

Social Change and Female Involvement: Sinthiane's Associations At Home and Abroad

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Abstract

In this article I investigate the development and evolution of diaspora associations with a particular focus on female (migrant) associations by using a case study of a Senegalese village community (Sinthiane) at home and away from home, in France. Focusing on women's collective engagement, I argue that female involvement in diaspora associations and associational development are better understood by taking into account social and political change in the sending location. The argument is built on a gendered analysis of diaspora development engagement, focusing on the role of NGOs and policy programmes in the sending location and daily associational life in Sinthiane and France.

My analysis is based on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork mainly in the suburbs of Paris, and in Senegal, in Dakar and in Sinthiane, a village in the north-east of the country.

Introduction

Starting in the mid-1990s, interest in hometown associations and village associations (HTAs/VAs) resurfaced (Caglar 2006) focusing not only on collective remittances but also on a variety of non-economic questions concerning those collectivities (see e.g. Grillo and Riccio 2004; Page 2007; Kleist 2008). Despite this, associational development and especially questions around social change and female engagement in HTAs/VAs and the development of female associations tend to be ignored or stand out due to their narrow focus which is based on two main characteristics.

First the few studies focusing on women's associational activities tend to focus on the question of whether migrant associations' challenge or reproduce patriarchal norms (see e.g. Mahler 1998; Denzer and Mbanefoh 1998; Honey and Okafor 1998; Goldring 2001). They are based on the assumption that migrant associations have the potential to induce social change or reinforce common social norms at home and in the diaspora. As a result, their

analysis of HTAs/VAs concentrates on structural questions, such as: Are women part of HTAs/VAs? Do they hold leadership positions in those associations or does diaspora-development engagement of HTAs/VAs empower and liberate the women from social and patriarchal norms in the sending area? Secondly their focus of investigation is frequently on the receiving society using the political opportunity structure model to explain why women are absent from HTAs/VAs or from leadership positions in those associations (see e.g. Jones-Correa 1998a, b).

Both assumptions are problematic. First they are based on essentialist binary understandings that assert that human beings are differentiated into two clear-cut groups, namely women and men. As Judith Butler (1999) and other poststructuralist feminist scholars point out, the idea that society is 'inevitably' based on a binary patriarchal culture leaves little room to analyse differences and resistance. Taking this into account and being inspired by research that points out the validity of differences between and within migrant groups (see e.g. Marston

1989, 2002, 2004, Sinatti 2008, Mercer et al. 2009), I will focus on diversity and acknowledge the differences and similarities between men and women, but also among women and among men when analysing the evolution and changing landscape of Sinthiane migrant associations. Second their focus of analysis is on the receiving society and implies that HTAs/VAs have the potential to play a modernizing role in terms of social change at home. Scholars of transnational migration remind us, however, to study migrants' simultaneous involvement in two or more nation-states (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003), a point of view which I will implement here. Focusing on women's associational evolution and engagement at home and in the diaspora I suggest that political and social change at home and the exchange between those at home and those overseas propels associational development and social change in the diaspora thereby providing a different gender analysis and questioning the standard assumption of diaspora-development participation.

In this article I present some results of my multi-sited ethnographic Ph.D. fieldwork which was carried out over 17 months, in the suburbs of Paris, in Dakar and Sinthiane. I focus on Sinthiane's changing associational landscape and the emergence of female associations in Sinthiane and the diaspora. In particular I will investigate the relationships between the different actors by focusing on social and political change in the sending locality and the way those changes impact on the evolution of diaspora associations, specifically female associations in France. I will critically examine the political opportunity structure approach, and highlight the strength of observing associational everyday life at home and away from home, as a tool to investigate associational life. The paper highlights the influence of the sending context in shaping associational formations and social change in the diaspora thereby elaborating on the political opportunity structure model and questioning the assumption that migrants are 'the only agents of social change'.

The article is organized in four parts. The first part focuses on the political opportunity

structure model and provides a review of the literature that analyses the emergence of diaspora associations in France established by migrants from the Senegal River valley region. In the second part I will introduce the sending context and the Sinthiane associations at home and away from home. Third I will elaborate on this account and focus on the evolution of female associations in Sinthiane and their interactions with the community in France. Finally I will present my conclusions.

The political opportunity structure approach and associations from the Senegal River valley region in France

Research addressing migrants' political and social mobilization and participation on the national, international and transnational level tends to use the political opportunity structure approach (POS) which Patrick Ireland (1994) introduced and applied to the field of migration studies. In relation to associations, the POS approach tries to explain migrants' political behaviour, primarily their mobilization potential and motivation to set up and engage in associations. Furthermore, the approach addresses questions related to the evolution and changes in associations over time. The main assumption is that the formation and organization of migrant associations will strongly depend on the structure of political institutions and the configuration of political power in a given receiving society (Tarrow 1996). Comparative studies of migrants' political participation in Western Europe assume that the receiving societies shape the collective organization of migrants by providing certain resources for, and models of, organizing (Soysal 1994; Doomernik 1995). Changes in the external opportunity structure or constraints on mobilization can drive or curb associational activism (Schrover & Vermeulen 2005). In the course of time some studies elaborated on the POS approach by including non-institutional factors (Bousetta 2000; Koopmans 2004; Però and Solomos 2010), such as paying attention to discursive articulations of governments (Koopmans 2004) or moving away from national considerations pointing towards the dispersal of political and

institutional power. Those studies showed for example that the associational engagement of migrants belonging to the same group might vary depending on the local POS (Berger et al. 2004; Caponio 2005). The calls to 'transnationalise the POS' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Però 2007, 2008) have so far been hardly heard, a task which I will address here.

The Senegalese case in the receiving context

Research addressing associational development and women's associational interest and activities in HTAs/VAs tend to use the POS model, frequently in combination with other socio-economic factors found in the receiving society. This applies equally to the case of the Senegal River valley community in France. The studies that focus on the associational activities of migrants from the Senegal River valley region point out that the migrants' associational engagement in France is strictly divided into male and female associations. Although there are exceptions, on a general level one can distinguish between a variety of male HTAs/VAs working primarily with and for their village of origin, and female associations which are frequently multi-ethnic and multi-national in nature and direct their interest primarily towards issues concerning integration in France (Quiminal et al. 1995; Daum 1998b, 2000; Millet 2004/2005).

The emergence and evolution of those single-sex associations is described as a result of the POS in France and other political, social, economic and cultural factors. In relation to this men's associational interest and the evolution of male HTAs/VAs is explained with reference to five main reasons. First it is argued that the booming French economy fostered the largest labour migration trajectory attracting mainly people from former French colonies in the 1960s (Timera 1996; Daum 1998a, b, 2000). This migration trajectory was notably composed of male labourers from the Senegal River valley region. Second the French state did not provide any help or facilities for the social integration of the newly arrived migrants, but rather a migrant was: '...a worker and his integration into society goes mainly and maybe even fully through his

inscription into working relationships' (Quiminal et al. 1995:4). Thus migrants were primarily perceived as workers and not as part of French society, and faced thirdly discrimination and racism. Fourth the legal framework allowed a free movement between France and the sending countries thereby fostering a circular migration system. Finally social integration was blocked owing to the state-managed provision of migrant housing. Migrants were accommodated in *foyers*, i.e. male migrant hostels. Women and families were until today denied access to those forms of migrant housing and thus family reunification was not on the agenda. The loose visa regime and the hiring of a male migrant working force without providing social integration helped to foster a particular kind of lifestyle. Daily life practices consisted of a family left behind, circular migration and a shared common life in the *foyers*. The shared common life in the *foyers* was organized around male village clusters that performed and shared their daily life together. Those male village clusters were the forerunners of or the actual first forms of male HTAs/VAs in France (Quiminal 1991, Quiminal et al. 1995, Timera 1996, Daum 1998b).

The sending perspective

This kind of lifestyle and especially the rise of male village clusters or HTAs/VAs was further supported by certain circumstances in the migrants' context of origin. Increasing environmental degradation and little support from the new postcolonial states did not allow for the continuation of the predominant forms of lifestyle; i.e. men providing for the family through working the land (Diop, M.C. 2008). Subsistence farming became increasingly supplemented by flows of remittances that emerged mainly from outmigration to the Senegalese capital Dakar and/or France. (Boutillier et al. 1962; Diop, A.B. 1965; Wane 1969; Guèye et al. 2007; Dia, H. 2008; Sall 2008). This goes together with certain customs and traditions, such as the division of labour and a tradition that prohibits unaccompanied female migration or even family reunification in France. Notably in Haalpulaar and Sereer culture, unaccompanied female migration was and

remains to a large extent an obstacle (Dia and Colin-Noguès 1982; Kane 2002) and moreover it remains the husband and his family who decide whether his wife will join him or not (revealed in interviews in France, Dakar and Sinthiane 2005/2006). As a result, families have become transnationalized and transnational family life became the predominant form of lifestyle. As the family was left behind private remittances supplemented the daily family life and collective remittances through the village clusters made sure that the village develops in certain ways that fit into the migrants' retirement aspirations. In this spirit it seems to be natural that a dense web of male HTAs/VAs engaging in mutual aid and the village of origin emerged over time in France. Furthermore, the inclusion of women into those collectivities appears to be redundant. This is still important, because only one third of the migrants from the Senegal River valley region opted for family reunification (Daum 1998b).

Receiving country: diversification of migration associations

However, the suspension of further migration and tighter immigration controls, as well as new visa requirements introduced for several African countries in 1985, transformed the temporary model of circular migration, and gave rise to both, a diversification of migration and family reunification from 1974 onwards. (Azoulay and Quiminal 2002; Tall 2002; Marfaing 2003). Over time, an increasing level of migrants coming from different sending countries, with different backgrounds and professional skills joined the mainly unskilled migrant workers from the Senegalese River valley community in France. This new diversity went together with the emergence of protest movements all over the world and resulted in the formation of an array of new migrant associations. Those associations were no longer directly linked to their hometowns or villages but rather they were fighting for migrant rights in France and rebelling against neocolonialism and other deplorable states of affairs concerning their countries of origin. Thus they transcended the common features of the predominant male migrant associations or village

clusters. Frequently they were run by students and composed of male and female migrants (Quiminal et al. 1995; Azoulay and Quiminal 2002). Those associations, however, had little attraction for the increasing number of migrant women who frequently came with children in the framework of family reunification to France. Those women were not only left out of the new associations but also, as mainly illiterate migrant women with no experience of 'western lifestyle' excluded from French mainstream society. However their double exclusion was taken up by some of the activist and feminist migrant women who started to built new kinds of female migrant associations, namely mutual aid associations aiming to facilitate migrant women's daily life in France (Quiminal et al. 1995). On the one hand the activist women continued to work in newly-built migrant associations focusing frequently on female rights and colonialism, and on the other, some of those women became founders and leaders of female mutual aid associations, first established in neighbourhoods with a high level of newly-arrived migrant women. The foundation of those female mutual aid associations became a trigger for a never ending cumulative process, which set in motion female associations in nearly all localities where a certain number of migrant women and families lived (Quiminal et al. 1995). The spread of both kinds of associations was further prompted due to a major change concerning the POS in France in 1981. In 1981 an emergency decree dating from 1939, which subordinated the constitution of associations of foreigners to the authorization of the Minister of Internal Affairs, was suspended. As a result, foreigners living in France gained the same rights as French people to form associations in accordance with the 1901 law which facilitated tremendously the setting up of migrant associations (Millet 2004/2005).

However, neither the associations of the activist women nor the female mutual aid associations swept off or were integrated into the earlier founded male HTAs/VAs but rather a spectrum of village associations came into being. However predominantly a juxtaposition of male and female village associations emerged. It is argued

that this juxtaposition is unlikely to break down due to two reasons. First the institutional and discursive POS in France continues to nourish the gender divided associational structure (Quiminal et al. 1995; Sargent and Larchanché-Kim 2006). This is explained with reference to distinct male and female modes of social integration. While men are little connected with public institutions outside their workplace, women are in contact with all kind of institutions thereby establishing relationships with teachers, nurses, medical personnel, social workers etc. Those divergent modes of social integration continue to be promoted by the French state and result in associational interest that supports women's involvement towards the receiving society, while simultaneously promoting the men's interest in their place of origin. Second this gender divided associational organization gains further ground due to cultural peculiarities found in many African societies. Many African societies are highly gender-divided and it is common that women need to integrate into the husband's family and the surrounding female networks after their weddings. The literature addressing this issue (Quiminal et al. 1995; Azoulay and Quiminal 2002; Sargent and Larchanché 2006) proposes that this situation bears some similarities to women's situation in France, where women arrive in an unfamiliar setting; however, they quickly become embedded into female neighbourhood networks that serve as a replacement for the female solidarity structures in the context of origin.

Thus the gendered associational characteristics of the Senegalese River valley community in France case are explained with reference to the POS in the receiving society as well as some other mainly cultural and economic factors originating in the sending context. I will build on those findings by conceptualizing male and female engagement in HTAs/VAs as a process of exchange between those left behind and those living overseas. However, unlike prior research my focus will be on the POS structure in Senegal and the associational practices in Sinthiane and their impact on associational life in France. Thus I will neither focus on the POS in France nor on the

efforts of the sending state to persuade those in the diaspora to become development actors (see e.g. Lampert 2009 on Nigerian; Mohan 2008 on Ghana). In the next part I will briefly present the sending area and map out Sinthiane's associational life at home and abroad.

Sinthiane: the sending context and its associations at home and abroad

My case study concerns the northern part of Senegal, i.e. the Senegal River valley region which stretches along the south bank of the Senegal River. More precisely Sinthiane is situated in the Middle valley (also termed *Fouta Toro*) and is one of the numerous *Haalpulaar* villages in the Senegal River valley region. It is part of the *communauté rurale de Ouro Sidy* and situated around 30km south of Matam which is the next largest city and the seat of the regional council. There are 2770 people living in Sinthiane among them 792 men and 717 women of working age, 505 boys and 556 girls aged between 0-17, and 100 men and 101 women of retirement age. Thus the population is balanced in terms of sex and the claim that only women, children and old people are living in those villages cannot be confirmed.

Due to social, environmental, political and economic circumstances, the River valley region is undergoing a permanent change and the hierarchies of the past are being contested due to their incapacity to ensure the future: sometimes women, men and young people take on new positions and slightly reorder the traditional village organization. Nevertheless tradition continues to exist and it is worth recalling the basic principles of village organization revealing the daily life relations between men and women.

The social status of women relates to their performance as wives, mothers and caretakers (Diop 1965; Wane 1969; Sarr 1998; Dilley 2004). At a young age girls are already educated to respect and perform their wifely duties: to behave in a seductive manner, presenting attractive bodies, to be submissive and to bear in mind the position of co-spouses. After the wedding a woman is supposed to be incumbent on her husband and has to fulfill a broad range of domestic tasks. Though life based on subsistence farming was

already threatened by the colonial powers and is no longer possible due to increasing droughts and ongoing environmental degradation, farming remains the main source of income and the major profession of men (Dia and Colin-Noguès 1982; Guèye et al. 2007). Although women might engage in little farming tasks overall they are not supposed to be involved in agriculture and they thus have hardly any possibility to become economically independent.

Associations in Sinthiane and the diaspora

In terms of associations Sinthiane builds the starting point for both male and female diaspora associations. Before the emergence of any diaspora associations there were two types of associations in the village. On the one hand there has been what is commonly termed as *the caisse* which reunites all men from the age of 16 onwards and on the other, there was and continues to be an array of female-run family associations. While the former is organizing public and political life in the village, the latter is responsible for organizing family events, such as giving birth and wedding ceremonies. Hence the migrants' context of origin used to be and continues to be, to a large extent, predominantly organized around gender-divided associations, placing men and women out of place in specific contexts and privileging them in others. Those gender-divided local village associations became the role model for a growing amount of diaspora associations that emerged with an increasing level of national and international migration trajectories of Sinthiane people.

The first Sinthiane diaspora *caisse* came into being in Dakar and was literally a clone of the *caisse* in Sinthiane, providing mainly mutual aid for the migrant community. Over the years, the *caisse* in Dakar took on a double function, i.e. to provide mutual aid for the members and to engage in collective remittances for the village. However, not only the associational activities changed over time but also the associational landscape broadened. Geographical dispersion of Sinthiane migrants and family reunification taking place brought about new associations. On the one hand a much regulated transnational

associational system of male associations or *caisses* emerged and on the other old and new forms of female associations came into being in the diaspora. In what follows I will briefly explain the difference between Sinthiane male and female associations that emerged in the diaspora.

Female associations in the diaspora

In relation to female associations, it is important to bear in mind that migration from the Senegal River Valley region is still male-dominated and only a minority of migrants opted for family reunification. Concerning Sinthiane, family reunification took mainly place in Dakar and France. In addition to this there are some Sinthiane families in other African countries, notably Côte d'Ivoire (until civil war and unrest broke out). However the increase of female migrants in Dakar and France jogged the emergence of new Sinthiane diaspora associations. In fact the women acted similarly to the male migrants and cloned the traditional female associations found in Sinthiane. Thus Sinthiane migrant women engaged in associations that enable them according to tradition to perform family events, such as giving birth and wedding parties. This implies that their associational engagement is not necessarily linked to the village community but rather oriented towards an output that serves their own family needs in the receiving context. As such the female associations are sometimes built with neighbours or women who live in the same compound, house or district. They are neither necessarily homogenous in terms of the women's belonging nor are they transnational in nature.

Hence the Sinthiane diaspora associations that emerged over time used to clone the traditional village associations thereby keeping and renewing the traditional associational gender division. However over the years not only the daily life of migrants changed but also the life in the village increasingly altered. Due to social, environmental, political and economic circumstances, the whole River valley region is undergoing a permanent change. This change includes the emergence of new associational formations. In the next part I will focus on the

evolution of female associations in Sinthiane and how this evolution impacted on the formation and development of the Sinthiane diaspora associations in France.

New female associations in Sinthiane

Among other things, the presence of development relief agencies, as well as shifts in the POS both have induced some changes to the traditional village organization and to associational life in Sinthiane. Though the shared narrative in the village and abroad continues to claim: "women are only running family associations and men are doing the development work" (revealed in interviews in France, Dakar and Sinthiane 2005/2006). Observations and interviews suggest however that changes in the POS combined with the efforts of some NGOs have fostered and challenged the traditional female associational landscape. In the course of several years, female associations that transgress the realm of family associations have emerged in nearly all villages in the region. From the 1980s onwards, the Senegalese government, in tandem with some NGOs supported the formation of *Groupements de Promotion Féminine* (GPFs), which are formal rural female associations (Sarr 1998).

The aim of these associations has been to integrate women into small scale development projects. They bring together 50-800 women, and sometimes assemble the women of one entire village (Sow 1990). Despite the fact that many of those associations were not very well accepted and under-used in the beginning, the Senegalese government continued to promote and support those associations as part of the state's development politics. Today, the official development discourse, expressed for example in Senegal's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, is based on the notion '*no development without the women*' (République du Sénégal 2002). Looking at those documents suggests that the Senegalese state tries actively to promote women's empowerment in accordance with the global development discourse. Supporting the foundation of GPFs as an integral part of the national development plan is one example of the state's efforts to proceed in line with the shared

global discourse on women and development.

Since the 1980s, Sinthiane also has a *Groupement de Promotion Féminine* (GPF), which has by now been joined by the majority of women in the village. Most interesting is how the GPF came into being and how a relationship between several actors and especially the GPF and the Sinthiane diaspora associations emerged:

...as women are now running ministries they (women) should also have something for themselves, they should build women's associations and also gardens because each women's association needs a garden... that is what we were told when the Ministry of Women came up with the idea to create female village associations... The government continues to support the GPFs but also other people, NGOs and other donors... (Binta. B., Sinthiane, 26.7.2006).

This statement reveals both, first, how a POS was created that provided incentives to build female associations which transgress the performance of traditional associations and second that the incentives to build those associations are provided by global development actors. Tracing the exact way in which the GPF in Sinthiane came into being makes this even more explicit:

...one day a delegation of policy-makers from Dakar came to visit. ...They (the government delegation) offered to construct a new well in Sinthiane under the condition that Sinthiane has a female association that will use the well... honestly at this time we did not have... a female association... but I quickly said yes we do have a non-registered female association... they told us... we need to register the association if we want a well. ...In fact the offer was only transmitted by the government... because it was finally UNICEF who dug and paid for the well... (Salamata S., Sinthiane, 14.08.2006).

Both statements suggest that the efforts of the Senegalese government in supporting the creation of female associations came neither out of the blue nor was it a non-recurring action; but rather, the states' actions to establish a 'female friendly POS' has been embedded in the interest of NGOs and foreign government institutions and their focus on the development-women nexus.

However while the government and development aid agencies provided incentives and facilities for the creation of formal female associa-

tions, the women in Sinthiane could only create the association after the male community in Sinthiane and in the diaspora approved it. Thus the Sinthiane women consolidated and asked the male *caisse* in the village for approval. Once approved by the male community in the village, the diaspora community was informed and asked to acknowledge the association and to make a financial starting contribution to the GPF. Overall this was a 'success story'; the GPF foundation was approved and the association received money from a variety of Sinthiane *caisses* and also from some individuals based elsewhere.

Not only is the approval of the male diaspora *caisses* exceptional but even more important is their willingness to listen to the voices of the women. While women have been in exchange with their husbands or other family members in France, communication between the women in the village and the male diaspora associations did not take place until then. Moreover to approach the male diaspora community and to ask for approval and some seed money was the beginning of an array of new communications between the male community in the diaspora notably with the *caisse* in France (the biggest one) and the women in the village. However caution is needed because not all men are in favour of the GPF and only a few women are responsible for the male/female exchange, namely the GPF leadership and some people close to them. Also even those women are to some extent still constrained and need to approach the *caisses* in well thought-out ways. For example they do not always approach the *caisse* directly but rather they ask a male representative in the village to approach the diaspora community. Alternatively, one of the responsible GPF women may call a migrant in France to request advice on if and what kind of a request letter to send to the *caisse*. Central, however, is that it the women's bargaining involves men in the village and the diaspora. This is especially interesting as one of the common narratives continues to claim: "women are responsible for the family and not for development" (revealed in interviews in France, Dakar and Sinthiane 2005/2006).

Fostering female exchange in the diaspora

However the female engagement goes even further, once they received the approval from the male community in the village and in the diaspora the women reached out and engaged with administrative officials who are responsible for local development. The *chef d'expansion rurale* (CER) was approached, in order to get technical and administrative advice. CERs are supposed to foster and encourage the self-responsibility and self-determination of the local population, and to promote local development. As such it is part of the CER's work to support and advise the rural female associations in their development efforts. For example, in Sinthiane one of the CERs has been central in helping the women to establish the garden and to provide a link to funding sources:

...the CER...when we meet he asks me if everything is all right with our gardens...it was also him who went with us (GPF chairwomen) to the village chef and the elders to ask for a plot where we can construct the gardens... once we had the plot he came to measure the allotments and to give each woman (who joins the GPF) an allotment of 5 metres...and the CER is also the one to ask for help from UNICEF...UNICEF makes some donations each year. ...If we want any cooperation with UNICEF we need to ask the CER...the funds from the French embassy were not through the CER – I think but I am not sure...(Binta, B., Sinthiane, 26.07.2006).

This highlights that not only new communication between the women in Sinthiane and the diaspora men emerged but rather that some of the women have entered some male-headed communications and made direct contact with relatively important and influential local people.

However, despite the acknowledgement and some seed money from the male diaspora community as well as continued support from the CER, UNICEF and other international donors, the GPF was not working particularly well in its founding years. This however changed over the course of several years. Today, the female association is engaged in a number of small-scale projects. For example, the GPF maintains a garden which allows each woman to cultivate a small plot and to use the harvest either to

supply the family or to sell it and to gain a small income. Another example of the activities of the GPF in Sinthiane is the production and selling of batik cloth which also allows some women to earn some money. The evolution of those projects might be applauded in terms of the women development-nexus, however what seems to be more central is that the foundation of the GPF in Sinthiane fostered some new relationships between men and women, which were thought impossible within the common narratives, and remain so. The foundation of the GPF created a variety of new communicative relationships between Sinthiane women and men in the village and the diaspora. For example the local cooperation with the CER brought about that the women managed to go through a funding application process in order to receive funding for watering pots for their garden from UNICEF. To master this process implies not only a range of very formal administrative work but also engagement in many male-headed communications, a task which was so far unknown for the women in Sinthiane. Similarly the approval and seed money from the male diaspora *ciasses* was just the starting point for further social and economic exchange between the women in Sinthiane and the male diaspora groups. Though there was and is no regular exchange between them but the diaspora *caisses* are approached in a very target-oriented manner according to the GPF's needs. For example the celebration of a women's day was a reason for the women to approach the male diaspora and to ask for supporting funds to carry out and host this event. Even though women are not fully part of all associations and meetings in and outside the village, and their partial participation continues to be ignored by some people, my observations paired with my interviews show that some of the women, mainly the GPF leadership and people close to them have entered domains which were previously fully closed to them.

I illustrated that a growing interest in women from national and international government and non-government institutions induced shifts in the discursive and institutional POS in Senegal, thereby 'targeting women' and fostering new

collective female initiatives such as the GPFs. In the next section I will illustrate how the women's associational engagement in the village affected the migrant women in France. I will focus on the GPF and the genesis of a new female association in France, namely the *association de femmes de Sinthiane en France* (AFSF).

Female Associational Involvement, the Women-Development Nexus, and Changing Transnational Gender Relations

Associational involvement has had interesting and unexpected effects on transnational gender relations, both in perceived and real terms:

...UNICEF was wondering if there is not a women's association similar to the *caisse* (in France)...as a result they (the female group in Sinthiane) wrote a letter to S.B. (one of the migrant women in France) and asked for a donation from us (Sinthiane migrant women in France) ...We had a meeting and finally we decided to make a donation by setting up a sister association...the *association de femmes de Sinthiane en France* (AFSF) ...(Oumou, B., Paris, 28.09.2005).

The women in Sinthiane describe the foundation of the female association in France (AFSF) in a different way. According to the women in Sinthiane it was the initiative of the women in France to set up a sister association in France (AFSF) and to make an initial donation of 100,000 CFA (150 Euro) to the female village association (GPF). Even though it is not clear who made the first step, the genesis of the female association in France is related to the prior established female group in the village. Today the AFSF has 27 members and group meetings take place on a rotating basis every three months at the home of one of the members. The maintenance of the association is driven by the wish to support the women in the village. 'Maintenance' means that the women pay into a kitty each month in order to support the female group in the village. They are in continuous exchange with the GPF by post, phone call, and video tape. They keep track of the association's activities, collect the membership fees, transfer the money, and all other related things. The women's long term goal is not only to respond to requests from the women in the

village but also to initiate development projects through fundraising actions in France. Until now the group reacted 'only to the requests' of the women in the village. Once a request from the female group in the village comes, exchange, discussion and further investigation starts, in order to come to an agreement on whether and how to support the female association in the village.

The women's group in the village fostered a new association and new associational practices among the Sinthiane women in France came into being. The foundation of a female sister association in France called into question common narratives which stress that, "women are not interested in development work" or "they [women] care only about their feast but not about the development of the village" (revealed in interviews in France, Dakar and Sinthiane 2005/2006) and question the assumption that "migrants are the only agents of social change and development". However some caution is needed as the women in France needed the permission of the male *caisse* in order to set up the AFSF. In addition, each of the women needs to get her husband's permission to join the association. However, the chair women and the leading circle of the association received broad support from their husbands and also from some of the single migrants in France.

The continued exchange between the AFSF, the male *caises* all over the world and the GPF suggests that the POS in Senegal not only influences the associational interest of women and men in Sinthiane, but also impacts on the associational behavior of the migrant women and men in France. The external people surrounding the women in Sinthiane, such as UNICEF employees and government officials, are not only financial resources but heralds of new images and ideas concerning men and women. They are shaping the institutional as well as the discursive POS in Sinthiane and Senegal. Institutions such as UNICEF foster a new discursive POS that influences associational behaviour locally and transnationally. The new ideas and discourses in the village have an impact on the Sinthiane migrants in France. One example for this concerns the division of labour:

"...The world is changing and I like to be part of this... if I could, I'd go to work happily...in Sinthiane I am limited...I do the garden and sell juice...but really the women in France they have the possibilities they can work and they can support us (the GPF)..." (Salamata, S., Sinthiane, 14.08.2006).

Though the pre-dominant division of labour and the organization of daily life in male and female spheres is still deeply ingrained in people's minds, the women in Sinthiane seem to assume that the women in France and Dakar experience upward mobility, which is perceived as an enabling factor for building female solidarity networks or associations across borders. The women's associational evolution in Sinthiane produces new images and ideas about men and women in the transnational space.

The changing images and ideas of the women in Sinthiane have also had an impact on the male migrants in France:

... My sister (one of the migrant women in France) contacted me after the women received the letter from the women's association in Sinthiane (to ask for support from the women in France)...I told her my opinion...to work something out with the other women in France and to support the GPF... (Coumba, D., Paris, 07.04.2006).

This statement underlines that the women's growing involvement in the GPF brought about some challenges, which are not only described as a catalyst for the establishment of the female association in France, but also encourage male Sinthiane migrants in France to support the foundation of this association.

Conclusions

By focusing on Sinthiane's associational performances at home and abroad this article has offered a corrective to recent approaches to the study of migrants' gendered associational engagement which has focused merely on one question, namely whether migrant associations are vehicles to change social and patriarchal norms or not. By changing the focus of investigation from the receiving to the sending context, the article contributes also to the political POS approach and challenges the common assumption that migrants are "the only agents of

social change". Focusing on the POS in Senegal the article questions the standard assumption of diaspora-development participation.

At the case study level, the article has shown how the collective initiatives of Sinthiane women have broadened to engage and mobilize locally and transnationally in development issues concerning their life in Sinthiane. In particular, the case study has illustrated how Sinthiane women extended their traditional associational engagement by directing their attention to small-scale development projects. The way the women reached out to find support for their new associational activities brought about the emergence of new local and transnational communicative, and the greater development of social and economic ties between the women and the male community in Sinthiane as well as with the Sinthiane diaspora community. Moreover it fostered the emergence of a sister association in France, which equally transgresses the realm of a traditional female association.

This illustration has been embedded into an analysis of the POS in Senegal. I highlighted how a female-embracing POS in tandem with policy programmes of development relief agencies nourished the establishment of the GPF. Interwoven in this was an illustration of the local and transnational interactions between the

female association in the village and the male Sinthiane association in France. In particular, I examined how the local shifts taking place in Sinthiane are mirrored in the associational landscape of Sinthiane associations in France. This highlighted that male and female diaspora engagement is not only bound up with the POS in the receiving society, but is also influenced through the discourses and exchanges performed in the village.

The experience of the Sinthiane case presented also some limitations regarding a gendered analysis of diaspora development engagement. Both the failure to include gender in the analysis of diaspora-development engagement as well as the preoccupations with questions concerning migrant associations, patriarchal norms and female empowerment are hiding more than they reveal. Taking an alternative path of analysis suggests that female engagement is inextricably bound to the sending context. This is not only ignored in the few studies that focus on gender in HTAs/VAs but also in the rhetoric of some academics and policy-makers who recently rediscovered and celebrated the development potential of migrant associations. Thus the Sinthiane case study serves as a reminder to study social change and diaspora-development engagement from an angle that includes the sending and the receiving context.

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