true Mouride can pray anywhere. If he is holy and "clean", his house is as good as a mosque.

Networks of Trade :

Mourides became involved in trade as agriculture became less profitable. They drifted to towns in search of work and many moved onto France where, until recent years, they could more easily find jobs. Growing unemployment in France, however, has meant that trade is now the brotherhood's most profitable source of income. Even settled immigrants who once had stable jobs now rely solely on trade while those who still have steady work, buy

and sell to make ends meet. Though the level of their involvement varies - from those who can be seen as seasonal migrants who leave home to work the summer tourist markets in Europe and the U.S. to traders whose formerly seasonal work now covers most of the year.

The brotherhood has set up trade networks stretching from Dakar to Western Europe and on to Djeddah and Hong Kong. In their long boubous with red and blue striped plastic bags, the Mourides are now familiar figures in the wholesale districts of Paris, Rome and Marseille. While they may occasionally pause for a few months, they are virtually non-stop travelers with a beat which covers a good portion of the globe. Despite their rural backgrounds and their often barely functional French, they leave their homes in rural Senegal to make, for example, a month-long trip across three continents. As one Mouride put it, "Our homeland (in western Senegal) is built on sand and like the sand, we are blown everywhere".

As street peddlers they deal in whatever they can sell, but for economic and practical reasons - quick turn-over and small size - most specialize in Asian-made watches, "fantasy" jewelry, novelty items such as fluorescent shoe laces and jump ropes, and American beauty products. In addition to these staples, major traders (all of whom started out as street peddlers) also deal in electronic goods.

This mass movement towards trade means that large numbers of Mourides are now on the road and their itineraries demonstrate a remarkable capacity for trade as well as talent for operating on

the margins of society as they make their way through the complex maze of immigrations and customs regulations.

A summary of a three month trip made by a young Mouride conveys an idea of their entrepreneurial skills and flexibility. He sets out from Senegal for Marseille with 2000 thousand "Ouagadougou" bracelets where he stays with a cousin in a hotel; he leaves him some bracelets to sell and buys Italian jewelry from a Mouride wholesaler; on to Paris, where he buys leather clothes made by Mouride tailors and items in the Turkish garment district to re-sell in New York. He sells everything in New York and buys up beauty products and music cassettes. Then onto Cameroun to sell the cassettes and to send the beauty products back to Senegal with a cousin. Meanwhile, he heads north to Libya to find work for a few months to make money to return to New York.

Throughout his travels, Mamadou stays with Mourides. While none are permanently resident in these cities, members of the brotherhood establish bases for themselves, generally in apartments or in residential hotels where they can freely come and go.

Migration as a Theme in Mouride History :

Mourides find an explanation (and also some consolation) for their transient lives in the history of the brotherhood. They compare their years of travel to Amadu Bamba's periods of exile. One Mouride trader, a migrant for thirteen years, says that Amadu Bamba wanted his followers to leave home to test their faith.

Hardship is part of their religious heritage. As one put it "We know misery so well that we have come to love it, so much that now we conjugate it as a verb, "Moi, je misère à New York; toi, tu misère à Paris". Hardship tests the faith and also leads to knowledge, hkam-hkam, which is essential to a young man's education - travel, life in another country, perhaps a foreign wife - will add to his understanding of the world.

The theme of exile is frequently expressed in proverbs and Mourides compare themselves to birds always in flight. For example, "We are like the birds who think of home when flying high above the earth". Another frequently heard saying, "The songs of birds orient their young" describes how the cheikhs at Touba guide their followers even from a distance.

Throughout their travels, Mourides say Touba is always with them; they carry this sacred place in their hearts, or as a trendy young Mouride cheikh put it, "Touba is a state of mind".

One story, frequently illustrated on Mouride posters and paintings on glass, recounts how the French took Amadu Bamba away into exile on a boat. They objected to his request to pray, so Amadu Bamba placed his rug in the sea and knelt upon the waves, surrounded, as in one illustration, by a circle of leaping fishes. After finishing his prayers, he climbed back into the boat and, to the amazement of the sailors, the bottom of the boat was covered with sand.

The omnipresence of Touba is also expressed on the level of speech. Cheikh Amadu Bamba is "Serigne Touba"; the school

established by Mouride migrants is "La Maison de Serigne Touba"; the imminent visit of an important cheikh is heralded as, "Touba is coming to Paris".

Home as a Movable Feast :

To understand how Mouride migrants use space we need to look briefly at how they live in Senegal. While crowded living conditions of Mourides abroad may seem due to their lack of means, it is only a somewhat exaggerated version of how they live at home.

The value attributed to space and privacy differ and while we tend towards more rather than less of both, such preferences are not necessarily shared. Questioned about his noisy neighbors, one Mouride convalescing in a crowded ward in Bellevue Hospital replied, "Il y a ceux qui aiment la paix et ceux qui aiment les gens. La paix, c'est la mort".

Not only do they have different ideas on what home should be like, they may have more than one place they call home. Their more diffuse notion of family generates a wider choice of places to go to feel "at home".

The same non-centralized household pattern is true for Senegalese abroad but with additional factors due to their immigrant status. They may sleep, eat, drink tea and spend time in different households and, moreover, like any group of immigrants, whether wealthy French fleeing socialist France in the early 1980's or English house owners in southern France, Senegalese abroad tend to stick together, creating a place of

warmth which embraces its own and excludes the outside world, especially, when, as in their case, the outside world is so pointedly unfriendly.

At Home in Marseille :

For these travelers, home, for most of the year is a series of hotel rooms and apartments generally located in dangerous neighborhoods. Marseille, an important meeting point on the trade networks for traders arriving from France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, provides a good example of a Mouride base where individuals may come and go but where there is a permanent Mouride presence.

When in town, Mourides stay in the neighborhood between the port and the train station. This old quarter of the town has been abandoned by the French and taken over by immigrants from North and West Africa, mostly men and a few women. Non-residents who come into the neighborhood are looking for drugs and prostitutes; fights are commonplace and police cars cruise the streets, occasionally throwing tear gas bombs at groups which become too large.

While Marseille may be notorious in France because of its quota of organized crime, neighborhoods where Mourides live in other towns and other countries are much the same. Given their need for a central location, near the wholesale trade district, close to the train or bus station, and with low rents, it is not surprising that Mouride traders tend to live in neighborhoods

where it is better not to go out after dark.

In Marseille, Mourides have little rapport with their neighbors. Outnumbered by the Algerians, whom they refer to as "Arabs" and with whom relations are rarely amiable, the Mourides stick to themselves. They have few relations outside their work with non-Senegalese and their occasional contact with other Muslims at the mosque do not seem to lead to more prolonged meetings.

Relations with the French are not much better; their neighbors complain about the noise, cooking smells and irregular hours. On the other hand, one Mouride street peddler summed up a general opinion about the French, "What they're good for is butter and cheese" and then went on to describe a recent experience in Bordeaux where a haughty woman allowed her dog to walk on his wares, saying "Well, at least he's from Bordeaux." As a consequence of such neighbors and neighborhoods Sengalese living space often seems hermetically sealed against outsiders.

Mourides in Marseille have taken over a few of the residential hotels, more like boarding houses, where they have developed good relations with the owners. The air of camaraderie, a welcome change from the streets, resembles a college dormitory. Whether the rooms are designated as singles or doubles is unimportant. Sleeping two to a bed and with mattresses covering the floor, the population of the rooms is far above whatever the hotel initially intended and, moreover, it varies nightly as occupants move on and new arrivals take their place.

Within the hotel, space becomes differentiated according to

Mouride needs. Certain rooms are designated as kitchens; other rooms become favorite places for drinking tea. Large rooms are meeting places where the weekly da'ira is held.

Despite Mouride claims that they are never far from Touba, their rooms do not outwardly bear much resemblance to their capital. They do, however, look like every other Mouride immigrant's apartment. Furniture is minimal - one or two beds but, at night, more mattresses appear and the sleeping capacity of the room doubles or even triples. People generally sit on beds rather than chairs. Off in a corner may be a space for cooking, or at the minimum, the necessary equipment to make tea.

The walls are decorated with at least one poster of a Mouride saint, most often, a copy of the only photograph of Cheikh Amadu Bamba - a slight figure in white with the end of his turban covering the lower half of his face. Sometimes, there are posters of other important cheikhs. One of the most popular shows Cheikh Ibra Fall, known as Lamp Fall, superimposed in front of the minaret which bears his name. Other items, equally transportable, in Mouride apartments are the cassettes of the qasa'ids sung by celebrated Mouride singers and prayer rugs.

Some rooms, such as Amet's, a major wholesaler in Marseille, are meeting places for wholesalers and "runners" from Italy, Switzerland, Hong Kong and New York. Amet holds court on his bed, seated on a satin cloth, handing around samples of the latest arrivals - handfuls of jewelry from Italy and tangled heaps of shoe laces recently arrived from Spain. At the end of the day

the "bana bana" or street sellers come to pick up more goods and pay him for merchandise taken on credit the night before. Since Amet is also important in the brotherhood, visiting Mouride cheikhs stay in his room and the weekly da'ira are also held there.

Temporal Divisions vs. Spatial Ones :

Time is a variable in the use of space and it may be either synchronic or diachronic. To first discuss synchronic time : In crowded conditions, spatial divisions between secular and sacred categories are non-existent; praying, eating, watching TV all take place in the same room at the same time. I would like to explore the idea that while activities may be adjacent, a difference in the quality of time separates them. A man who unfolds a prayer rug is in a different time dimension than the one who is preparing to go and work. Ritual/religious activities have their own metronome and more than one metronome may be simultaneously ticking out different rhythms in one space. When space is limited, people who cannot physically separate themselves enter into another measure of time as a way to maintain separations between categories.

Looked at diachronically, categories/events can also be separated into discrete units of time. These separations in time are just as effective as spatial divisions in keeping categories apart. Occupying a room for a series of different purposes over time is equivalent to occupying several rooms.

As we have seen, the way time orders the use of space

becomes more crucial when space is limited. However, the way people move in space, the choreography, is another a variable to explore in a discussion of space and time. No physical barrier separates Mouride space from the outside nor is there a distinct spatial arrangement which identifies the space as Mouride. What does distinguish the space is the choreography, the way people move within it at specific times. For example, upon entering a house, a Mouride shakes hands with everyone, sometimes with the distinctive Mouride handshake, where he brings the other's hand reverently to his forehead as the other person makes the same gesture (with a cheikh the gesture is not reciprocal - he only allows his hand to be raised to the other's forehead).

On particular occasions, especially during rituals, values and beliefs assume a special importance in structuring how people use space. The most striking feature is the polarization which occurs between states and beings considered sacred and polluting. For example, at a da'ira session, separations between men and women suddenly become important. A sort of fission occurs in the group and men and women separate to form two discrete groups. Women go to their own space, perhaps in an adjoining room as the men come together in a group.

If the men were viewed as forms under a microscope, separate forms merge into one wavering shape. New arrivals advance, approach the central group, shake hands and join them; they form a circle and sing the dhikrs; shoulders touching, they sway from side to side in unison.

This physical togetherness has its spiritual dimension.

People say that singing the qasa'ids brings them closer to Amadu Bamba. Trimingham has described these sessions as providing release from daily hardships and freeing them from the usual limitations of everyday life (1971:200). These meetings become intense emotional experiences where close bonds develop binding people together into a collective identity. (Martin 1976:2). As one young street seller said after a da'ira, "Now that we have sung the dhikr and eaten together, we are like that" and held up his fist, "tight and strong", and then citing a newly learned English phrase, "All for one and one for all."

Touba Comes to Town : A New Choreography

The arrival of a cheikh from Senegal marks a starting point in a new set of movements. The presence of this sacred individual introduces a more formal order into the community, like the jolt of an electric shock to regulate an erratic pulse. His arrival activates notions of hierarchy which, among immigrants seem to be rather less observed than in Senegal. His presence means that more attention is paid to separations - between men and women and also separations due to notions of hierarchy. Members of castes, griots take up their caste activity and sing the praises of the cheikh; women of the community cover their heads and cook. Observing these separations requires a different division of space which we shall examine below.

Every year a son of a former Khalifa General, who is now the khalifa of his lineage and therefore a major figure in the

brotherhood, visits his followers in Europe and America. Like other important cheikhs, he travels with an entourage of family members, always the same cast over the three years I have been to visit - a younger brother who acts as a translator, the young wife who is a preferred traveling companion, a daughter and her husband, also a cheikh.

The khalifa and his entourage travel the Mouride circuit in somewhat the same way as a traveling troupe. Every year they follow the same itinerary around Europe - Paris, Lyon, Rome, Barcelona, Madrid - to visit their taalibe. At each stop they set up house in a lavish hotel where Mourides come to visit and, despite their frequent moves, the stage set remains the same in the different cities where I have visited them.

While in Paris, the cheikh stays in a luxury hotel near the Eiffel Tower frequented solely by businessmen from Japan and the Middle East. (His preference for this hotel over all other Paris hotels seems related to the understanding staff, at least three of whom have become his followers and a fleet of friendly cleaning women who stop by the cheikh's kitchen at noon for a Senegalese lunch).

Hotel Floor Plan :

The apartment is spacious and uncluttered (see diagram). It has three bedrooms, a large living room , a kitchen and two bathrooms. At the entrance is a hallway where visitors leave their shoes and a prayer rug where younger men of the cheikh's family pray. The room for the young men of the cheikh's family is closest to the entrance, directly to the left. The women's room,

further along into the apartment, is adjacent to the men's room, and also opens up onto the hallway. Women should generally wait in their room until the cheikh is ready to receive them. While men can move from room to room, even stopping to pay a call on the women, women are more limited in their movements. A woman would not usually enter the men's room except to distribute food. Even when she goes to greet the cheikh, her husband accompanies her.

The hallway leads into the large living room which becomes a waiting room for the visiting taalibe. (At peak times, after work and on week-ends, there may be 50 to 80 people waiting to see the cheikh). The cheikh's room, which is entered from the living room, is located in the innermost region of the apartment. While the cheikh makes occasional appearances in the living room to greet the taalibe, private meetings are held in the small inner room.

In this arrangement of space, the cheikh is in the most protected location in the interior of the apartment. While the apartment design is purely European, the use of space is similar to a traditional cheikh's house in which an enclosed structure is built around a series of concentric circles or squares with the cheikh in the central, most interior, most protected space.

A nineteenth century visitor to a king's house gives a similar description of his protected position. "At the entrance is a large courtyard with armed soldiers at the door. One must pass through several such courtyards to arrive at the prince's

room; in each courtyard one traverses a house which serves as a sort of guard. The house of the sovereign is always at the end of the enclosure. Close by, is another large courtyard where, in good weather, the king receives visitors . To the right and left are the houses of the women, the marabouts, the storerooms, kitchens and stables" (Boilat 1857:292).

The king's visitor had to pass through armed guards at each phase in his approach to the king. Not only did he leave his weapons with the soldiers, he also had to remove his gris-gris (objects of mystical protection). While the cheikh in Paris no longer requires protection from physical attack, an element of vulnerability still surrounds him. (As Tambiah has noted purity is far more vulnerable to pollution than vice versa.)

The exterior door of the apartment, as well as the entrances to each room, are station points for "guardians". In the small foyer at the main door, the cheikh's younger brother is always present, greeting taalibe, sometimes giving blessings and also receiving their adea (offerings). The new arrivals leave their shoes at the door and then, especially, if they are close to the cheikh's family, they visit the young cheikhs in their room.

At the entrance to the living room, the visitor passes by an individual who acts as a bekk neeg during the cheikh's visit (3). This role is crucial in the hierarchy of the cheikh's entourage. He is, according to various definitions, "the marabout's l'homme de confiance" (Fal 1989:44). He controls access to the cheikh and a visitor needs his approval in order to see the cheikh. According to a Wolof proverb, a marabout needs more than one set

of ears and the bekk neeg is his second set.

During the cheikh's visit to Paris, the bekk neeg at the living room entrance was flanked by the important taalibe of the cheikh's family. Sometimes kin or members of lineages which have historical ties with the cheikh's family have a favored status as taalibe which give them special privileges as well as special obligations to the cheikh. Mouride immigrants who have this position will often take a week off work when their cheikh comes to town; they spend their days at the hotel, act as chauffeur and perform any service he requires.

In the living room, the taalibe tend to form small groups where they await the cheikh who spends most of his time in the inner room. Another person acting as bekk neeg who is stationed at the entrance to the inner room to control access to this room.

The arrangement of space in Paris follows a model found in Senegal. Movement within the space follows an equally established choreography with the bekk neeg as the principal authority. He directs the daily flow of people in the apartment by indicating the appropriate waiting space and allowing people to see the cheikh at the appropriate time. He protects the inviolable space around the cheikh.

Protecting the cheikh and maintaining separations between men and women orient circulation within the apartment.

Conclusion :

The Mouride brotherhood is an example of a highly centralized body, organized around a hierarchy of saints, with

the Khalifa General at its peak and Touba at its geographical center. It is now also a highly mobile society (taalibe and cheikhs in a state of continual motion) which places high value on solidarity and their collective identity. Itinerant Mourides reproduce aspects of this structure wherever they are. Touba multiplies and is re-created, a sort of spontaneous generation, which occurs when conditions are right, i.e. when Mourides invoke its presence; when they call it into being. These replications of Touba can be ephemeral such as the ambience created during a da'ira or during the visit of a cheikh, or semi-permanent, such as a hotel room which becomes a Mouride base.

In reproducing Touba, Mouride migrants do not construct buildings or alter the arrangements of their space but they do make a sort of invisible architecture wherever they are. Three features seem essential to creating their space. Firstly, they bring Touba (and everything it connotes - the mosque, Cheikh Amadu Bamba, the home of the saints) into their present space. The invariable objects in their living places - posters, tapes of the qasa'ids, "Touba" coffee - refer to Touba, like a series of mnemonic notes.

Secondly, the presence of other Mourides is essential. Singing the dhikr and the qasa'ids brings Mourides together, physically and spiritually, binding them into a collectivity, the very foundation of their invisible house. In creating space which is specifically theirs, the group or, as they say, "being numerous" is crucial. Mourides say that everything is better when

it is shared - eating, praying and singing (4). People say that at the da'ira meetings, they make the "inside outside"; they appropriate and transform space by externalizing an inner world. Their perception of transformation in physical space corresponds to Shipibo Indians' description of the geometric designs covering their walls and clothing and even their faces (Gebhart 1984). The designs, they say, are their songs made visible. Mourides, too, externalize their inner state with their dhikr and qasa'ids in a way that transforms their outer world.

Thirdly, the way they maintain separations between sacred and polluting categories, whether by temporal or spatial means, establishes the outlines of their space. Establishing these separations with typically Mouride choreography or time separations (synchronic or diachronic) eliminates the need to impose rigid spatial structures.

Mourides appropriate and claim space as their own by re-creating Touba, observing their specific choreography, and simply being in a space - a Mouride surrounded by other Mourides. Minimal is the only word to describe their living conditions and the transformation of space into specifically Mouride territory depends on its occupation by Mourides. They don't really need to possess space to make it their own. Their presence creates their space, despite their patent lack of it. The paradox is that they have no space yet they are constantly in the process of creating it.

FOOTNOTES

1. In 1895, Amadu Bamba had 500 followers; in 1912 a French official estimated their numbers at 68, 350 and in 1952, figures had risen to 300,000 and in 1959 at 400,000 (Monteil 1966 :370).

2.Each immigrant community abroad makes a collective donation to Touba which is announced over the loudspeakers at the annual Magal. The importance of Touba for Mourides is highlighted by comparison with the behavior of Toucouleur and Peul migrants who form immigrant associations to carry out collective projects in their home villages; Mourides make their collective donations to Touba.

3. Abbé Boilat describes the bekkneeg dyurbel the head of the king's captives; he transmits the orders and instructions of the king; he cites Le Maire in 1682 who says he is the first gentleman of the king's chamber (1985:81).

4. Serigne Khadim Ba, a grandson of Cheikh Amadu Bamba, said, "It is 27 times better to pray with others than to pray alone".

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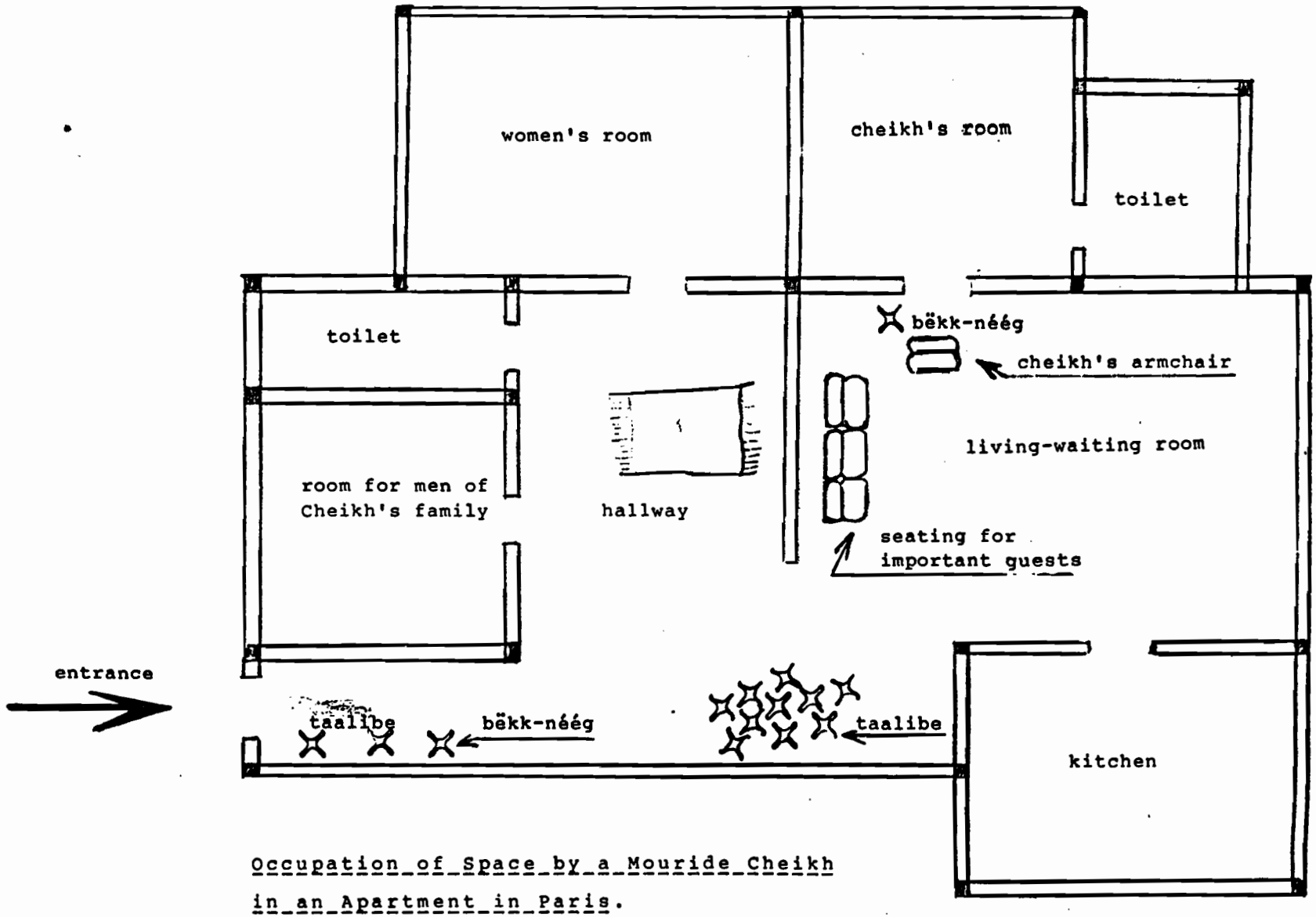

Occupation of Space by a Mouride Cheikh in an Apartment in Paris.

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