Migrant Associations' Double Engagement and the Transnationalisation of Public Spheres

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With this chapter I would like to focus on a specific form of transnational engagement and space of action, namely that of migrant associations.[1] In the last ten years there is an expanding interest in migrants who with their organisations strengthen transnational connections and address remittances not only to the kin groups but also to broader social and collective projects in the country of origin. (Çağlar 2006, Mercer et al. 2008, Halm/Zeynep 2012) This social process can be well explored by a transnational perspective regarding migrants not merely in their connection to the receiving contexts, but rather as subjects who are »doubly engaged« in diversified transnational spaces and organise accordingly (Grillo/Mazzucato 2008, Nieswand 2011, Fauser 2012). Indeed, many migrants, in the contemporary age, tend to feed interchange and connection circuits with their country of origin, through financial and economic actions, social and political practices. (Vertovec 2009, Glick Schiller/Faist 2010)

What these various types of migrants have in common is that rather than simply assimilating into their countries of residence or birth, they are increasingly articulating their lives through transnational social, cultural, religious and political spheres. Nancy Fraser (2007) argues that the Westphalian nature of public sphere theory is being challenged by the fact that people increasingly hold multiple nationalities and that individuals and communities inhabit social, political and cultural spaces across borders. In

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other words, they represent a living example of the inadequacy of what has been called »methodological nationalism« (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002, Beck 2006) and of nationally bounded conceptions of membership and political mobilisation.

This is exemplified by the continuous back and forth movements of migrants from the society of origin to the society of destination and beyond, whether by way of recurrent physical return or through symbolic cultural, social and/or political ties and loyalties. Even more central in the understanding of contemporary migrants' lived experiences is the notion of »simultaneity«, which sheds light on how migrants simultaneously engage with the nation-building processes of two or more countries (Levitt/Glick Schiller 2004) gradually shaping »transnational public spheres from below« (Salih 2010).

Relying on the case of the Senegalese in Italy, with this paper I will suggest the need to explore how a specific kind of double engagement – namely those of migrants' associations involved in co-development projects – may contribute to the transnationalisation of public spheres. Against the most celebrative reading of the *Migration-Development Nexus*, I will argue in favour of considering the difficulties encountered by such a double engagement. Despite this criticism, I consider these processes deserving further research because they are important arenas within which transnational migration experience is negotiated. For this purpose, I will briefly take into account some broader analysis of migrant associations' transnational co-development before moving to the specific case study. After giving a background on Senegalese migration in Italy, I will than consider the diversification of their associational life and the difficulties and ambivalences characterising the development projects they undertake within trans-local spaces.

Migrant Associations and Co-Development

Research has shown that transnational migrant associations have undertaken a range of large- and small-scale ventures in their home places. These include support for education and training, building homes, fundraising and making charitable donations, organizing group remittances for public goods or infrastructure projects, trading with and investing in businesses at home, paying taxes, and transferring technology and knowledge (Black/

King 2004, Grillo/Riccio 2004). They have consequently come to the attention of scholars interested in transnational flows of people, money and ideas, and the relationship between these flows as well as the development in sending contexts (Mazzucato/Kabki 2009, Glick Schiller/Faist 2010). This process of transnationalisation is highly uneven in space and time, but some of these associations have achieved visibility in Europe (Çağlar 2006) or North America (Smith 2006) and, as a result, development professionals have identified them as potential development actors.

The term *Co-Development* refers to policies of decentralising aid practices to institutions below the level of the state and involving migrants as »actors of development« (Daum 1998, Grillo/Riccio 2004, Faist 2008, Mercer et al. 2008). Co-development signals an orientation towards development which considers conventional development, characterised as state-to-state (bilateral) aid programmes, as inadequate, even counter-productive from an economic and political point of view. Programmes and projects, their primary movers, and the locus of their activities - not states, but localities -, it is argued, should be »decentralised«: local states and places, the people who inhabit them, and the institutions of civil society (NGOs, associations etc.) they have created. (Grillo/Riccio 2004) Co-development circles also stress the importance of dialogue with migrants and their organisations. Their legitimate interests in the development process, it is indicated, should be recognised and they should be encouraged to become »development actors«, dissolving the developer/developed distinction. (Lavigne-Delville 1991: 196; Quiminal 1991)

What distinguishes co-development from the transnational activities of migrant hometown associations is the involvement of a variety of local institutions and actors *here* such as regional and municipal authorities, NGOs, and crucial associations, based locally in Europe but representing particular villages or clusters of villages from which migrants originate, with funding from the state, the EU or IOM (Stocchiero 2008), and counterparts like local authorities, NGOs, village associations etc. *there*, in the South. Following the pioneering role of France, some local authorities in Italy also became involved in co-development projects in order to work with migrants and their associations. As a result, a growing number of projects have been undertaken (e.g. in Tuscany Lombardia and Emila-Romagna) by Italo-Senegalese organisations and Senegalese organisations in direct contact with, or supervised by, Italian institutions, with funding from, variously, the EU, IOM, national and local states, NGOs, and training organisations.

These activities may represent an original strategy indicating a refusal to break with countries of origin while seeking integration. Furthermore, although, as social actors, they do not represent a formal example of political transnationalism, these organisations can provide the channel for political participation.

In a similar vein, the analysis presented by Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen in Spain (2011: 22) without evaluating the outcome of migrant engagement in co-development, focuses on how the nexus between local migrant incorporation and transnational practices is »reflected in policy plans and activities of local governments and migrants at the national, regional and local level«. She shows how within a co-development context the receiving state-migrant relations provide a set of negotiations about the meaning of the transnational dimension of local membership between a state and migrants.

Myself, I would like to stress the importance of researching how migrant associations' everyday experiences of negotiating co-development projects set up simultaneously in the receiving and in the sending contexts may contribute to the transnationalisation of public sphere. The example I will take into account is that of the Senegalese migrant associations in Italy. Along with the illustration of the recent process of diversification of these associational trajectories, stemming as much from the interplay with the receiving contexts as from transnational projects, I will point to the opportunities for co-development but also the difficulties encountered in its implementation in the place of migration and origin. (Riccio 2008b) I will show how these projects sometimes represent an opportunity to improve the social conditions back home in combination with the inclusion within the local receiving context. However, I will stress the ambivalences concerning this search of enhancement of migrants' status and recognition at both ends of the migration experience.

Senegalese Migrants in Italy

Since the 80's emigration constitutes one of the main economic resources for Senegal testified by the birth of a specific Ministerial Department to ensure political representation to emigrants. As Dahou and Foucher (2004:10) stress, in the last decades emigration functioned as a Government's safety net benefiting the economy through remittances and provid-

ing an exit option for the disfranchised youth. In West African collective imageries migrants have substituted the graduate students as a symbol of success. (Schmitz 2008) The *modou modou* (abbreviation of mamadou mamadou) who are the rural migrants and supposedly know only how to trade but nevertheless manage to earn enough money abroad and come back showing off new houses, clothes, big weddings and all the symbols of success took the place of the graduates, who stay behind in Senegal and work very hard at school only to find themselves eventually unemployed. If in the past they were stigmatized for their ignorance, migrants are now seen as contemporary heroes. Senegalese discourse is replete with the celebration of migrants as symbols of contemporary society, because of their solidarity and their efforts in coping with being far from home for the well being of their families. (Riccio 2005) President Wade himself used the diaspora in multiple ways as informal political capital. (Salzbrunn 2008) Indeed, the growth of associations with a transnational orientation towards the development of the communities of origin after 2000 is partially affected by the Government's interest in and call towards the Diaspora.

Seen from the immigration society viewpoint one records a constant growth. The first Senegalese migration to Italy started at the beginning of the eighties with flows coming initially from France, which closed its borders in the late 70's, and later directly from Senegal destined for the islands and the capital city. In 2008, according to official statistics, Senegalese migrants regularly resident in Italy were mainly men (50.503) migrating as individuals, following the paths shaped by migratory networks, and highly mobile within Italian territory. The number of women (12.117) has been growing through family reunions, although much less so than other migrant nationalities. Yet, we should not forget that many migrants might lose their right to stay when without a job they are unable to renew their permit to stay in the country.

The Senegalese emigrate for mainly economic reasons and in particular because of the crisis of the traditional agricultural structure, which produced the following historical pattern: firstly urbanisation in Senegal, secondly western African internal migration, thirdly emigration to Europe (mainly France; Bava 2003), internal European migration (from France to Italy) and a change of direction in European emigration directly to Italy and Spain and finally to the USA (Ebin 2008). A distinctive culture of emigration as a training experience and the access to transnational networks play important roles, too. (Riccio 2008a)

However, one should remember the differences in Senegalese migrants' experiences. With regard to work, various studies have shown a diversity of work experiences. (Castagnone et al. 2005) This raises the question about the ambivalence of a Senegalese community which on the one hand has successfully entered the receiving society, but on the other hand, presents itself as a self-sufficient but also closed community interacting only occasionally with the receiving context. Indeed, among the main characteristics that are stressed by all the studies undertaken up to now is a very strong sense of solidarity and a »cohesive and group-centric« structure. Such an organisation provides newcomers and job-seekers with suggestions and an »original capital«. Nevertheless, the Senegalese show a high ability to become acceptable to the receiving society despite being the most »visible« group among the migrants in Italy. (Schmidt di Friedberg 1994)

On the other hand, the ambivalence between acceptance by the receiving society and closure within the community mirrors also an internal differentiation of trajectories and strategies and a complex dialectic between such strategies. The Senegalese migrant who is integrated within a trade union, at times acting as associational spokesperson of the community and occasionally found in a school telling his own story, is different from the trader/wholesaler well-integrated within transnational trading spaces (Bertoncello/Bredeloup 2004), though meanwhile living at the margins of or even excluded from the receiving society. This is just to say that the Senegalese presence in Italy is a dynamic phenomenon, which cannot be pictured in a rigid way. This becomes even clearer when looking at the multiple ways Senegalese migrants entered public space and engaged within transnational social fields.

Senegalese Associations in Italy

The Senegalese, and the Wolof in particular, provide us with an excellent example to appreciate the characteristics of transnationalism. For many Senegalese, transnational migration means engaging in economic transactions (including trade) across international boundaries, and over considerable distance, spending much of their time away from their place of origin, but returning there at fairly frequent intervals with the overall goal of creating an economic, social and spiritual life for themselves and their families in Senegal. (Riccio 2008a) The temporary returns of migrants,

especially when they are characterised by ostentation, play on the imagination of the people staying at home forming a symbolic push factor characterising the emigration from Senegal.

In the receiving context this background displays itself through various ways: religious organisation coexist with national and lay associations along with hometown associations. Historically, Senegalese religious organisations seem to be amongst the first actors in facilitating the migration experience. *Mouridiyya* is one of the four main Sufi syncretic brotherhoods in Senegal and most of Senegalese migrants in Italy are Mouride. Schmidt di Friedberg (1994) argues that the practical importance of the solidarity displayed by the Mouride brotherhood in a foreign environment is twofold: concerning the immigrant, who is not abandoned and uprooted but can move in a universe of meanings that are actually known and familiar; and concerning the host society, which is not confronted with individuals outside any social control, but rather with a cohesive group conscious of the difficulties of integration in another reality and ready to negotiate its position, avoiding conflict.

However, an aspect often mentioned by Mourides when talking about the importance of the brotherhood in the migratory experience is that the brotherhood helps in respecting the rules of the receiving contexts. On the other hand, it is the fact that the Mouride movement is embedded in a transnational social field that makes it so successful in controlling potentially deviant behaviour. Within this field Mourides transnational formations are kept alive by oral conversation, the selling of cassettes, with prayers and sacred chants. These social formations are shaped and strengthened mainly by the activities of the numerous religious circles, dahiras, widespread in the receiving countries (Carter 1997), and by the frequent visits of Marabouts from Senegal. Through the activities of the dahiras, the Mouride movement is also able to organise the interface with the institutions of the receiving context and to channel important resources in the sending one, especially Touba, the capital of the mouride brotherhood (Gueye 2002). One of the most important dahira, with around 5,000 members, is situated in Ponte Vico within the province of Brescia (cf. Kaag 2008), where a house to host itinerant big Marabouts has been constructed. Other important dahiras are that of Zingonia within the province of Bergamo (Sinatti 2007), that of Lido Adriano within the province of Ravenna and that of Pisa. Of course, big cities such as Milan, Rome and Turin have important dahiras too. Dahiras also implement some transnational projects, which

are more socially than economically oriented. For instance, Mouride associations from Spain and Italy raised a lot of money to build a hospital in Touba during the 90's, a project managed by the province of Diourbel. Still Mouridism helps in networking and having points of reference abroad it is not the only factor. Individual immigrants look for help and reference in general, sometimes relying on kinship, sometimes on religious adherence, and sometimes also on a general code of solidarity and through economic negotiations. Thus, the religious organisation is very important to maintain transnational identity, to provide migrants with spiritual and ideological points of reference and, mainly indirectly, to aid development of networks that are combined with other networks. People move within such a complex web of symbolic meanings and personal connections and try to make a living from it while keeping options open. (Riccio 2006)

A multiplicity of other organizational actors play an important role in the interface with Italian institutions as well as being crucial in keeping transnational connections with the homeland. (Ceschi/Stocchiero 2007, Riccio 2008b) The national associations perform an important function. During the 1990's Senegalese developed such a form of organisation with numerous provincially based Senegalese Associations of Italy united by a Coordinamento (CASI, Coordinamento delle Associazioni Senegalesi in Italia). These associations of foreign nationals are often shaped by migrants who are the most knowledgeable about the institutions in the receiving society. These are often the better educated, the elite who represents the foreign community only to some degree. However lay associations and CASI in particular have declined and other potential forms of organisations are developing, such as cooperatives or enterprises targeting more specific objectives together with more focused social organisations such as village associations.

Besides the branches of national associations in the various provinces there are also ethnic and village associations which are numerous. The former refer to the linguistic or ethnic minorities in Senegal who also organise themselves within the diaspora. There are, for instance, twelve Fulbé (Fulani) associations with 1400 members in Italy. The latter, called also hometown associations (cf. Çağlar 2006) or organisations (Halm/Zeynep 2012), tend to develop in the provinces with many migrants coming from a specific village or district. Such associations become involved in projects of various kinds such as construction of a well back home or collection of funds to build places of worship, schools and health centres (Grillo/Ric-

cio 2004). initially to ensure services for funeral ceremonies back in the home village, become more complex involving the transfer of money or products (medical drugs and equipment) for collective objectives such as community development, the of health centres or small hospitals, and the improvement of regional transport. Beside these common features, one records meaningful differences about the purposes and objectives (health, education etc.) as well as internal organization (more or less democratic). For instance, despite the objectives of associations sound almost always altruistic and noble, inside them one may find innovation, transformation as much as reproduction and strengthening of cleavages and power asymmetries along gender and intergenerational lines. For instance, in the province of Bergamo one records a village association from Baol which explicitly excludes women from its membership. (Riccio 2007)

A very important and non-intuitive aspect in the strengthening of hometown associations – which may be conducive to projects of co-development – is the crucial role played by the relationships and the interplay with local associational and institutional networks. Beside local government, also voluntary associations, NGOs, trade unions, or even single social practitioners facilitate the birth and endurance of the associations, which although focussed towards the community of origin, is intermittently involved with the sending context. The support towards the associations takes the form of suggestions as much as the concrete dispositions of places where members meet for formal assembly or discuss other kinds of decisions in case of unpredictable circumstances (sudden death of a member, special need from the village back home, etc.). Most of the longstanding associations are those who benefited from satisfactory relations with Italian Institutional and non institutional actors. (Cf. Brettel 2005) Furthermore, and more relevant for what will be discussed later, associations' leaders are ready to engage in projects which involve other social actors, like NGO's or a training centre connected with the trade union etc., only when their inclusion in the local receiving context is well assured and they can relate really as partners. Therefore, transnational engagement with the village of origin and the inclusion in the immigration society may feed each other. (Riccio/ Ceschi 2010)

More recently one witnesses also to a process of further diversification. Some organizational transformation is due mainly to the development of transnational connections activities, like when we count egional associations (*Self Help* from the Region of Louga), federations linking together

hometown associations (FADERMI connecting all the home town associations from Matam Region; Riccio 2007). Other organizational changes are due more to the interplay with the receiving contexts' institutions like the birth of foreign families' and mixed associations together with what is normally called second generation associations.

Finally, one should note individual initiatives based on Italian associational structures, which allow socially active migrants to become involved in cultural and economic activities, networking with the actors of the economic and institutional system within specific localities. Associations involved in intercultural events (music, performances etc.), but also those concerned with entrepreneurial projects, good examples. Individuals who address the broader issue of citizenship for migrants within the local context represent another example. Here one may encounter persons who prefer to participate within the trade union or the provincial or communal consultative councils for foreigners to seek to empower and enhance access to citizenship of migrants in general and not just Senegalese or Fulani. For instance, in Ravenna, a Senegalese elected as representative within a provincial council, belonged to the Tidiane minority and not to the Mouride majority of Senegalese. This is to say that the diversification with which migrants have been entering the Italian public space is tending to overcome national, ethnic and religious lines. All these processes shape multilayered and situational figurations. For instance, migrants may be shifting back and forth between different affiliations.

Modou (Sengalese pseudonym) may be involved in a hometown association and discuss often with co-nationals if it would be better to connect in a regional federation of HTA (like all the village associations coming from the region of Louga in Senegal) better access the resources provided by the EU or the OIM and managed by the Region or the Commune. At the same time he can be seriously engaged to the national association acting within a specific Province (say Bergamo or Ravenna) but he also participates within the provincial or communal consultative councils for foreigners to seek to empower and enhance access to citizenship migrants in general. Finally, his incorporation within receiving localities does not stop at the insertion of the labour market but might involve his work at the local branch of the trade union all Saturdays, where beside general information for other foreigners more specific services are provided to workers concerned with work problems on local, national and global scale. He might enhance his status at the local level in the hometown village for having contributed to

the building of a health centre, but he acts politically within the organization of expatriates when back in the capital to raise the voice of migrants with a ministry.

As one may appreciate, these figurations seem more diverse and complex than the simple elite non-elite distinction, which puzzles many scholars working in this area. Indeed, there has been a long-standing debate about which kind of actors are these migrants doubly involved in both countries of origin and immigration. On the one hand, these practices of double engagement are seen as dominated by well educated and often wealthy men who wish to be incorporated in the elite in both sending and receiving countries rather than challenging the unequal power relations characterising them. On the other hand the transformative potential of migrants' political transnationalism is stressed. (Levitt 2001) The debate includes contributions on the politics of hometown associations, which have suggested a wide range of purposes driving these state centred, autonomous or even oppositional transnational associations. (Smith/Bakker 2008) Moreover, Mercer and colleagues (2008) request to overcome easy dichotomy between political belonging and moral conviviality showing how both aspects are at stake in the engagement of home associations, which can show also progressive aspects and be conducive of social change even when they use elite's rhetoric of belonging. In their views, home associations have the power to re-orientate the belonging-based policies by mobilizing collective action and resource distribution in a way that disregards the struggles for power as well as social, gender and political inequalities. (Cf. Halm/Zeynep 2012)

Co-Development and Transnational Engagement

Another aspect that should be kept in mind is a certain degree of normativity of transnational engagement for these different organizations. (Stocchiero 2008) Thus a momentum has been developed around transnational investments and projects. For instance, some of these organisational actors embark on micro-development projects aimed at their country of origin in Sub-Saharan Africa. As already explained, such transnational schemes, alongside and in conjunction with northern and southern local authorities and NGOs conflate different scales in both sending and receiving contexts. These provide an opportunity to enhance the chances of inclusion in the

receiving contexts as much as social mobility in terms of prestige and status in the sending contexts.

However, ambivalence can be recorded in these programmes. They form part of a general »discourse of development« (Grillo/Stirrat 1997), someone called it »mantra« (Faist 2008), stressing community, civil society, self-reliance, and, sometimes, profitable investment. From the perspective of the receiving context, it forms part of a transition to migration policies in which the emphasis would be on the stimulation of autonomy and entrepreneurship. As Faist puts it, »transnational networks and associations of migrants have come to stand at the centre of the optimistic visions of national and international economic development policy establishments« (2008: 22). Do these reflect the real demands of migrants or the logic of Italian planners, politicians, and social practitioners involved in the implementation of immigration policies? Moved from a bit of scepticism, this question should always be kept in mind.

Problems of exploitation should be taken into account. For instance, projects have been realized »in the name of migrants« by involving actors of the territory in the organization and by excluding migrants' associations. Let us take the example of a consortium of enterprises in the province of Bergamo, which has run courses of vocational training with a special attention towards migrants working in construction and manufacturing. It was well networked with local governments, the entrepreneurial as well as the associational sectors. At the beginning of the 2000's it has run one of the biggest and important projects in Senegal by creating a school for professional training in polyvalent mason in Senegal. The project involved many important social and economic actors of the province: the local government, three NGOs, UNESCO Dakar, a renowned school of construction, the two main associations of building firms, the Chamber of Commerce and a local foundation. The biennial project aimed at training semi-skilled and skilled masons in Senegal. The most successful among the 70 or 80 trainees were meant to come to Italy and enter regularly the provincial labour market. However, with the system of quota established by the Bossi-Fini law in 2002 these potential labour migrants could not leave Senegal and had to look for a job there. This grand project involving variety of actors was clearly oriented towards the need of the local labour market, but at the end it failed its main purpose.

Furthermore, the project did not involve the Senegalese association in Bergamo, which was among one of the biggest and better organised in

the Italian territory. When talking to the director of the Consortium and the responsible person of the project, I understood that a project of co-development working the other way round (training Senegalese migrants in such a way that they could invest their skills in the building sector within urban Senegal) would not find the necessary consensus among the productive actors of the network. The lack of involvement of Senegalese migrants organised in associations was explained with reference to the low degree of literacy among them. However, this was not the case for those who had been elected to represent the Senegalese migrants and therefore sounded as an excuse to many of them. More accurately, in other occasions the complaints refer to the lack of reliability of foreigners' associations' representation. Especially with development projects, there are conflicts concerning the level of benefit a project can provide for a specific sending context. However, the resentment for not having been involved in this project was very high among Senegalese migrants (Riccio 2008b) and it disappeared only when other opportunities emerged some years later faciliating the direct engagement of Senegalese associations (Ceschi/Stocchiero 2007).

In other circumstances, even when the projects ensured the participation of migrants, problems could arise due to mutual incomprehension and naïve expectations. Italian partners are often idealized for committing themselves and giving their time with no gain but cultural enrichment. Obviously such representations engender disappointment when the operators turn out to pay less attention to the needs and the culture of migrants than to the correct implementation of the project stages and to the rational employment of financial resources. On the other hand, perception and consequent expectations by Italian operators can be as idealistic and distorted, in so far as they are sustained by an exotic and pre-political fascination towards lost community values, an approach that can turn into its contrary when disappointment engenders the most racist and paternalistic generalizations. (Riccio 2008b)

Disappointed expectations are able to produce refusal towards the receiving context and induce migrants to invest in informal social networks that have often proved to be effective and secure in realizing individual or collective projects. Also, involving migrants as »development actors« is not free from ambivalence, particularly when the project is openly aimed at the »return to the country of origin« since it relies on a *discourse* that justifies the investment through the objective of »sending them home«. Support for such projects has often been ambivalently bound up with the goal of repat-

riation, and ideologically exploited in order to legitimate exclusion policies. (Daum 1997) For instance, even the Northern League encouraged NGOs to engage in development with the specific objective of halting immigration. In this context, it may all too readily become entwined with the politics of racism. Such projects risk feeding narratives of exclusion, while claiming to benefit the excluded. Praising the idealist Third-Worldism of Italian municipal authorities and activists, or the role of migrant associations as cultural mediators, is not without ambiguity if the purpose of local politicians is to return migrants to their home countries. Actually within the idea of co-development adopted in France and Italy, the interface role played by immigrants implies their active presence in the welcoming context. Nonetheless, even in projects fulfilling this criterion, a subtle political and symbolic exploitation of the processes cannot be excluded, since they can be used to offer a very benevolent and charitable image of the receiving country while, at the same time, security policies against migrants are adopted.

At the end of the nineties for instance the administration of a small town on the Riviera Romagnola succeeded to disguise their hard-line policy towards the irregular hawkers by co-financing a project of a group of Senegalese. They claimed: »We even bought them a boat!« The financing of one part of the project by only eight beneficiaries, united under the notion of »community«, produced a political and communicational semantic on the administrational side, by which their action seemed to involve the Senegalese community as a whole in the territory. This allowed the mayor to provide the image of a balanced political approach: hard-lined enough to satisfy the expectations of the shopkeepers' associations, but also generous and sensitive enough to neutralize the critics on the left as well as the catholic voluntary organizations. In other words, investing in this kind of project risks nourishing the rhetoric of exclusion while seemingly helping outcasts.

From the point of view of the sending country one records problems, too. Meillassoux, in his pioneering critique of co-development (1990) and especially on the projects characterised by the discourse about the need for »productive« investments argued that if the migrant workers are exploited in the receiving economy, »productive investments« run the risk of positioning them as exploiters of second degree in the context of origin, reproducing instead of undermining a system of overexploitation. More recently, Bakewell (2007) discusses the long-standing ambivalence of the relation between a too un-problematised notion of development and migra-

tion, arguing that often many of these projects aim at ensuring immobility. Indeed, many projects celebrating the *Migration-Development Nexus* examine the possibilities for the voluntary return of migrants to their »home«. (Cf. Glick Schiller/Faist 2010)

Furthermore, hometown or other kind of associations are bound to deal with local communities back home. As Faist observes (2008), the ability of migrants' associations to combine, thanks to transnational mobility, *exit* and *voice*, the famous concepts coined by Hirschman, can make them collide with those who don't move. The activities associations tend to promote in the places of origin, have to face local societies and the tension their actions can possibly evoke in these communities. For instance, migrants can be protagonists but this may collide with the claims of local political representatives (i.e. *les élus des communautés rurales*). There could be a struggle for the power on the decision making process affecting the community. In the case of local politicians this is managed according to a formal process of political representation, whereas migrants' associations often benefit from a charismatic informal power, which is acted in an effective and innovative way. If the former accuses the latter of being »undemocratic« or »far away from the every day problems of the village«, the latter, sometimes together with other members of the community, can counter-argue that the former revealed himself as »corrupted egotistic and nothing more« (Riccio/Ceschi 2010).

The relationship with the broader community of origin demands attention, too, because of an ambivalent representation of migrants in contemporary Senegal. (Riccio 2005, Fouquet 2008) On the one hand the success of migrants stimulates emulation as well as the popular imagination, on the other hand, some people argue that migrants succeed only because they »trick«, they become rich in a fraudulent manner. These comments are connected to another criticism of people wasting money on big weddings and houses instead of investing it in more entrepreneurial ways, producing jobs for others. Furthermore, the priorities mediated by migrants can contrast with kin, generational or gender hierarchies. For instance a larger association from the Matam region in Bergamo had to negotiate a lot to convince the elderly that a school for girls was more important than a third mosque for the village. (Riccio 2007)

Also, the involvement of the sending state is not unproblematic. If on the one hand migrant associations' activities and engagement in local development have forced national or local state to provide them with political

recognition and sometimes with financial support there is always the risk, as has been noted in other context, that associations may be »left doing the lion's share of the government's work' in development« while the government itself steps back from this responsibility (Levitt 2001: 209). Differently, the state can be also very crafty in exploiting these programmes. For instance, Robert Smith (2006) illustrates the historical path by which the community of migrants coming from Tijuana and living in New York has benefited from being repeatedly involved in projects of the local and then the Mexican authorities. Beside the first attempts of development projects and the institutionalisation of electoral mechanisms, aiming at facilitating distance voting, such activities became more concrete in the 1990s with the growth of a multiplicity of recreational associations, which proved to be the organisational actors most capable of maintaining transnational relations and undertaking complex transnational projects.

However problematic co-development may reveal itself, it can provide the means for migrants, individually and/or collectively, to fulfil their own projects and is often a mean for social change and power re-negotiations along gender and generational lines but also along ethnic lines within the receiving contexts. (Mercer et al. 2008)

Conclusion

Although one should be cautious of celebratory as much as pessimistic views towards hometown transnational activities and co-development in particular, a methodological opportunity needs to be recognized: by involving a large number of social actors (institutions, associations, NGOs, local state) in both sending and receiving contexts, this field of research represents a laboratory for the study of complex and ambivalent social processes as transnational public spheres in the making. As Smith and Bakker (2008) have clearly shown with their study of Mexican economic and political projects between the US and Mexico, the research on the interplay of social and institutional actors operating at multiple scales is somehow revealing about the political construction of citizens across borders. (cf. Çağlar 2006)

As a perspective, taking into account migrants' organisation engagement in co-development allows to see how discourses on development policies are acted, represented and even put up for discussion by the promo-

ting associations, by collective and individual migrants operating within the project. (Olivier de Sardan 1995) Moreover, studies on decentralized cooperation through migration can provide methodological insights in order to observe the interaction of institutions and associations in the country of destination, as well as among transnational practices and economic or socio-cultural changes in the country of origin.

The construction of a transnational public sphere needs to be investigated through an analysis of how migrant associations create political spaces out of their transnational socio-economic activities. The negotiation between associations' members and the Senegalese political representatives about the priorities of a project, or their critique towards local government officials as being corrupt, as much as the contestation of the ideological and instrumental use of a co-development programme by an Italian politician, all these situations concur in shaping a transnational arena where social if not legal citizenship is negotiated, contested or enacted. What I may anticipate is that the experiences of Senegalese associations in northern Italy, like the migrants' activities crossing the US-Mexico border mentioned above, seem to show that the transnationalisation and inclusion in the receiving context reinforce each other. As I said, migrants involved in more complex programmes with the aim to facilitate social and economic change in the sending context are those who managed to enter the Italian associational structure successfully moving themselves with confidence through the institutional networks of the receiving society. On the other hand Mercer and colleagues (2008) as well as Ostergaard-Nielsen (2011) have shown how African home associations do undertake also projects aimed at integration in British and Spanish societies respectively. Clearly, many migrants consider their engagement with the county of origin as compatible with their integration and investment in the society of immigration. (Smith/Bakker 2008, Nieswand 2011)

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