Sa bir bi dafa rey - An analysis of joking relationships and make-believe families in the Senegalese diaspora

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MSc Political Science- Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Development

Leiden University 2021-2022

Thesis Seminar- The Dark Side of Identity

Master Thesis

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Word Count: 9960

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

[1] Translation from Wolof: Your belly is big

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1. Abstract

Leaving one's home is never an easy undertaking. Whether having left voluntarily or not, migrants face various challenges in their new host states. Many rely on their co-nationals and diaspora communities to remain connected to their homeland and to navigate their new host countries. One way to remain connected to the home country are joking relationships. Prevalent in West African states, joking relationships or *cousinage* assume make-believe family ties, which in turn allow people to jokingly insult their "cousins". Commonly known as traditional conflict resolution techniques, these relationships play important roles in people's everyday life.

This thesis investigates the impact that cousinage has on the community of the Senegalese diaspora in Germany, as well as the question whether diaspora activity and involvement can facilitate integration. In the course of this thesis, an in-depth case study of the Senegalese diaspora in Germany was conducted, for which 28 members of the diaspora were interviewed. The research found that joking relationships are a way for the diaspora to create community feeling based on ethnic and national identities. Furthermore, the thesis shows that diaspora involvement facilitates the integration process of migrants by offering active support.

2. Introduction

Being home to many different diaspora communities Germany is a highly diverse strates. Walking around in any big German city one hears a multitude of languages. If one happens to speak Wolof, one of the many West African languages mainly spoken in Senegal, it often happens that one hears people shouting "*Sa bir bi dafa rey!*". Hearing this insult, translatable to "Your belly is big" might be a strange thing for outsiders, however for Senegalese, these jokes or *cousinage* are an everyday occurrence, even in the diaspora. During cousinage, people will often make comments about someone's physical fitness, or presumed laziness, based on ethnicity or last name. Cousinage is known as a way to mediate between ethnicities and avoid ethnic tensions, an issue many African states are facing. In the region of West Africa, the state of Senegal, being home to more than 20 distinct ethnic groups, has long been known as politically stable, a stability that is often, at least partly accredited to cousinage.

While much research in recent years has focused on cousinage in conflict settings, it remains unclear which role it takes on in the diaspora community of a state that does not experience violent ethnic conflict. It is important to further investigate which, if any, effect cousinage has on community building in diaspora communities. Additionally, it is of interest, what role the

diaspora community plays in the integration of its members. Stemming from this, the research questions that will be the focus of this paper are the following:

1: Do joking relationships promote community feeling in the diaspora?

2: Does diaspora involvement in integration efforts affect relations to the host state?

The research questions were answered through content analysis of interviews with 28 members of the Senegalese diaspora in Germany. It was found that cousinage influences community feeling in the diaspora and is an important aspect of Senegalese culture. Furthermore, it was discovered that the diaspora is an important factor in the integration processes of Senegalese migrants.

This paper will be structured as follows: first, literature on ethnicities, cousinage, diasporas and integration will be discussed. Secondly, content analysis, the method used to analyze the interviews conducted in the course of this thesis will be described. Lastly, after a background on migration from Senegal, ethnicities, and voter behavior in Senegal, the analysis will follow.

3. Africa, Joking Relationships, and the Integration of Diaspora Communities

In this literature overview, research on the topic of ethnicity in Africa will be discussed, before focusing on works on joking relationships and their role in Senegalese society. Then, the focus will be on integration and the role diasporas play in the integration of migrants. When concentrating on integration, two views will be highlighted, one following the argument that diasporas can inhibit integration processes, and the other focusing on the positive impact diasporas have on their members. The following research will be arguing in favor of the idea that diasporas are both actors for political change in their home countries, as well as a good basis for integration to newcomers. Finally, the literature and arguments will be brought together.

3.1 Africa- the Conflict-ridden Continent?

3.1.1 Ethnicities in Africa

The African continent is often associated with tensions and conflicts on the basis of ethnicities. This association, while being rather stereotypical, has some foundation, especially since ethnicities have been the center of many conflicts over the years **(**Venkatasawmy, 2015). What needs to be kept in mind, however, is that African states are still in the borders arbitrarily drawn by their former colonial rulers. Thus, many states ended up with a multitude

of different ethnicities, while dividing others between multiple states, creating ethnically diverse states that face a multitude of issues.

Ethnically diverse states risk ethnic tensions, especially if there is a power imbalance or if some ethnic identities are more pronounced than others, possibly leading to secession efforts (Collier, 2009). While some scholars maintain that ethnic identification tends to be stronger than nationalist feelings, scholars like Robinson disagree. Robinson (2014, p. 712) argues that while many states do suffer from weak nationalism, most citizens in countries included in the Afrobarometer survey, do not feel more connected to their ethnicity than their nationality. Additionally, Collier (2009, p. 52) states that a society can function, even if its citizens have multiple identities. According to him, an issue supposedly only arises, if loyalties to one of the other identities become more important than attachment to an identity defined by the state.

Ethnic tensions are a common occurrence in African states, most prominent the example of Rwanda, where, through different methods, the majority ethnicity of the Hutu was mobilized against the Tutsi minority (Duchac, 2015). However, some countries have found a way to deescalate tensions and conflicts through joking relationships. In the interplay of ethnicities in African states joking relationships or cousinage can play an important role. Being grouped into the category of traditional African "conflict medicine" (Zartmann, 2000, p. 5), cousinage has important implications for politics in West Africa, an effect that has been pointed out by multiple scholars (Wilson-Fall, 2000, Zartman, 2000).

3.1.2 Joking Relationships as Conflict Medicine

Many scholars have focused on joking relationships and their effects during their research endeavors (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940, Wilson-Fall, 2000), and cousinage has been widely acknowledged as a tool for conflict resolution, drawing on make-believe familial ties. Cousinage has been defined by Radcliffe-Brown (1940, p. 195) as "a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence". Radcliffe-Brown (1940, p. 199) goes on to describe this relationship as "an alliance involving real friendliness and mutual aid combined with an appearance of hostility". Oftentimes, "cousins" insult each other, calling each other fat or slaves, afterwards laughing about it, and asking about the other's family. What might seem strange and like an insult to outsiders, is an integral part of everyday social interactions of Senegalese and other West Africans.

Joking relationships are found within families and transcend hierarchical and ethnic lines (Dunning& Harison, 2010, p. 24). They can be both symmetrical, as well as asymmetrical, thus often transcending traditional conceptions of authority (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940, p. 195). When asymmetrical, these relationships transcend usual societal hierarchies. In this case, a grandchild could jokingly insult his or her grandparent, thereby ignoring the hierarchy. In symmetrical cousinage, these jokes would happen among "equals" in a society, individuals sharing the same age for example.

Cousinage can, according to O'Bannon (2008, p. 4) serve as an "indigenous structure of self-governance". Here, cousinage is used to highlight the constructed kinship between West African families, a kinship that transcends divisions created by belonging to different ethnicities. When these relationships are known in everyday life, governments and media agencies use cousinage so people will refer back to them in the face of violent conflict. A prominent example for this reminder is Mali, where cousinage is oftentimes used in series and films, especially during instances of conflict (Jones, 207, p. 104).

According to Hagberg (2006, p. 198), cousinage is a way to act out a made-up conflict, in order to prevent a real, possibly violent conflict. In the case of Burkina Faso, a country that has had multiple violent clashes between ethnicities over the years, joking relationships are used for this purpose. Here, warring parties have resorted to cousinage as mediating techniques (Hagberg, 2006). When asking one's joking partner for clemency for the other conflict party, he will accept due to the supposed obligation to their "family" (Hagberg, 2006, p. 206). Another way in which cousinage finds its way into everyday life in this country is through satirical press, where it is common practice to include jokes attacking one's joking partner (Hagberg, 2006, p. 208). Using stereotypes towards another ethnicity eases tensions since all individuals involved are aware of the relation between the jokers. O'Bannon (2008, p. 6), highlights this effect further when talking about the influence these relationships may have on modern conflict resolution in West Africa. Drawing from data collected over a two-year period, 1999 to 2000, O'Bannon (2008) investigates the influence of joking relationship on conflict resolution in rural Senegal.

De Jong (2005, p. 394) illustrates the dynamics of joking relationships based on last names in the Senegalese context, stating that people with the last name *Ndiaye* will have a joking relationship with people called *Diop* and vice-versa. This relationship can manifest itself in a setting like a supermarket, when one comments on the shopping of the other: "Oh, I bet you are a Diop, because you are buying so much.". Furthermore, it can be visible within families,

where people might not share a last name, and therefore resort to cousinage when visiting each other. In this instance, one might state “Oh, whenever I go to my cousins, the Diops, I don’t get enough food.”, while the counterpart might say “Oh no, today my cousin Ndiaye is coming, so we have to prepare more food than usually”. Additionally, among friends and people who have met before, when seeing each other in the street a Diop might cry out “Oh, there is a Ndiaye! How are you, my slave?”. In this setting, joking has often been described as an important pillar of society, facilitating personal and political lives of Senegalese citizens (De Jong, 2005).

Scales-Trent (2005) describes cousinage as made-up families, that have a special bond in life, and are allowed and able to make fun of each other even in serious situations. The different definitions of joking relationships highlight the fact that cousinage is like a glue binding together the Senegalese people across ethnicities, allowing them to be seemingly disrespectful in very serious situations like police controls. In everyday scenarios, joking relationships are said to facilitate these interactions, stressing the supposed relation between people.

3.2 Diasporas- Inhibiting or Enabling Integration Processes?

3.2.1 Integration and Acculturation

For many people living in the Global South, there might not be a lot of opportunities regarding work and education. Therefore, many people see migration to another country as a viable option to support their family and fulfill their aspirations. In 2020, 281 million individuals were living outside their home country, with the US hosting 51 million, and Germany hosting 16 million migrants (United Nations, 2020).

However, different perspectives on what integration means or should mean prevail. For some it is a process depending on the migrant and the migrant has to put in a conscious effort in order to integrate into the host state (Butler, 2001, Brubaker, 2005). These authors also argue that a continued contact to co-nationals might inhibit a person’s integration. For others, integration is a process including both, the host society, and the migrant (Baffoe, 2010, Marfaing, 2003, Shum, 2019). Authors following this view see diasporas as important agents, helping with the orientation of newcomers or being advocates for political change in their home countries. In this thesis I will side with those authors focusing on integration as a reciprocal process.

Integration can be understood as a “bi-directional process”, involving immigrants and the host state (Baffoe, 2010, p. 160). This entails two processes focusing on different perspectives,

actors, and their implications, which Shum (2019) defines, similarly to Baffoe (2010). Normatively, integration is a process during which migrants "renegotiate their identity through interactions with the host population" (Shum, 2019, p. 38).

Marfaing (2003, p. 16) defines integration rather as being linked to and in the hand of the host state. It is for this state to decide how immigrants might achieve the status of integration. Yet, integration is not limited to only one domain. Marfaing's view is partly in line with Baffoe's idea of integration processes, which highlights the importance of the host state in the process. Adding to this, Ponzo et al. (2013, p. 6) agree with this definition, once again stressing the bi-directional aspect. Here, the process of integration is said to facilitate "effective participation by all members" in order to have a "politically, economically, and culturally diverse society, fostering a shared sense of belonging" (Ponzo et al., 2013, p. 6).

Identity of migrants and identity in general is understood as being ever-changing and fluid, thus also being easily influenced. Additionally, I argue that the expectation towards migrants to leave behind their cultural identity is harmful rather than beneficial, especially since they are a minority, even if the diaspora is an established entity. Berry and Sam (2010) investigate acculturation on different levels, that of the group, as well as that of the individual. The group level is the focus of this case, since the research is looking at the diaspora community as a whole.

3.2.2 Diasporas

Diasporas are one of the most important concepts when talking about migrant integration, and are defined by Vertovec (1999, p. 1) as populations that are considered "deterritorized or transnational", meaning their country of residence is different from their country of origin. It is often highlighted that diasporas take on different functions for their members (Vertovec, 1999). This includes support networks for people struggling and having social networks to help face the challenges of work and bureaucracy in the host country. The diaspora mirrors the ethnic make-up of its home country. The exchange and contact with co-nationals are of high importance and go hand in hand with the debate of whether a continued contact to co-nationals is beneficial to one's integration into a new society. On the one hand, it is argued that diasporas can be harmful to integration (Brubaker, 2005). On the other hand, aspects like acculturation are brought forward to argue against this notion (Berry& Sam, 2010).

Diasporas can, depending on the size, take on economic responsibilities from abroad. They do not only constitute social networks possible mapping multiple states, but are also important

economic actors, offering financial support to their families through remittances and other social services (Uzelac, 2018). Adding to this is the fact that members of diasporas tend to have strong ties to families and friends in their respective countries of origin. This contact and the nostalgia to speak one's language and connect to co-nationals can in part explain the desire for diaspora communities, as well as their importance to their members.

Diasporas do not need to be static and otherwise bounded groups, their membership fluctuates with migratory developments (Brubaker, 2005). Butler (2001, p. 191) in addition to Brubaker (2005) lists five points a group has to meet in order to be categorized as a diaspora, namely being spread across two or more countries, having a "collective mythology" of the homeland, an alienation from the host land, the idealization of the home state and lastly, an ongoing relationship with the homeland. Additionally, the migration data portal (n.d.) characterizes diaspora communities as having a sense of kinship among each other, spanning national borders. Contrary to this point of having an idealized picture of the homeland and it being influential regarding the identity of individuals, Uzelac (2018) and Salzbrunn (2004) show how diasporas can act as important political actors, oftentimes bringing upon political change in their home countries. in the case of the Senegalese 2012 presidential elections diasporas' political power becomes clear. Where it was a clear win for Macky Sall, he received 82.5% of all votes in the diaspora in the US and 84% in France, thereby defeating incumbent president Wade (Vari-Lavoisier, 2016, p. 8).

Some authors might argue ties to a diaspora community are harmful for the integration of migrants into the host society since the involvement with co-nationals is said to lead to an alienation from the host land, and a possible ghettoization (Butler, 2001). This ghettoization would happen if immigrants and their families only spoke their own language, limiting the contact with the host state (Brubaker, 2001, p. 543). Diasporas have, while they often live in different countries, a collective idea of the homeland which has, according to Butler (2001) and Brubaker (2005), the potential to lead to an alienation form the host land and its culture and customs. This so-called homeland orientation can be understood as the orientation toward a real or imagined homeland as a source of value, identity, and loyalty (Brubaker 2005).

Sam and Berry (2010) argue against the idea of homeland orientation and the notion that diasporas locking people in parallel societies, by focusing on acculturation. They see acculturation as a mixture of keeping contact to co-nationals and traditions and entering into exchanges with people outside of their group. Acculturation, a term coined by Berry (1997), is defined as a constant exchange of practices, and customs between host- and home-culture,

mixing together aspects of old and new cultures. This goes hand in hand with integration, and assimilation just as separation and marginalization are alternative strategies to integrate in a country. As a strategy to integrate, acculturation is used when individuals seek to continue their customs and contact with co-nationals, while at the same time entering into contact with other groups and individuals (Sam& Berry, 2010, p. 476). Acculturation is deeply linked to diasporas and their influence on integration, since these groups often have contacts outside of them, thus helping newly arriving people to establish the contacts with the host nation they seek. The idea of acculturation goes hand in hand with Taylor's (1994) focus on recognition. Taylor highlights the harm that demanding complete assimilation cand do. This can be looked at on an individual level as well, and one can argue that there is a need for recognition among ethnicities and co-nationals.

Support from diaspora communities is also picked up by Maraing (2003), who talks about the process of integration, and the construction of an identity in order to fully integrate into a state. Maraing (2013) stresses that the continued connection to co-nationals is important for the identity of migrants, and that a complete separation from countrymen might have negative consequences. This mix between cultures is beneficial to the individual's integration, since the connection to co-nationals is not interrupted, while new connections to the host society can develop and continue. Diasporas are constantly engaged in so-called integrative exchanges with their host state and its population in the form of customs and traditions they showcase (Shum, 2019, p. 51).

Especially in Western states, immigrants from Africa and African diaspora groups are often faced with difficulties, making a connection to co-nationals even more important. Focusing on Nigerien immigrants in Belgium, Loftsdóttir (2019) highlights the difficulty of integrating into the job market. Due to the occurrence of acts of terrorism, as well as an increased influx of migrants since the mid-2010s, the image of migrants in Europe has become increasingly negative (Loftsdóttir, 2019, p. 242). Highlighting the supposed differences between Western modernity and a way of living associated with the global South and Islam, many misconceptions about migrants and their compatibility with Europe have increasingly made their lives difficult. While the reasons for migration to Europe differ, Loftsdóttir as well as Toma (2015) agree on the often-forgotten links between the colonial past and the influx of African migrants. This history and stereotypes stemming from colonial misconceptions about Africans also influence the attitudes towards African migrants. Similar to Loftsdóttir, Toma

(2015) describes the struggles of Senegalese men in Italy, arriving in hopes of job opportunities, and oftentimes ending up in economically and otherwise precarious situations.

Building on a multidimensional approach of integration in this paper, integration is understood as a bi-directional process between the host society and the diaspora. This is supported by the definitions and concepts provided by Shum (2019) and Ponzo et al. (2013). Diasporas are understood as groups made up by different ethnicities and maintain close contact to their families. Simultaneously, they are active citizens in their host state, in this case Germany.

Cousinage is defined as both, a tool for conflict resolution as well as a way to bridge ethnic divides and dissolve hierarchical structures in the diaspora dependent on age or social positions. If continued, it is argued here, cousinage can also function as a glue in the Senegalese diaspora, highlighting individuals' national rather than ethnic identity. Furthermore, it will be questioned whether strong diaspora ties lead to weak host country ties, tying into the diaspora-integration debate.

4. Case Selection, Research Design and Methods

In order to answer the research questions, an in-depth case study of the Senegalese diaspora will be conducted. Case studies have the advantage of giving clear insights into a specific setting and the circumstances surrounding a case. They allow for a focused, in-depth analysis and give the opportunity to gain and report more nuanced information about the setting as well as the phenomenon being studied (Kohlbacher, 2006, p. 6). Especially in the case of a regionally centered concept like cousinage, the focus on a specific country will help accentuate the meaning of joking relationships to the population that is being studied.

To yield meaningful results, a content analysis will be conducted. It has been defined by Babbie (2013, p. 295) as "the study of recorded human communications" and is used to analyze textual documents such as articles, as well as interview transcripts (Prior, 2014). The analysis can be focused on themes that are manifesting themselves in the data as in this case (Prior, 2014). This method will lead to an understanding of the underlying meanings of the content that has been shared, making connections between recurring themes among all interviews. Since content analysis focuses on how things are said, and what is meant by different statements, it is well suited for this research project.

The case of Senegal is suitable for this topic, since, while being home to a variety of ethnicities, it is also relatively stable relative to its West African neighbors. Cousinage has

been the focus of many research endeavors, yet not many have focused on its importance in diaspora communities. Additionally, there is a large Senegalese diaspora in Germany, with an abundance of religious as well as ethnic identities. Looking at this community as the focus of the research will be beneficial in finding out the usefulness of cousinage in regard to bridging ethnic differences.

In principle, it can be expected that ethnic differences are set aside when diaspora communities find each other. However, the role of joking relationships in this setting needs further investigation. The focus of literature on cousinage mainly lies on states experiencing violent conflict. Illustrating joking relationships in a diaspora community of a politically stable state is therefore useful. Furthermore, it asks the question whether a diaspora community still engages in traditions and customs of the home country, or if these practices tend to be discontinued in order to integrate into the host state.

In order to investigate joking relationships, I have interviewed 28 members of the Senegalese diaspora in Germany (Table 1). The interviews lasted on average about 45 minutes, and were conducted in either French, German or a combination of both languages. The interview questions assessed the interviewees' ethnic identity, their age, the time spent in Germany, and their ideas of cousinage. The translated version of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A. Out of the 28 people interviewed, 10 were female, and 4 out of all interviewees have resided in Germany for less than 10 years. The respondents come from different areas of Senegal. Furthermore, there is little variation in ethnicity, however, the ethnicities Wolof and Peulh/ Puular are umbrella terms for multiple ethnic groups, and respondents did not always specify. The interviewees have all given informed consent before being recorded and, prior to the interview were made aware they could refuse to answer questions they did not feel comfortable with, however this did not happen.

The interviewees have been sampled through personal connections, and through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was employed, in order to get a representative sample. Snowball sampling relies on the personal networks of respondents that meet the criteria needed for the research, thus diversifying the sample (Halperin& Heath, 2017, p. 277). In this case the criteria were quite broad, with being originally from Senegal and having some knowledge about cousinage being the main ones.

Conducting these interviews and writing this thesis, I especially focused on the topics of community feeling within the diaspora and the effect the Senegalese diaspora has on the integration processes of its members. Within the first topic, the importance of cousinage

became pronounced, and individual friendships were mentioned a lot. Ethnicities and ethnic identities play a substantive role in both Senegal and the diaspora, there is however some difference among individuals, and national identity tends to be more pronounced than ethnic identification. Intra- as well as inter-ethnic relationships are influenced by the use of teasing based on cousinage. The focus lays on relationships, ethnicities that remain among each other and are more secluded from the diaspora, the construction of ethnic identities based on cousinage, and the de-escalation of conflicts due to the presence of cousinage in everyday interactions. In the second topic, the focus laid less on cousinage, and more on the conscious efforts of the diaspora to help its members' integration into German society.

Table 1.

Number	Initials	Gender	Ethnicity	In Germany since	City and Region of origin
1.	S.F.	Female	Serer	2006	Thiès, Thiès
2.	A.S.F.	Male	Serer	1992	Bambey, Diourbel
3.	K.N.	Male	Wolof	1987	Bambey, Diourbel
4.	M.N.	Male	Wolof	1984	Dakar, Cape-Vert
5.	M.D.	Male	Wolof	1993	Pikine, Dakar
6.	P.M.G.	Male	Lébou	2013	Dakar, Dakar
7.	N.S.F.	Female	Serer	2015	Guinea; grew up in Bambey, Diourbel
8.	M.T.	Female	Haal-Puular	1995	Matam, Matam
9.	B.B.	Female	Toukouleur	1997	Dakar, Dakar
10.	K.N.	Female	Lébou	1989	Dakar, Dakar
11.	T.C.	Male	Wolof	1976	Dakar, Parents from the South
12.	A.D.	Male	Toukouleur	1993	Dakar, Dakar
13.	O.K.	Male	Puular	1999	Fouta-Toro, Podor, Saint-Louis
14.	I.L.	Male	Haal-Puular	2003	Saint-Louis, Saint-Louis
15.	C.D.	Male	Wolof	2001	Dakar, Dakar
16.	S.D.	Male	Wolof	1985	Diourbel, Diourbel

17.	O.T.	Female	Djola	1995; permanently since 2005	Ziguinchor, Casamance
18.	B.T.	Male	Toukouleur	2001	Dakar, Dakar
19.	M.G.	Male	Wolof	1988	M'Backé, Diourbel
20.	K.D.	Female	Wolof	1989	Saint-Louis, Saint-Louis
21.	A.D.	Female	Serer	2013	Bambey, Diourbel
22.	R.D.	Female	Djola	2018	Pikine, Dakar
23.	C.F.	Male	Wolof	2013	Mekhe, Thiès
24.	A.D.	Female	Wolof	2002	Casamance
25.	A.S.	Male	Wolof	1980	Dakar, Dakar
26.	A.A.M.	Male	Wolof	1977	Cape Verde, Family from Saloum
27.	A.G.	Male	Wolof	2017	Kaolack, Kaolack
28.	A.N.	Male	Serer	2001	Sine Saloum

5. Background

5.1 Ethnicity in Senegal

Senegal is home to multiple ethnicities, the main ones being Wolof, Pulaar or Peulh, Serer, Mandinka, Djola, and Soninke (CIA country Report, 2019). It is noteworthy however, that both the ethnic groups of the Wolof and the Pulaar, include multiple smaller ethnic groups, such as Lébou and Haal-Pulaar respectively. Historically, the ethnicities were centered around specific geographic territories, with the Wolof inhabiting the region of Cape Verde, and the capital city of Dakar, the Serer living in the central region of Senegal, and the Djola residing mainly in the Southern region of Casamance. The ethnic groups of Pulaars are historically known as nomads, but many of them traditionally live in the North of Senegal, towards Mauritania.

The region of the Casamance has long been experiencing ethnically and politically motivated tensions. Beginning in the 1980s, 20 years after the independence of Senegal, the *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance* (MFDC) has pursued a violent form of resistance

against the Senegalese state, leading to instances of violence over the years (Fall, 2010, p. 4). The population of the Casamance is predominantly Djola, and in contrast to the rest of the country, the region is ethnically relatively homogenous (Fall, 2010, p. 8). However, the conflict in the Casamance is described as being of regional rather than ethnic nature, mainly due to a geographical as well as historical disconnect between the region and the rest of the country (Osei, 2012, p. 194).

Despite these tensions and the recurring conflict, ethnicities are generally not as politically instrumentalized as one might expect. Voter identification in Senegal is not decided by ethnic affiliation, and while the region experiences violent periods, voting behavior in the Casamance region does not differ far from the other parts of Senegal (Osei, 2012, p. 194). Senegalese voter behavior is more divided along rural-urban lines than any other cleavages (Osei, 2012). Rather, there are two mechanisms in Senegal that are taking on more important roles than ethnic identification when it comes to voter behavior.

Firstly, religious authorities have a big influence on the voting of their followers, who are likely to support their *marabout's* or religious leader's, preferred political party and candidate. Religion, and more specifically Sufi-Islam has what Osei (2012) calls an "integrative and balancing effect" (p. 193).

Secondly, what is called *Wolofisation* has been occurring in Senegal. A term coined by Cruise O'Brien (1998), *Wolofisation* is described as the phenomenon that Wolof, while not being the official language, has become known as the language of "commerce" (Osei, 2012, p. 193). While French is the official language of Senegal's political elite, urban Wolof has expanded beyond ethnic lines, slowly becoming the unofficial lingua franca. This development is said to be tied to migration as well as urbanization (Cruise O'Brien, 1998, p. 30). This *Wolofisation* is taking place "in the shadows", which is one explanation that there is no open contestation of this phenomenon. Would there be an open assertion of Wolof as the main language, it could be expected that other ethnicities would oppose this practice. The domination of one language can be seen as a stabilizing factor in the country, and its diaspora since it makes communication easier.

5.2 Migration from Senegal

With large Lebanese and French populations, as well as influxes of people from all over Africa, Senegal has long been a hub for migration in West Africa. Simultaneously it is also a stop on the way to Europe for a lot of migrants from different African countries. With 4% of

the population being registered to live in other countries, the Senegalese diaspora has the power to take on political as well as economic responsibilities for their home country (Uzelac, 2018, p. 3). This influence becomes especially pronounced when looking at economic facts. In total, the diaspora is responsible for around 14% of the country's GDP through remittances (Uzelac, 2018, p. 3).

Legal migration between Senegal and Europe and the US for educational as well as work purposes has been going on for many decades. However, in recent years, there has been a rise in clandestine migration. Due to high youth unemployment rates, people not only decide to leave their country in order to study at a university, but many also choose to enter Europe illegally, an issue, that the Senegalese government has until now failed to fully combat. While there are many initiatives and even media efforts to stop illegal migration, most of it has been unsuccessful. This frequent migration leads to the Senegalese diaspora being prominent in many states across the world, while being inherently diverse, in motivations to leave and personal pathways.

Due to illegal migration, exact numbers of Senegalese nationals living in Germany are difficult to raise. The Senegalese diaspora in Germany is mainly organized in religious and cultural organizations, which also overlap in members. The religious organizations or Dahiras are modeled after the ones in Senegal, and operate similarly, being divided between Mourids and Tijannies, the two main Islamic orientations in the country. These are also the only organizations that are organized on a national level in Germany (Faye, 2007, p. 6). According to Faye (2007), the Senegalese diaspora is in constant contact to family member in Senegal and has a high degree of social engagement in their country of origin. Furthermore, the diaspora organizations, religious and cultural, offer educational programs for their members, that "show a certain degree of integration and prove their awareness of being part of German society" (Faye, 2007, p. 8).

6. Analysis- Cousinage and Diaspora Activity

6.1 The use of Joking Relationships abroad

Among the interviewees, there was a consensus about the desire to be in contact with co-nationals, and to speak one's mother tongue (22, 3, 8, 9). The theme of nostalgia and the need for contact in the interviews was mentioned, independent of how long the respondents have been residing in Germany. Nostalgia was also what led a group of Senegalese men to establish the *Association des Sénégalais de Munich*, the association of Senegalese in Munich.

This group was and still is ethnically diverse, and as one interviewee explained, he was one of the founding members**,** because the other person, his cousin, or *kaal* "knew that he needed the support of his king, because he knew slaves are not effective without their king" (12). This is already a prominent example of cousinage, as he describes his close friend as his slave.

Joking relationships have been described in the interviews as "the highest form of friendship" (28) and simultaneously as "a strategy to avoid conflicts" (9, 1, 7). Cousinage uses the stereotypes between ethnicities to deescalate situations. These stereotypes come in part from what used to be the typical occupation for the respective ethnicity.

While the role as a mediator of ethnic interactions is mostly applied in the Senegalese setting, cousinage is a way of forming bonds and long-lasting friendships when entering the diaspora. "You know, I have met 2, and through these (cousinage) relationships, it felt like we had known each other for a long time when we first met. And we did not know each other in Senegal", explains 12. Cousinage is an integral part of Senegalese life and culture, as many people have grown up with these forms of mocking and joking.

6.1.1 Cousinage and Friendships in the Diaspora

Based on the opinions of certain members of the diaspora, the special meaning of cousinage becomes clear. While being a Senegalese phenomenon, cousinage holds importance for the diaspora, and is pronounced in their daily lives. Where one might expect that traditions such as this one loose importance, most interviewees disagree (10, 14, 16, 26, 27). Cousinage is integral for Senegal, a highly diverse state, with many religious and political views, but "It is something going beyond our religious ideals. Cousinage was there before Islam and Christianity even arrived in Senegal." (26.). Their use in the diaspora community varies over age, occupation, and the amount of time the individual has spent in Germany. Cousinage is used to make people feel more comfortable and create meaningful friendships with co-nationals in a foreign country. Many interviewees stated that there is a need for contact with other Senegalese people, contact that can be facilitated and established through joking relationships (12, 3, 17). This contact is, as stated previously, a large aspect of diaspora identification and the behavior of diasporas in general. It is also perpetuated by the fact that due to the political climate in Senegal, it is relatively easy for Senegalese nationals to visit the country, as well as stay in contact with family and friends.

While there are limited resources in the diaspora, the arrival of asylum seekers, often via Libya and Southern European countries, heavily influences the Senegalese diaspora: "The

nostalgia to hear your own language, it's gone now, because you can hear Wolof, and see Senegalese people everywhere." (2). Another interviewee points out that, "there are definitely changes in the diaspora, in every city in Germany. New people are arriving, and they are different from the others. There is a difference between those coming from Africa directly, and those making stops along the way, living in Italy for a period of time for example." (19). While it has been pointed out that there is a cultural proximity between Senegal and Southern European states, there are of course still differences. However, since the diaspora in Italy for example is significantly bigger than that in Germany, Senegalese culture there is more pronounced.

The younger generation, depending on where they are from in Senegal, highlights aspects of Senegalese identity and traditions, including cousinage, by actively using it, also with older and very much respected members (27, 6, 2, 26). "There have been more young people recently, because they have more opportunities now, you can do apprenticeships in Germany that you can't find in Senegal. And a lot of them are from rural areas, and they change the diaspora. Because they remind us of the traditions they are still tied to. And they enter the room and start joking with us, that is really great, because then we know it will be used in the future." (19). This points out variation not only between generations, but also between the area of origin. It becomes clear that because of the rural origin of many migrants, cousinage has a continuing relevance in the diaspora.

There is also, evidently, an interplay between the use of cousinage and the experiences that immigrants make when entering another country. Helping people cope with their traumatic experiences goes far beyond the abilities of the diaspora but having joking relationships helps: "When we arrived, we had difficulties, but now it's an entirely different thing. They have to their own demons, and cope with their experiences. Cousinage is freeing, because you can forget your problems and laugh about yourself for a bit" (17). Joking relationships in the diaspora can take on the form of breaking down the barriers between long-time residents and newcomers to an extent that they would not be broken down otherwise (11)**.**

6.1.2 Inter-ethnic Relationships in the Diaspora

Since Senegal is not a state that experiences a high degree of violent ethnic tensions, the conflict resolution aspect of joking relationships is not the focal point for many members of the diaspora. Almost all interviewees acknowledged that historically joking relationships were used to avoid conflict, and the main focus lay on the positive effect cousinage has on both intra- and interethnic relationships.

Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that there are ethnicities in the diaspora that remain more reclusive, focusing on their ethnic rather than their national identity: “the relationships are used regardless, but sometimes there are ethnicities and they do not want to let others in. The Toukouleur or Soninke, they don’t want anyone in their groups, I think it’s racism. But the Wolof, they allow anyone to join, because most of us speak the language. It is something that’s historical, determined by who used to live where, and then the farmers get mad at those from the city. The Pulaar for example, they also exist in other states in Africa, they’re nomads. So, they don’t always feel Senegalese. But that depends on the individual.” (11). While an extensive explanation for the reclusiveness of one or multiple ethnicities is beyond the scope of this paper, many Pulaar and Toukouleur interviewees find the reasons for this behavior in individual rather than collective sentiments: “Even if people have conflicts, they are on an individual level. But cousinage stays, if you’re Peulh or Serere or Toukouleur, it’s going to stay. You see the last name, or you hear the ethnicity, and the fun begins.” (14).

In general, interethnic relationships in the diaspora are relatively peaceful, with many interviewees stating that potential conflicts are quickly solved through the application of cousinage and stereotypes: “It’s a positive thing. We utilize them wherever we are, and if we see a fight, we ask them about their names and then we say ‘What are you doing? Don’t you know he’s a Peulh?’, for example. And then we remind them that they are cousins, and we say: ‘Oh yes, that’s typical for Serers and Peulhs, no wonder you were fighting’” (2). When meeting someone of another ethnicity, one can then use the supposed knowledge about this group, in saying things such as “Oh you Serers are always eating”.

Similarly, jokes can be made among “cousins” and the other’s assumed low intelligence. In this case, cousinage is on a last-name-basis. One interviewee illustrates this with a joke concerning him and individuals called N’Diaye,**:** “You know, a man passed a tree, where another man was sitting in, sawing on the branch he was sitting on. And the man walking asks him ‘How are you Mister N’Diaye?’ And the man in the tree asks: ‘How did you know I my last name?’ And he says ‘Well, only a N’Diaye could be so stupid to saw on the tree he was sitting in’” (16).

While people are making fun of each other, they always do so with respect. It is never about actually insulting and belittling someone and there is a deep connection between people and their make-believe cousins: “My grandma used to tell me I was not allowed to fight with the Peulhs, because we are cousins. It is a special bond, and we cannot break that.” (7). If conflicts flare up in the diaspora or in Senegal, people always remind the fighting individuals

of this relationship. It needs to be considered however, that there is a certain dependence among members of the diaspora. Since they are in a different country, which is culturally and geographically very far from their home country, being together as a community is necessary for many. The desire of having contact to co-nationals might outweigh the desire of being with co-ethnics, since it is more important to at least hear the national language Wolof, than to hear an ethnicity-specific language: “We are a minority, and that can also be one of the reasons we need to stay peaceful” (8, 25). It seems as if ethnicities can be regarded as a tool in the sphere of cousinage, and cousinage is used to connect individuals with each other.

Another aspect is that cousinage seems to be moving from ethnicities and toward last names, which can be linked to the fact that there is an abundance of inter-ethnic marriages in Senegal: “When I was still in Senegal, our neighbors were Serers, and we are all Peulhs. And the woman would always say: ‘Peulhs are always mocking Serers, pretending like we do everything wrong, but they all end up marrying our women. He's marrying a Diouf, and the other one married a Faye, all they do is say nonsense, these Peulhs.’ And that is how it is in Senegal, you see there’s everyone living together Serer and Bambara and Adjago, and even the *Portuguesos,* from Cape Verde. We’re all living together, and these relationships are facilitating our interactions, it’s a blessing that we have them.” (13). Last names usually were indicative of an individual’s ethnicity, a fact that cannot be relied on anymore, since “last names do not have any borders” (2), meaning that last names transcend ethnic lines. This has led to a focus on last names when mocking people and moves further away from the idea of ethnicities and their supposed importance.

Cousinage plays an important role in the Senegalese diaspora in Germany, being foundational for multipole deep friendships and the overall feeling of community and belonging. While there are changes, and its use fluctuates, most interviewees agreed on the presence of this phenomenon and its continuous use in the community. Including many different ethnicities, the Senegalese diaspora does not focus on ethnicities relative to a sentiment of national identity. What all interviewees see as a fact is that national identity is more prevalent than individual ethnic identities within the diaspora, and ethnic identities are mainly used for cousinage. “We’re Senegalese and after that we see about anything else, like ethnicity or religion” (11).

6.2 Diaspora Activities and Integration into the German State and Society

When choosing to leave one’s country, one takes on parts of one’s culture and continues to utilize them in daily life. Cousinage is used to establish contact with co-nationals, and to

facilitate one's way into an already established community. it represents a kind of familiarity that many migrants miss when coming to a foreign country. As nearly all interviewees stated, being an active part of the diaspora gives them a good feeling to be in contact with other Senegalese, speaking their own languages, while at the same time offering support and being supported (2, 3, 9).

Members of the Senegalese diaspora have different reasons for having migrated to Germany. While many of the interviewees entered Germany in the 1990s, some did so in pursuit of better job opportunities while others came to Europe on academic scholarships and continued to make their residence permanent after completing their studies. Many of those that came earlier than the 1990s, have since left the country, 12: "The people that were here before us, they had different activities, so most of them have left since, or they were, well the police, just write '…'". Here, the interviewee refers to illegal migration and people being sent back to Senegal, a phenomenon that has decreased, but is still a painful memory for some.

One interviewee explained the different situation of people arriving as asylum seekers, as they often cannot get residence permits based on economic reasons: "It is freeing to be laughing about something when you arrive here. You have so much going on in your mind, and that is when the older people come in to connect with them and include them." (17). Another active member of the diaspora, who has resided in Germany since 2013, and is the leader of one of the religious organizations in Germany states "It helps people, we're trying to show that we're all from the same family. We all belong together, and it helps the young ones to open up and talk about their problems with us." (6).

The diaspora community is one of the main actors in the integration of Senegalese newcomers, helping them with a general orientation in Germany, and finding job opportunities for them: "We cannot really help them with finding an apartment, but we help them to get a sense of orientation, go to the doctor with them, or help them with bureaucracy. We can translate letters for them, or if someone dies, we will collect money to get them back home" (2). Another member of the diaspora explains: "At one point, the people know you, they know that you help others, you know 5, he tries to give jobs to Senegalese in the kitchen, so they have something to do and don't get bad ideas" (4).

In addition to the expansion of various support systems inherent to the Senegalese diaspora, the growth of the Senegalese population in Germany has other implications. Generally, most interviewees said that they are trying to get most if not all of the Senegalese people they know to participate in the diaspora organizations, in order to "keep them on the right path" (2, 6,

12). The main development in the diaspora, that is visible to Senegalese people living in Germany is a change in attitudes and mentalities. Whereas early on there were fewer Senegalese people in Germany who connected on the basis of nationality, now there is an abundance of co-nationals, which makes people focus on the compatibility of individuals and their personalities: “The more people arrive in Germany and here in particular, the more you look at what you have in common. We all have different mentalities, and reasons we came to Germany, and these become more important.” (15).

As mentioned before, there are states e.g.: Italy or France where parallel societies are established by the Senegalese diaspora, and where Senegalese customs and traditions are more pronounced and practiced. This includes not speaking the language or being only surrounded by Senegalese people: “it depends on how many Senegalese people are in the country. Some people, when they arrive here and they come from Italy, they bring their own customs, which might be weird in the German context. There are *tanganas*[2] in Italy, imagine we had them here, that would not fit. And there are people that come via Italy, and they don’t speak Italian, because they live in like Senegalese ghettos. And we don’t have that in Germany. If you cannot speak the language, that makes life impossible here.” (18).

Playing into the topic of acculturation, a focus on Europe and a Western lifestyle can function and exist along with customs that are being continued in the diaspora. A continued orientation toward the West and especially France, leads to developments away from traditions such as this one as described by a longstanding member of the diaspora: “Cousinage might lose importance. Because when people come here, they sometimes think that they’re no longer Senegalese, but we need to stay together and show that we’re Senegalese. Now, many people focus on Europe rather than Senegal, it seems like they have a different spirit now. We have to show our *Sénégalité* and show that we’re proud!” (6). The orientation toward Europe can be seen as both beneficial and harmful for the integration into the host society. One the one hand, focusing on Europe and the host country’s culture can be beneficial. On the other hand, it could take away from migrants’ identity. The question remains if it is the only way to integrate into the host society. As 26 says: “there’s a conflict for the diaspora, between Western individualism and our values. But we can keep it through our fashion, our idioms, and language, they can help”.

[2] Small traditional Senegalese restaurants

While integration and support for it is an important part of diaspora activities, 28 states that: “Being in a diaspora, and having traditions like cousinage, and support systems among us are both, a kind of integration, while also being a shield against assimilation. Because assimilation, that is not the end goal, it is integration that we want them to achieve.” While it might be difficult to transfer cousinage completely into a German or otherwise foreign setting, integration is, as previously stated, a bi-directional process, and acculturation, facilitated by all actors, would be the end goal.

The aspect of the use of cousinage changing goes hand in hand with a need to adapt this tradition in light of other developments in the diaspora and the topic of integration. A big part of this is the integration of the second generation of the diaspora members. Children with either one or two Senegalese parents experience cousinage as well as Senegalese culture in general very differently: “For the Senegalese people that grew up here it is completely different. They’re basically German, even the ones with two Senegalese parents. It’s not the same, but then there are kids who grow up in Germany like they were in Senegal, so it depends on the parents. But most are basically German, they go to school here, they speak German at home, it’s not normal for them, cousinage” (11).

Growing up with two different cultures, some did not experience these relationships. For other children however, cousinage was adapted, so they could still experience this tradition. One of these instances of acculturation was explained during an interview: “The children that we have, many of them don’t know cousinage. It also depends on the parents, but then they will learn the definition of a slave, and they will be so confused, when they hear their uncle call their father a slave. That’s why I always told you, you were let go as a slave, and free. You can only understand cousinage if you have grown up in Senegal” (12).

This illustrates that the Senegalese diaspora has adapted and changed their custom of joking relationships during the time they have been living in Germany. Still, 28, working as a social worker in the field of integration, states that having a strong diaspora community is important: “It’s always about giving and taking, and we as Senegalese we bring cousinage. You cannot expect people to leave their beliefs and customs behind. That’s what I always tell them, don’t leave your customs behind. That’s not the idea behind good integration.”

While integration and its support is an important part of diaspora activities, 28 states that: “Being in a diaspora, and having traditions like cousinage, and support systems among us are both, a kind of integration, while also being a shield against assimilation.” While it might be difficult to transfer cousinage completely into a German setting, integration is, as previously

stated, a bi-directional process, and acculturation would be the end goal. The continued support of Senegalese people among the diaspora highlights its efforts to facilitate integration and navigate the German state.

7. Conclusions

During the interviews cousinage has been confirmed as an important aspect of Senegalese life abroad. In the diaspora it is known for building the foundation for many long-lasting friendships and bringing a good and relaxed atmosphere between different generations. The conflict resolution aspect, which has been the focus of many research endeavors over the years, is known in the diaspora, and cousinage is referred back to in the rare occasion in which tensions arise. Different developments like a general orientation towards the West by new coming Senegalese immigrants influence the use of cousinage, however the consensus among the interviewees was that it is likely a phenomenon that will remain present in everyday life of the diaspora.

The Senegalese diaspora takes on important roles when it comes to the integration of its members in the German state as well as supporting those in need. The actions taken by the diaspora go hand in hand with the concept of acculturation, which can be seen in the adaptation and changes in cousinage consciously made by the members when interacting with second generation diaspora members. The combination of Senegalese and German customs allows second generation diaspora members to experience both customs. At the same time, it does not inhibit these members from integrating into the German state. Changes in the diaspora, such as the expansion of membership lead to a diversification of the community.

This research, while including a variety of interviewees, is rather limited in its findings. It mainly includes known members of the diaspora in Germany and would have benefitted from a more diverse and bigger sample. It would be beneficial to include Senegalese that were harder to reach and belong to the more secluded ethnicities and have more pronounced ethnic identities. While they were mentioned during the interviews, many stated that they themselves were no in contact with these individuals, and choosing the sampling method of snowball sampling, the already established contact would have been needed.

Further research would be needed to include these individuals. Furthermore, more extensive research would be needed in order to better generalize the findings. Lastly, a comparison between the use and importance of cousinage in Senegal and in the diaspora in Germany would offer interesting insights about theories of diasporas, such as homeland idealization as

well as the collective memory. A comparison would yield interesting results, since it could further illustrate the developments in the German diaspora in relation to changes in Senegal.

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9. Appendix A.- Interview Questions (translated from German and French)

1. What is your surname?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. What region and city in Senegal are you from?
4. Since when have you lived in Germany?
5. Did you have contacts to the Senegalese diaspora before coming to Germany?
6. Who helped you find employment and housing in Germany, and do you think the diaspora can help with that?
7. Are you an active part of diaspora organizations- religious and cultural?
8. Can you explain what cousinage is for you?
9. Can joking relationships help people to integrate into the diaspora?
10. Which ethnicities are your joking partners?
11. Do you have concrete examples for cousinage?
12. Is cousinage relevant in Senegal and the diaspora?
13. Do you think developments like an increased migration from Senegal influence the diaspora and the use of cousinage in the community?
14. Are these relationships a good mechanism to establish a community and to bridge ethnic differences in the diaspora? Can cousinage prevent ethnic tensions in the diaspora?
15. Is the diaspora relying on an ethnic sense of community or is being Senegalese the main element binding people together?