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# Gender, Networking, and Transnationalism: a Case Study from Dakar, Senegal

Sarah Akin  
*Portland State University*

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RUNNING HEAD: Gender, development, and NGOs

Gender, Networking and Transnationalism: A Case Study from Dakar, Senegal

Sarah Akin

Mentor: Dr. Priya Kapoor

Department of Global and International Studies

Portland State University

### **Abstract**

Nongovernmental organizations have become important actors and contributors to global governance as states have been superseded as the primary representatives of constituents. Many of the current studies on NGOs tend to focus on their abilities as institutions without actually studying the processes that occur in the work. The current trend in the literature is moving beyond a generalization of NGO work that provides binary accounts of success and failure, good and bad toward ethnographic approaches that study the processes of NGOs in time and space. It is argued that development NGOs, particularly those that work on issues of gender and women's rights, are part of what Keck and Sikkink call "transnational advocacy networks" where a set of values and meaning are shared among various actors working on a particular issue. However, these networks are clearly defined and do not include sporadic, non-organized actors working with shared values within and beyond borders. Through a participant observation and data collected through semi-structured interviews, I analyze how a local women's organization in Senegal works with globally and transnationally defined values to engage in gender activism and community-based work. I argue that Réseau Siggil Jigéen relies on diverse strategies and networks within and beyond its borders to engage in a process of collaborative communication, or rather translation, of constructs of gender and women's rights into diverse local contexts to enhance the position of women's socially, legally, and economically. As a result, these organizations work alongside a variety of actors committed to shared values of gender equality and women's rights, which I argue are indicative of discursive transnational networks.

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### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Research Questions**

How do local or grassroots NGOs that work on gender-related issues communicate when they interface with transnationally or globally shared values?

And how do NGOs facilitate community-based work as a result of globally and transnationally shared values?

### **Introduction**

Nongovernmental organizations, NGOs, have become important actors and contributors to global and national governance as states have been superseded as the primary representatives of constituents. The neoliberal era corresponds with a rise in the NGO sector as neoliberal policies require a rapid decline in public spending on social services and argue that “private”, nongovernmental actors are more cost-effective and efficient (Fisher, 1997; Nordtveit, 2008; Bernal & Grewal, 2014). NGOs seek to fill in gaps left by such policies or to compete for state contracts to do so (Fisher, 1997; Nordtveit, 2008; Bernal & Grewal, 2014). A clear relationship exists between NGOs and neoliberalism where the latter creates both the conditions of their existence and frames the issues which they engage in. Many studies on NGOs tended to focus on their abilities as institutions without actually studying the processes that occur in the work. The current trend in the literature is moving beyond a generalization of NGO work that provides binary accounts of success and failure, good and bad, relying on case studies and ethnographies to reveal precisely the processes of NGO work that occur in time and space.

The NGO form defines itself in negation to the state by being “nongovernmental” and in doing so, an “umbrella term” is created for a set of heterogeneous actors that work with or against one another (Bernal & Grewal 2014). Beyond this umbrella term, these organizations exist under in many different forms whether they are regionally-based, community-based,

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women's organizations, grassroots, and civil society (Michael, 2005; Holmén, 2005, Bernal & Grewal, 2014). NGOs have become prominent, indispensable actors in the field of international development where they engage in a multitude of activities from service provision to advocacy, encompassing many different fields of intervention in the name of development, or rather under the discourse of development in many cases.

West-Africa is a hub for NGO presence and activity, with a strong presence of both Northern-based and local organizations that intervene in a multitude of sectors (Michael, 2005). Réseau Siggil Jigeen (RSJ), in Dakar, Senegal is the head and solidifying body of a network of women's organizations. Their mission is to improve and reinforce the position of Senegalese women with a vision of establishing in both Senegalese and African societies relationships of gender equality with the intention of sustainable development. Their members intervene in various different domains, including family planning, women's rights, youth leadership, research, micro-finance, literacy, the fight against poverty, and training. I interned at this organization and conducted research through qualitative interviews with the the staff of RSJ and members of a collective in one of their partner organizations, a community-based organization and collective called L'Association des Femmes de la Medina (AFEME). Through a literature review, participant observation, and a data analysis of personal interviews with NGO staff, I have taken an ethnographic approach to a case study. This study explores themes of advocacy, participation, funding, and networking to highlight their interwoven role in Senegalese gender activism carried out by a local organization. I argue that Réseau Siggil Jigeen relies on diverse strategies and networks within and beyond its borders to engage in a process of collaborative

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communication, or rather translation, of constructs of gender and women's rights into diverse local contexts to enhance the position of women's socially, legally, and economically.

## **Literature Review**

### *Non-governmental organizations as diverse actors of governance*

In many states that underwent structural adjustment policies, particularly African states, NGOs have become increasingly important in activities of governance, intervening in sectors that are generally considered the responsibility of the state, such as health and education. In their book, *Theorizing NGOs*, Victoria Bernal and Inderpal Grewal highlight the fact that NGOs seek to differentiate themselves from the state in their very name, but that this complicates an understanding of the relationship between NGOs and states where it is states, whether through collaboration with NGOs, failure, privatization, or retreat creates the spaces where NGOs function and are legitimized (2014). In addition, they also note that it must be recognized that NGOs, often through funding or collaboration, work alongside other states foreign to the nation they are working in. These actors are dependent on or linked to the concept of the state. It has also been argued that the strong presence of NGOs is indicative of a weak state or declining state power, but some scholars contest that it means a transformation of the state, where the organizations work alongside states, not in opposition to them (Ole & Sending, 2006). Others argue that is a renegotiation of the role of the state beyond a conception where the state alone is charged with providing services and governance (Titeca, DeHerdt, 2011).

As funded actors from both private and public sources, the subject of donor funding has come under great concern in studies on NGOs, where funding becomes linked to donor

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preferences for the approaches and outcomes of NGOs, dictating the work of the organization and, in some cases, alienating it from its beneficiaries (Tvedt, 2002; Michael, 2005). However, it has been recognized that these organizations, particularly smaller or local organizations, are essential to the “ethical and political legitimacy” as well as “image” of funders and as a result, they have in the past had the opportunity to negotiate and wield power in this system to represent their own interests over those of funders (Tvedt, 2002; Michael, 2005).

NGOs are considered by some scholars as actors in a “*transnational advocacy network*” defined as “actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). NGOs play many different roles as they engage with and work alongside a variety of actors ranging from states, international donors, intergovernmental organizations, local communities, and other organizations working on the same issues, using different communication strategies and discourses to carry out their work and achieve their goals (Holzcheiter, 2005; Ole & Sending, 2006; Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Gal, Kowalski, Moore, 2015). Boundaries become fluid as NGOs occupy many roles and communication methods simultaneously. Bernal and Grewal point out that “the everyday politics of NGOs may be simultaneously local, national, and transnational” (2014, p.13). However, these networks are considered formal, defined and organized. Working on the same issue alone does not constitute a network.

Some scholars point out that NGOs, particularly those involved in formal networks, often have the ability to communicate the needs, desires, and interests of the communities they serve in forums that transcend the local boundaries they work in. It has been argued that “international and domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play a central role in most advocacy



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networks, usually initiating actions, pressuring more powerful actors to take positions. NGOs introduce new ideas, provide information, and lobby for changes” (Keck & Sikkink, 2002). In this sense, they become intermediaries between the communities they work with at a grassroots level and national or international governing forces. NGOs must rely on nonmaterial sources of power to engage in this dialogue where their ability to negotiate, set agendas, and open up new forums of discussion for governance rely on “knowledge/information/expertise, networks/contacts, moral authority and normative credibility, authenticity, altruism, or representation of civil society voices” (Holzcheiter, 2005 p.). This involvement, extending beyond the local sphere in which they work, becomes an opportunity for the interests of beneficiaries to be made visible and potentially represented in policy (Fisher, 1997; Holzcheiter, 2005). In this sense, NGOs become political actors where it is not the success or failures of their work that is of significance, but their engagement in existing politics at all levels, local and global, and the consequences of that intervention (DeMars, 2005). These organizations are also viewed as intermediaries between the state and the local level or international discourse and local practices where NGOs engage in a process of translation of development concepts stemming from international development discourse and open up spaces for a re-negotiation of the meaning of those concepts (Fisher 1997; Wendoh & Wallace 2005; Sieveking, 2007; Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Mannell, 2014; Gal et al., 2015). This strategy becomes particularly helpful in issues pertaining to gender, women’s rights, and reproductive health.

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By the 1970’s development efforts acknowledged the role of women in development and adopted the framework of Women in Development, WID, that later shifted toward a theory of

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Gender and Development, GAD (Nordveit, 2005; Samarasinghe, 2013; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). The shift from WID and GAD highlighted the social relations of gender where women exist in relation to men rather than separate from them (Nordveit, 2005; Samarasinghe, 2013; Cornwall & Rivas 2015; Ghere, 2015). The concept of gender was integrated into development discourse by a series of conferences starting in 1975, also known as the Women's Decade and had been institutionalized at an international level by the 1995 Beijing Conference (Nordveit, 2005; Samarasinghe, 2013; Ghere, 2015; Jasor, 2015). This correlates with the shift in the development discourse that extends beyond approaches that are focused solely on economic growth to those that integrate human development. The Women's Decade and UN Conferences on Women were the first transnational feminist forms of activism, with women from all over the globe coming together to share, discuss, and project feminist struggles into international forums to highlight gender disparity (Mohanty, 2003). However, during these conferences, there was tension between feminists from the Global North and South on conceptions of gender, traditional gendered practices, and approaches to gender-related activities (Sow, 1989; Nordveit, 2005; Bernal & Grewal, 2014). Disparate power relations in these forums emerged with feminists from the Global North often regarding the cultural and traditional practices of women in the Global South, particularly those from African countries, with disdain and refused to recognize the global economic order as a source of oppression and marginalization (Sow, 1989).

NGOs gained their momentum in the UN conferences, particularly the Beijing conference, where they were explicitly included in the discussion and activities alongside states (Bernal & Grewal, 2014). Feminist activism during this period shifted from the space of social movements into NGO, pushing states and international organizations to recognize women and

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gender equality in relation to development initiatives (Costa, 2014; Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Norveidt, 2005). The inclusion of feminist NGOs, and even women for that matter, in these conferences signified hope that the voices present would be heard and that through grassroots organizations the steps necessary to formulate positive change for women would be achieved (Bernal & Grewal 2014). Women's rights as human rights were brought to the forefront of the Beijing conference and a series of conventions protecting the rights of women have been signed and ratified by many African states in the post-conference era (Sow, 2003; Wendoh & Wallace, 2005).

However, these efforts have been criticized by some for highlighting what women can do for development in terms of economic growth rather than how development can serve women (Nordveit, 2005). Feminist struggles for many women in the Global South extend beyond the patriarchy, as they face marginalization by a neoliberal economic order as well (Mohanty, 2003; Nordveit, 2005). Many studies have found that neoliberal structural adjustment programs, SAPs, have transformed traditional family income generation as more spaces for women to generate income opened up as a necessity and that changes in service delivery have negatively affected women (Nordveit, 2005). Many organizations are now gender-based or incorporate gender-related approaches in their activities due to either donor requirement, new state agendas (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005), or a genuine devotion to the improvement of the position of women. NGOs thus become "simultaneously neoliberal entities and sites of struggle for feminists" (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p.22).

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### *Gender, participation and empowerment: Buzzwords in development discourse*

The UN conferences on women led to a gender mainstreaming trend as gender becomes an indispensable, integral element to all conceptions of and interventions in development. Gender is now a buzzword and a requirement in NGO projects and in the development discourse. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) note that despite the fact that the integration of gender into international forums has been seen as a gain for women, the institutionalized understanding of gender that emerged as a result of the UN conferences has faced much criticism as it paints a binary of both gender and the power relations embedded within the social relations between men and women where women are predominantly understood as victims in the face of male violence. These scholars also point out that as a result, other gendered and non-gendered relations of power at micro and macro levels are neglected and remain unquestioned while gender, a subjective concept that varies in time and space, becomes objectified and depoliticized in its institutionalized recognition. Gender and development theory put in practice becomes contradictory as it no longer questions power relations, but frames them (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015) and its overall goal of empowerment is lost.

Empowerment, another buzzword in the development discourse, has direct links to gender where empowerment is understood as a continual process of transformative change of power relations at micro and macro levels (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). However, this too has been subject to measures of technicality represented by literacy rates, school enrolment, and faulty images that attempt to signify an end and threaten the process (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Calvès, 2009). Rather, empowerment should be understood as a well-rounded approach to transforming social power relations at various levels, both local and global, while achieving measurable

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outcomes that signify success. Participation in development projects is often seen as a means through which empowerment can occur because it asserts a means of ownership at a local level, ensures sustainable effects, and has the opportunity to entail democratic social change (White,1996).

The concept of participation has been criticized because it doesn't necessarily entail a sharing of power and that its integration into development discourse transforms its political meaning and focus of democracy to an issue of technicality as it is something that is both required and recorded (White 1996). Participation must be understood as a process rather than a tool of technicality where it is who participates and the level of that participation that is of concern (White, 1996; Ebrahim,2003; O'Reilley, 2014) Neoliberalism is directly linked to NGOs' practice of participation where it is legitimized as a means of project efficiency and a requirement by donors (O'Reilly 2014). The de-politicization of participation when it becomes a technical approach is problematic because it masks the power relations that are embedded within participation as a concept employed by various actors for a multitude of objectives be they democratic or neoliberal (White,1996). Participation can remain top-down in many cases or in cases where it is bottom-up, systems of social exclusion at a local level are neglected and reinforced (O'Reilley, 2014; White, 1996). In addition, it can often mask the various interests of organizations or donors that are embedded within projects by creating a seemingly participatory project.

As a result of a gender-mainstreaming trend in development, the concept of participation in development projects has become heavily gendered to highlight the importance of women (O'Reilley, 2014) and has been adopted externally by many states, donors, and NGOs (Wendoh

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& Wallace, 2005). Gendered approaches facilitated by both local and international NGOs have been criticized for imposing ideas of gender that are not created by and for the communities in which they are working and that undermine cultural constructs of gender in those communities (Wendoh & Wallace 2005). Many scholars point out that the translation and integration of gender under its dominant understanding and its requirement in development projects has been a challenge because it is often culturally irrelevant, insufficient, nonexistent or static (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005; Samarasinghe, 2013; Gal, Kowalski, Moore, 2015). These concepts must be renegotiated through translation (Wendoh & Wallace, 2005; Samarasinghe, 2013; Gal et al., 2015) where translation is not seen as creating semantic equivalents, but a transformative process where some meaning is altered and some remains (Gal et al, 2015). The new meaning acquired from this process of translation allows often globally-defined conceptions of gender and gender equality to fit various local contexts. Local NGOs, being familiar with both the language of international development and the social realities of the places they work, are often charged with this task.

These three terms concepts have become essential to development work, but also controversial as they become both depoliticized and technical. They become means through which power is asserted in this case rather than means to transform power. However, these concepts are essential to the development work that NGOs do, and it is how these organizations carry out these concepts which are of interest.

### *Transnational feminism*

Transnationalism can be identified in a variety of contexts be it migration, capital flows, or social movements that create a variety of cultural, economic, and political links that transcend

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and move freely beyond borders and boundaries of nation-states (Grewal & Kaplan, 2008). The term transnational has been used by many scholars to identify its separate complexity from popular terms such as international, global and cosmopolitan that invoke rather different meanings (Kapoor, 2014). Transnational feminism recognizes the boundless, but complex, context in which feminist struggles manifest and open up spaces for solidarity. Priya Kapoor provides a strong definition of transnational feminism in her article “The Challenge of an Earth Democracy: Vandana Shiva and the Relevance of Transnational Feminism” where she states that,

Transnational feminism has emerged within the humanities and social sciences as a paradigm that carefully acknowledges the contemporary, mobility of ideas, problematizing gender and sexuality and working toward a model of social justice, while foregrounding the intersection of nationhood, economic class, ethnicity and history. Transnational feminism takes on inequitable legacies of power, residual from colonial times, and the violent formation of modern nation states, when only select fields within the humanities critically engage with the historical fact of colonialism. Transnational feminism does not hold nation and its purposes sacred. Transnational alliances can, after all be forged between non-state actors. This vision is one of a shared, just, humanity. (Kapoor, 2014)

Kapoor’s definition highlights the complex contexts in which transnational feminism works, which simultaneously provide both opportunities for solidarity as well as challenges to it because transnational feminism must be reflective, flexible and inclusive. It must recognize these differences in forming alliances and acknowledge a dynamic feminism that includes various

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practices (Naples, 2008). However, many discussions surrounding transnational feminism emphasize the importance of maintaining solidarity despite cultural, economic, national, and social differences (Mohanty, 2003; Naples, 2008). Transnational feminism extends beyond the patriarchy as well where these historical economic systems of oppression provide opportunities for non-state actors to form alliances in solidarity to overcome such systems (Mohanty, 2003).

*Senegal, gender activism, and development*

Senegal, with its secular state, has ratified all of the international documents on human rights including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women and The African charter on Human Rights and People's Rights which both explicitly prohibit gender discrimination and any form of violence against women or coercion. These documents also frame women's rights as human rights. The African Charter on Human Rights, specifically Article 14 of Maputo, outlines women's rights to family planning methods and education, such as contraceptives and medicalized abortion in the case of incest or rape, accessible health services, and access to information pertaining to sexual health particularly for women in rural areas (Bopp, 2005). These documents directly frame women's rights as human rights. As a result, national laws such as the Family Code Law of 1973 and the Parity Law have made women's rights both visible and a reality in institutional law. Fatou Sow, a Senegalese sociologist and feminist, discusses the importance of globalization as both a source of women's oppression and liberation where it creates economic conditions unfavorable to women, but also establishes international forums and networks, such as the conferences on women, where women's struggles and voices can be heard (2003). Women have been acknowledged by state development initiative, particularly the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, that viewed women as



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vulnerable to economic instability and indispensable to development, promoting a slogan of “no development without women” (Sieveking, 2007, p.32). The current development program focused on economic growth and promoted by the state, the Plan Senegal Emergent, has a particular focus on women as well in education, employment, and access to land (World Bank 2013).

Many of the studies on gender and Senegal emphasize the fact that it has a secular state in a nation where religion, particularly Islam, is deeply important to and plays a central role in the everyday lives of its constituents (Sow, 2003; Bopp, 2005; Sieveking, 2007). Secular approaches to gender, women’s rights, and reproductive health function in a religious and social context that argue against human rights approaches, that highlight a woman’s right to control over her body and sexuality, as they are outside of Senegalese culture and religion (Bopp, 2005). However, it has been argued that many of the gender reforms at a legal and institutional level can be attributed to the secular government (Latha, 2011). Sow discusses the difficulties that gender reform and women’s rights face at a social level with the state’s secularity, acknowledging that “secularism seems to infringe upon people’s deepest sense of identity” (Sow, 2011, p.72), but advocates for a continuation of secular approaches by the government as they offer avenues for women’s rights to be put to the forefront. The difficulty remains in translating these policies at social levels. Latha (2011) argues that NGOs, such as Réseau Siggil Jigéen (RSJ), have engaged in this process as an intermediary by recognizing the indispensability of religion and powerful religious leaders to issues pertaining to women’s rights. She views RSJ’s engagement with intermediaries as indicative of “Islamic womanism”, a feminist approach that works alongside

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religion to provide interpretations that are favorable to women. This approach also works against dominant ideas of Islam as a religion oppressive to women (Latha 2011).

## **Methodology**

### *Method/Data collection*

This study is informed by ethnography. I used a participant-observation method paired with semi-structured interviews as data-collection. I was an intern at Réseau Siggil Jigeen from October 2015 to December of 2015 where I was involved in the daily office life of the organization's staff and attended many of their activities that will be included in my analysis.

Five interviews were conducted, three with the staff of Réseau Siggil Jigeen and two with members of one of its partner organizations, l'Association des Femmes de la Medina. Only one man, the director of follow up and evaluation at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, was interviewed for this study. The two members of l'Association des Femmes de la Medina are members of a collective that make soap and batik. I consider them both members of the coalition and beneficiaries as they receive services from the partner organization. The questionnaire for these two members focused on their experience with the organization and its services. The questionnaire used with the staff of Réseau Siggil Jigeen focused on their community-based work, challenges their work faces, and successes of the organization.

*Reflection*

In this section, I will reflect on doing intercultural research, positionality and subjectivity. Traditional methods pinpoint the researcher as objective and unbiased; however, when doing qualitative research, especially intercultural research, reflexivity and the acknowledgement of subjectivity become “necessary because without such reflection the outcomes of the research process are regarded as ‘characteristics of objects,’ as ‘existing realities,’ despite their constructed nature that originates in the various choices and decisions researchers undertake during the process of researching” (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p.6). Research must be understood as the production of knowledge and this production entails a dimension of power, which must be acknowledged. A reflection on the research process reveals the constructed nature of research by discussing the choices and decisions that the researcher makes in knowledge construction to reveal how the researcher comes to the conclusions that are made. This process is particularly important to the research I’ve done in this study because it is knowledge production outside of my own culture. During my time and upon my return, I kept a journal where I reflected on my experience as a whole in Senegal and the fieldwork that I did for this study and excerpts from this journal will be included in this section. This became a way for me to understand the conclusions that I’ve made throughout the data analysis and writing process. It is in this space where I identify my conclusions, unpack how my own perspective leads me to those conclusions, and how to present these conclusions in the discussion.

Positionality and reflection in the research process examine body politics of the researcher where they embody much more than an individual as “Race, gender, class, nationality are constant points of negotiation, justification, positioning.” (Bourke, Butcher, Chisonga,

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Clarke, Davies, Thorn, n.d.). As a young, white American woman doing research in a West-African context, this approach becomes integral to the intercultural research that I did where my identity is different in various ways from those that I worked with. In some aspects, my female identity correlated with those I interviewed, but differences of nationality, race, and class pinpointed me as an outsider. I was a “toubab”, which is the Wolof word for White foreigners. It was in understanding what it meant to be a toubab, and a toubab studying development and doing research in Senegal, that I positioned myself within the fieldwork that I was doing:

*My experience as a toubab greatly affected my thoughts on hegemony. It was clear, whether American, French, or Canadian, toubabs didn't fully get the Senegalese and that their perspectives were not always accepted. Toubabs did toubab things and had toubab perspectives... I heard this a lot along with the idea that Senegal must develop itself. What became clear to me was that toubabs didn't always get it and they would always be toubabs. Even on television, the presence of toubabs in their coverage of development was very minimal and any time I saw a toubab it was shocking and I wondered what they were doing there. (Excerpt from field journal, 2015)*

In working with a local organization, the purpose and intentions for my research became even clearer as I saw the importance of work that is being done by local collectives versus foreign or Northern organizations. In navigating what it meant to be a toubab understanding development or seeing other toubabs intervene in development, the work and approaches of Réseau Siggil Jigéen became even more important for me to represent. It is for this reason that I've chosen to do a case study rooted in ethnography.

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My identity as a white, American woman living in Senegal contributed to my understanding of what it means to be a woman outside of my own borders. My program had told us that women, particularly American women, will often experience more aggression from males or find friendships with males to be more difficult. My own ideas of gender identity and autonomy interfaced various constructs of female identity and gender roles that I had never encountered or occupied. I had never been so aware of my identity as a woman until my experience in Senegal where it had been constantly pointed out to me. It is these intercultural experiences pertaining to gender identity that have both influenced the inquiry of this study surrounding women's rights, gender equality, and gender activism. However, in understanding that my identity as a woman is much different from Senegalese female identities, I have relied on the work of Senegalese scholars to discuss aspects of Senegalese female identity and boundaries to gender activism as their perspectives paired with my experience at the organization provides a way to move beyond the aspects of difference to a new understanding. My identity as a student of development studies began to merge with my understanding of gender as it had been presented by concepts and measurements in the literature. I wondered what empowerment and feminism look like outside of my own understanding. I began to reflect on what gender equality means, how it is measured, and who is, or should be, involved in the conversations surrounding it:

*I knew I was a toubab and for me that mean the most important thing I could do was listen. I knew about development according to what the literature said. I knew the discourse, the concepts, the controversies, and the language. However, that didn't always fit in with what I saw and I knew that it wouldn't. Or more that my understanding of these concepts and what they meant at an international or a discourse-level did not align with*

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*what I saw in reality. What did gender equality mean? Who is included in the conversations about gender equality and how does one reach a more equitable society? How do measures of literacy and enrollment reflect that? Discourse becomes a blueprint with goals to achieve, but no means of actually achieving them. This is going to come from a change within society not by gaining the numbers necessary for the indicators that represent it. Where we really see change and movement towards the concept of equality is through the changes at a more social level where the conversations need to be had amongst those involved the process. (Excerpt from field journal 2015, 2015)*

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to attend NGO activities and in these moments I found myself directly involved in the process. Although in some activities language was a barrier and I often played the role of the observer, there was one particular instance where I was explicitly included in a group conversation on medicalized abortion and how to facilitate meaningful dialogue with Parliament to advocate for the legalization of a law protecting medicalized abortion. In this situation, I prioritized listening, but there was one instance where I was asked and asked whether any survivors of unauthorized abortions due to rape or incest would come out and speak if they felt comfortable. However, I was told that would not be appropriate and that those women would not feel comfortable because of heavy social stigma. My perspective, coming from a liberal American standpoint that found personal narratives to be a compelling and humanizing components to politics, did not hold significance in this space. As the conversation went on, two women from our group, one older and one younger, began to offer different solutions. The younger woman proposed that they encourage candidates to endorse the campaign and access to medicalized abortion while the older woman disagreed, arguing that it

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could be very unsuccessful and risky. Two different perspectives were presented and my perception of each one lead me to reflect on how I understood each one in relation to the advocacy work they were doing:

*I am torn because on one side I think that getting this into the public and discussing it in a political sphere is extremely important to its implementation and if it is used in combination with other methods such as media and community work. On the other hand, if the other candidate strongly opposed legalization of medicalized abortion, his influence might resonate more easily with the population, making him a stronger candidate and hurting the cause. In the case of abortion, action is very difficult. People are not willing to talk about nor accept it easily. This is something my own country has struggled with despite the fact that it is legal. Moving it through the political sphere is going to take a lot of consciousness raising on many fronts. It means consciousness raising with an entire population while also trying to implement it into structures so that the awareness created can be politically effective. (Excerpt from field journal, 2015)*

Being a toubab, especially a female toubab, meant acknowledging a part of my identity that I didn't grapple on a day-to-day basis within my own borders. It meant confronting different constructs of women and gender roles as well as my own privilege as an educated, American woman. It meant acknowledging my own political viewpoints as well. It meant being an outsider and an outsider trying to understand the perspectives of others while understanding that my role as a researcher entails power and privilege in doing that, which too must be acknowledged.

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. The purpose of this study is not to make any assumptions or expertise about Senegalese female identities or Senegalese gender activism, but to contextualize the analysis of gender activism as it interfaces with shared values through the information I learned from my experience and the literature review. It must also be emphasized that it is my own identity that influences my perspective and understanding of the research. In addition, this becomes even more important as I used a participant observation method and semi-structured interviews from which I have drawn the themes that are included in this study. I have used a participant observation method and semi-structured interviews to confine the study to what happens within a specific time and place and highlight the voices of those who I spoke with. This approach points to my position within the fieldwork where “researchers remain largely on the outside of the communities they work with, yet become part of the daily community life in which complex relationships are created and formed.” (Bourke et al., n.d.). My role as a researcher collaborated with my role as an intern where the two allowed me to create relationships with the staff as well as an experience within the organization.

Interviews situate the researcher within a position of power as they define the questions that are asked and the interpretation of that research. My questions primarily discussed the experiences of the respondents with the organizations they worked at. I did five semi-structured interviews for this study. Three of these interviews were with the staff of Réseau Siggil Jigéen with whom I worked alongside during my duration at the organization. One of these participants was male while the other two were female. The other two were with two members of one of their partner organizations with whom I did not have this more personal connection. My supervisor introduced me to them and we did the interviews with a translator, a young Senegalese female.



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The women were friendly and eager to talk about their experience at the organization, something I wasn't sure would happen or not since each of us did not know the participants before the study. Semi-structured interviews allowed more ease in the research process as it was the responses that guided the following questions. Although I did have a questionnaire, I let the responses guide which questions I would continue to ask. I chose to do qualitative research that focused on the experiences of those being interviewed with the intention that these voices will speak for themselves, but the thematic data analysis does put me in a position where I identify the themes. In the discussion section, I provide an analysis of each theme to contextualize my understanding before using the direct quotes provided by the interviews that lead to that understanding. In this sense, I present my interpretation before letting the data speak for itself.

My intention in doing this research and containing a section on reflexivity, is to position myself and identity as a researcher doing intercultural research to remain transparent and highlight how my interpretation of the data and my experience entails subjectivity. Through the literature review, I have highlighted the need to politicize and deconstruct terms, such as gender equality, as these concepts are subjective, but are often framed objectively in the literature or in international discourses. Reflexivity in my own work aims to parallel the work done in the literature review that politicizes and reveals a process of knowledge construction and choice. My perspective and the conclusions I come to in my research are influenced by the entirety of my intercultural experience in Senegal as well. Living with a Senegalese family and learning from Senegalese teachers was also another impact on the conclusions I've made in this paper. The discussion of the following themes reflects this experience as some aspects of the themes were

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not confined to my fieldwork with the organization, but emerged in other facets of my intercultural experience.

In the initial planning of this study, I had intended on working with a Northern-based organization to understand how they communicate development efforts and values with their beneficiaries. However, as I ended up working with a local organization that works on gender-related issues, the focus of my research shifted toward the role of NGOs in development initiatives that concern gender. As a result, the literature review reflects the shift of the research process. The themes I've identified emerge from both the data collected in semi-structured interviews and the field work that I did with the organization. I have chosen these themes because they were the strongest patterns that stood out in the data and connected to the fieldwork. Some themes, such as advocacy, participation, and funding, are directly derived from the words of the participants and are recurring elements in their interviews. The analysis that I conduct with these themes connects them to discussions in the literature that is both specific to Senegal and representative of these themes at a global scale. Other themes, such as local knowledge and gender and development, emerge from my own understanding in analyzing the data in relation to the literature review. I've chosen each of these themes out of the voices of the data and my interpretation of what is being said both explicitly and implicitly. In sections regarding the position of Senegalese women, I have used an extensive study done by a Senegalese scholar Coudou Bopp, essays by Senegalese sociologists and feminist Fatou Sow, another study done on Réseau Siggil Jigéen by an American scholar, and the information I learned from my experience with the organization and in Senegal. The themes in the following section are framed by the data, the literature, and my interpretation. It is these elements of

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subjectivity, identity, and the research process which I have aimed to make clear in this section to present how I've come to the conclusions in the following section.

## **Discussion**

*Advocacy as top-down empowerment: A means to reinforce women's rights at national decentralized levels*

“We work to defend and promote the rights of women” (Personal interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigéen, December 16, 2016)

With the shift of feminist activism into NGO spaces, advocacy has become a main strategy of feminist NGOs to advance agendas favorable to women (Bernal, Grewal 2014). In each of my interviews with the staff of Réseau Siggil Jigéen, they emphasized the importance of advocacy in their work as their strongest point. One study on gender in Senegal emphasized that the Réseau engages in a gender activism rooted in locally-specific contexts where they “are re-examining the place of feminisms today and are trying to promote women's social political, economic, and religious empowerment by taking the cognizance of the specific demands of the West African socio-cultural religious milieu of Senegal” (Latha 2010, p.56). The activities of their work reflect this as they engage in both advocacy and community-based work within the social, cultural, and religious contexts that women live in.

“And also we have more experience in advocacy because, us, our raison d'être is advocacy. Thus, the raison d'être is advocacy for the vote of laws favorable to women.” (Personal interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigéen, December 16, 2015)

Réseau Siggil Jigéen approaches their mission grounded in improving and reinforcing the position of Senegalese women with explicit ideas of what constitutes some forms of women's rights, such as access to family planning methods, and what measures need to be taken for those

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rights to be represented in law. RSJ engages in advocacy work at a national level where they seek to see their efforts represented in policy and institutionalize aspects of their vision.

Senegalese scholar Codou Bopp emphasizes that “It is the state that not only provides the enabling conditions, but also guarantees the enforcement of international domestic women’s human rights” (2005, p.2). RSJ often invokes international legislation, such as the African Charter on Human Rights, that the state has committed to as legitimization for the causes they represent to be presented in an explicit National law. In this sense, the organization aligns with internationally-defined agendas on gender equality and women’s rights where the measures laid out in those documents provides both a basis and justification for their work. Globally and transnationally shared values are embedded within these documents and are adopted by states where these values see no borders.

An institutionally-targeted approach to their mission that echoes the meaning embedded in empowerment as a transformation of power relations, can be understood as a means through which empowerment occurs from the top-down and where power is shifted in women’s favor. However, advocacy is not the final means of their work, but the starting point in many cases. It is through advocacy that the organization works toward political and legal access to the rights of women and through their programs that this access becomes supported and enforced. For example, with law on parity in governance, the organization fought strongly alongside other organizations to ensure that gender equality would prevail in governance and commitments made to prohibiting gender discrimination would be acted upon. In addition, they offer programs that provide training and support to women in office to enhance their skills, such as a budget workshop funded by UN Women that guided women in decentralized positions of government

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on making, managing, and dealing with budgets. As a result of their advocacy work, the organization was able to access sources of intergovernmental funding that draw upon globally shared values. In discussing the successes of the organization, gains achieved through advocacy were highlighted as the most representative.

“The community work that Réseau Siggil Jigeen does is primarily advocacy. If the chamber accepted, it is because Réseau Siggil Jigeen made a strong advocacy in any case since 1994. Réseau Siggil Jigeen and its members were at the base of the fight for parity at the administrative level. Réseau Siggil Jigeen fights for women’s access to family planning services. In this sense, there are many partners that help and give the network, at any rate, to materialize the funds for this objective.” (Personal interview with the supervisor of follow-up and evaluation, December 14, 2015).

“Réseau Siggil Jigeen is the source of free Cessarian section in Senegal. Free Cesarean section. We advocated with the Ministry of Health... We actively participated in the vote of the law that sanctions violence against women. We are a member of the coalition. We are also a member of the coalition of organizations who advocated for parity” (Personal interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015).

Réseau Siggil Jigeen engages in advocacy at decentralized political levels as well, particularly in issues regarding funding. In an interview with the Coordinator of Programs and evaluation, she explains that “advocacy is just as important at a national level as it is at the local level because we are actually in the process of working with the mayors. It’s at the decentralized level.” (Personal interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015). RSJ advocates at this level for localized communities and in some cases its partner organizations. I conducted interviews two members of one of the Réseau’s partner organizations, L’AFEME, at an advocacy event where RSJ and l’AFEME facilitated a dialogue between the mayor and the members of this collective. In one interview conducted with a translator, the member explains that she “doesn’t have a lot of means that allow her to communicate with the state, but she says the that little by little the branch makes on it, so today they can talk with the

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mayor. Maybe tomorrow it will be a minister. Maybe after tomorrow it will be the president. So, she believes in it [the organization]”(Personal interview, November 24, 2015). In this case, the needs and voices of a less powerful group are brought to attention and empowered through a direct dialogue with the mayor that was made possible by the organization. The Réseau and its partner organization advocate in support of those voices and create a space where they can be heard.

“...that this is the reason for the meeting today, the advocacy with the mayor. Because she wants that the mayor helps them and takes action. That is to say, bring about more women and give them the opportunity to do their work better, and to ameliorate their way of life.” (Personal interview with a member of l’Association des Femmes de la Medina, November 24, 2015).

Senegal has had a series of decentralization laws that have transferred power to local, decentralized collectivities (Bandiaky-Badji, 2011), which makes the decentralized budget a source for change as well. In another interview, with the director of follow-up and evaluation says that “We encourage the mayors to confront the financing of family planning.” (Personal interview, December 14, 2015). In listing the many successes of the organization, the coordinator of programs notes that “Since 2007, 2007, our partnership with Intrahealth, we never stopped, in the NGO, successes in advocacy with the mayor for financing family planning. So we have many, many, many successes with mayors for financing family planning.” (Personal interview December 16, 2015). Gains made through advocacy at a decentralized level too becomes a means to merge community-based work that focuses on family planning and reproductive health.

Advocacy work is not always done solely by the organization, but they form networks and coalitions in order to become a stronger force particularly on issues that are more controversial, such as family planning efforts. Working in collaboration with other actors situates

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the organization within a context of solidarity on that specific issue and their overall mission. In addition, these networks provide opportunities for the work of the Réseau to expand beyond a dialogue of advocacy with political leaders to one at a societal where they engage in a process of consciousness-raising with community intermediaries, religious leaders, and media resources.

During my time with the organization, I saw these networks of solidarity come together at a workshop to formulate approaches on the current issue they are advocating for: Medicalized abortion. The abortion debate is highly controversial in Senegal where the state is secular, but religion plays a significant role and is a barrier to legal, safe access to abortion where some religious interpretations outright forbid abortion and others allow it within a time frame of fetal development (Bopp, 2005). However, the current law forbids abortions except for in cases where the mother's health is in danger but even this process is very difficult to get approval for this as the woman must go through many consultations before this can happen. As a result, many women resort to extreme and dangerous methods to rid themselves of pregnancy. These occur most often in the cases of incest, rape, or young pregnancies. RSJ's pamphlet on medicalized abortion states that "each year 47,000 women die of complications due to informal abortions" (Campaign for Access to Medicalized Abortion in Senegal). Réseau Siggil Jigeen and its fellow campaign members invoke Article 14 which explicitly states a woman's right to access to safe, legal abortion in cases of rape and incest. Reproductive health as an issue of women's rights and a need for abortion on the basis of sexual violence frame the issue in the context of Senegal where both social and religious stigmas are a challenge.

During this workshop, three groups emerged to advocate at both institutional and social levels for the success of a law that legalizes medicalized abortion while eliminating the stigma

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surrounding the issue through *sensibilisation*, or consciousness-raising. The groups were categorized according to the source that they were targeting to achieve this: Parliament, media, and community. These three approaches that target the political and social dimension are inseparable to the success of the law's approval and a transformation of power. In forming a network that works on the campaign for medicalized abortion, the scope and depth of their work was enhanced. This group was made of journalists, members from other organizations, and jurists who came together to advocate for a law that both fights violence against women and for women's rights protected under Article 14. Advocacy is not limited to a contested space between the network of the organization and a source of political power as it is also "an act of organizing the strategic use of information to democratize relationships" and "empower weaker sectors of society" (Jordan & Van Tuijl, 2000, p.2052). Conscious-raising tactics that acknowledge the systems of local knowledge and rationality in place become important in this process of empowerment where these tactics address the social dimension of power and supplement the political approaches of the campaign. Empowerment as a multi-faceted process of transforming power relations occurs from both the top and the bottom in the work of Réseau Siggil Jigeen where they acknowledge the two as inseparable. Globally-defined and protected women's rights interface local contexts where the organization and its network must function as an intermediary to ensure their integration.

### *Local Knowledge: A starting point for transformative dialogue*

Consciousness-raising becomes integrated into the work of the organization that understands the local knowledge and perception as being integral to their efforts that serve women. They recognize the need to organize on issues and advocate politically, but that the



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population's approval is necessary for this as well. There is a social dimension that ensures the success of the work they do. Local knowledge paired with community-based work that uses *sensibilisation*, or consciousness-raising, efforts works on two levels: Socially and politically. If the local knowledge of communities is better informed on issues, such as the reasons for medicalized abortion, it can be used in the political and social process. The idea of consciousness-raising was something that we discussed many times in my development courses and was a word that I heard often in relation to development. It was a means of spreading information to accompany change. During the workshop on medicalized abortion, I came to better understand how Réseau Siggil Jigeen works with local knowledge in this way. In terms of abortion, representatives need to know that their constituents support the issue before they vote in favor of the law. This is why a very diverse approach in this subject is used where the political and social aspects are addressed.

RSJ identifies the cultural, religious, and institutional barriers to this and has developed a campaign in collaboration with other women's organizations for the access to medicalized abortion that facilitates dialogue with each of these barriers. In a country where religious affiliation is ubiquitous and intimately woven into daily life and perception, "cultural identity and religious identity can be very interconnected, which makes it difficult to separate them" (Nakayama & Martin, 2002). The campaign is a three-pronged approach to the subject that addresses both the socio-cultural, religious and political barriers to the issue by working with the Parliament, media, and communities. This campaign becomes a space where culture and religious interpretation becomes a "contested zone" in intracultural communication (Moon, 2002). RSJ is in charge of the community work where they facilitate dialogue with community

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relays and religious leaders who hold power and respect in their communities so that they can spread the information and serve as a strong, credible ally. During my last days at the organization, one staff member showed me photos of her speaking with imams in different communities as well as a large event where women and religious leaders came together in support of medicalized abortion. In working with powerful decentralized actors, local knowledge becomes integral to the approaches of the organization where their efforts seek to enhance and transform ideas embedded within religion and culture to collaborate on interpretations favorable to women.

The other two approaches work with the media and Parliament where consciousness-raising plays a role as well. The media group works as an extension of consciousness-raising efforts that reach the larger part of the population and present this issue to gain support for its approval, but also to eliminate negative social associations with its practice in the cases of incest, rape, child pregnancy, and maternal danger. The media is a very powerful tool here because many Senegalese families are very connected to television. The goal and job of the media group is to disperse information in order to consciousness-raise on many fronts. The campaign pursues many paths that they know are familiar and frequently used by the Senegalese population in hopes of reaching as many people possible with the information pertinent to medicalized abortion so that they can change the current perception of and provide support for it.

The Parliament approach relies on facilitating dialogue with those in office, both men and women, giving them information that emphasizes the importance of this issue and to ensure that the law will be voted in favor of women. The legal dimension of their advocacy work becomes contingent on the social aspect where support for the subject is necessary, but also a change in

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mentality surrounding the issue at a political, national, and local level. Local knowledge and an enhancement of it becomes a tool in the larger context of the organization's work and mission where staff collaborate with communities on interpretations of their values so that they are realized in local contexts. Réseau Siggil Jigéen translates and implements globally shared values of gender equality and women's rights through its multi-faceted work that negotiates with local knowledge rather than imposing upon it. This approach creates both a safe and sustainable environment for these values to be realized and for transformative change to emerge.

*Participation and local knowledge: A grassroots approach to health*

“From one person to another, development can have a different meaning” (Personal interview with the director of evaluation and follow-up at Réseau Siggil Jigéen, December 14, 2015)

Local knowledge at the decentralized levels becomes an avenue for participatory development where it is the local knowledge of the health posts that both guide and define the projects they implement. As development differs from place to place, participatory projects can give communities the power to decide their own approaches to development. In each interview, the community-based work of the organization was discussed in the context of the health sector where RSJ worked *with* communities to establish stronger health posts. It is an internationally-funded project with the organization's partner Intrahealth, a Northern organization that has worked in Senegal with the Ministry of Health and a variety of other international funders, such as USAID, on a model that ensures a constant stock of contraceptives in health posts (Daff, Seck, Belkhat, Suttan, 2014; Cissé, Hasselback, Gueye, Ndour, Ndao, 2015). The project is done through a grassroots approach where localized communities the 14 regions in Senegal identify deficiencies in their health posts and work in collaboration with Réseau Siggil Jigéen to develop

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solutions where the Réseau works as an intermediary to provides support and supply funding.

Participation and local knowledge are at the heart of this project where it is the community that defines the quality of their health post according to their needs, identifies problems, envisages solutions, and mobilizes its members to take action. The process is defined by the local knowledge of the actors within the community and according to their standards.

“If I take only the program that we are in the process of unrolling with one of our partners, Intrahealth, for the quality of health. So there, that is a project specifically communitarian because we work with the most withdrawn communities. We work at the level of the health post. For example, in this program, we have work objectives among 200 health posts that means with more health so it’s a program very communitarian.” (Personal interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015)

“There we try to organize the community throughout for their definition of the quality of health and then involve them because the community also must give its reflection, its definition of the quality of health because that community must be involved.” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2016)

“Yes, the programs of the network have a participatory approach. So first we talk about the aspirations of the populations at the base that we try to train in and that we can implement. And also, in the framework of implementation, as in the framework of follow-up and evaluation, the populations at the base are implicated in all the processes.” (Interview with the director of evaluation and follow-up at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 14, 2015)

“In all the programs we have a participatory approach. This approach means that the population, the beneficiaries, are the first concerned and define what they want, and then try to organize the activities of the network and do them themselves.” (Interview with the director of evaluation and follow-up at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 14, 2015)

Participation is criticized by some scholars for lacking a sharing of power and functioning as a depoliticized approach that neglects who participates and the level of participation, arguing that local people should not be confined to the process of implementation alone but that “they should also take place in management and decision-making” (White 1996, p.7; Ebrahim 2003). Réseau Siggil Jigéen’s work at the level of the health post relies on

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communities in the process of definition, implementation, and management where the community is involved throughout and given the power to make project decisions that affect them. The project begins by consulting the communities through dialogue and moves to a process of project implementation where the community is given agency in the management of its health post as well.

“It’s the community who defines all of the team. And then they advance and choose a team of 25. Then that team chooses an office of four people. And then they are all going to work together to weaken the challenges before us at the health post despite all the difficulties. And now we make an action plan.” (Interview with the director of Evaluation and Follow-up at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 14, 2015)

“Each person comes with their definition. And now we try to produce a single definition. There the community is on the inside because they participated and said what is the quality at the level of the health post. Because the health post is there and everyone shares the health post. There it is the community that takes care of itself well.” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2016)

“It’s not us that do that! We do nothing but accompany them.” (Interview with the Director of Evaluation and Follow-up at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 14, 2015)

“As I said earlier, the base. If you don’t work in collaboration in the quality of health services, you have a small advantage. The community, the person receiving the benefits, you have the community leaders. And eventually we see the perception of the preparation and the quality. (Interview with the Director of Evaluation and Follow-up at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 14, 2015)”

“It is necessary that the community feels the advantages of the community-based work. So it is necessary that the community is given a voice, that the community participates in the elaboration of projects, in the position of projects, in the resolution of problems” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015)

It becomes clear from the interviews that the organization implicates the members of the communities they work with by co-producing a definition of the health post and then implementing a structure of management. An intimate relationship exists between participation and local knowledge where there is a certain advantage to working in collaboration and co-

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producing. In this case, notions of local knowledge reinforce participation and the work of the organization because it is what allows it to be successful and become sustainable long after the organization has left. Within the quotes, a dual advantage of participation emerges where it aids both project efficiency and gives agency to communities. This approach is considered a “representative participation” where the community is given a voice in the nature and management of the project and become a means through which development projects become efficient (White 1996).

The project can be considered in some senses an extension of the work the organization does through advocacy with mayors to finance family planning as the project serves multiple interests of the organization’s work, such as access to family planning and quality health services, by enhancing the resources and capacities of health posts to ensure that they have medications, staff, and infrastructure. A participatory approach rooted in collaboration and made possible by help of Northern-based funders becomes indicative of their ability to access and connect multiple partners. Values of women’s rights emerge within these partnerships, explicitly and implicitly, where these partners have different interests in seeing them realized. Réseau Siggil Jigéen engages in collaborative community-based work in each of its approaches, be it development projects with the health posts or advocacy work with a focus on consciousness-raising. Collaboration with the State, decentralized governance, community leaders, local peoples, other organizations, campaigns, and networks become integral to Réseau Siggil Jigéen’s work that takes a multi-faceted approach to women’s empowerment. Their work is contingent on networks within their boundaries, but also those that extend beyond their boundaries that provide necessary financial capital and international credibility.

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### *The Paradox of Partners/Funding: Issues of renewal and credibility that attracts funding*

Non-governmental organizations are private, neoliberal entities that are dependent on funding despite their public and civil society-based work. As noted before, neoliberalism becomes integral to NGO work as it creates the conditions that both require and allow intervention. This dependence on funding has been discussed in the literature as a weakness of NGOs where they are often subject to the preferences and demands of their funders that interfere with their community-based work and that can have detrimental effects on gender activism when gender mainstreaming requires the integration of static gender concepts into development projects (Tvedt 2002; Wendoh, Wallace 2005; Michael 2005; Bernal, Grewal 2014). Donor funding and partnerships have become particularly competitive in West Africa where local organizations must compete alongside international non-governmental organizations (Michaels 2005; Sarr 2006). Sarah Michaels discusses funding of local NGOs in her book *Undermining Development: The Absence of Power Among Local NGOS in Africa* where she argues that local NGOs in Senegal have strong ties to the funding and partnerships of international organizations, particularly USAID (2006). She also notes that local organizations are able to enhance their competitive advantage over international and Northern organizations through political and social dimensions of their work, such as advocacy and empowerment, that the foreign organizations are incapable of or weak in doing and that access to international funding gives organizations both publicity and international credibility (Michael 2005). However, within the data, a paradox emerges that encompasses the necessity and accessibility of funding as RSJ is able to attract funding through their credibility, but sustainable funding or constant access to funds becomes a

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challenge to their work. This theme explores the organization as a neoliberal entity where their work is contingent on donor funding, which provides both constraints and opportunities.

When asked about funding, two seemingly contradictory responses were received. The credibility of the organization as a factor that attracts funding was always mentioned, but funding was also seen as a challenge to their work. Although their credibility allowed them to access many funders, and even be approached directly by others, a sustainable source of funding was always noted as a constraint to their work. At first this theme of funding emerged as a challenge to their work; however, when looking more closely at the data, an additional way to understand funding was revealed. Funding then emerged as a theme in a dual sense because it was more than a challenge, but an indication of their credibility in many cases. I view this as a paradox in this theme where funding is discussed as an opportunity and a constraint. The organization's credibility creates the opportunity while the competitive field for funding creates constraints for NGOs where Réseau Siggil Jigéen's credibility wins and loses.

“Yes, because the network is a network that is already very respected. It is a network that is very respected. It is a network that is credible” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigéen, December 16, 2015)

“I think that the Réseau has worked with many civil society organizations, certainly respected by Africans.” (Personal interview with the supervisor of follow-up and evaluation, December 14, 2015)

“Because when you do good work, people appreciate that and it is word of mouth that does the rest. There are funds that are there and they are very big. And then they come to say can we partner with you? Can we do this with you? Can we do that with you?” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigéen, December 16, 2015)

“But, it must be said that we have had the highest number of USAID that is a sort of financial certification. So the management, a strong management of funds and the partnership are part of the conditions of Réseau Siggil Jigéen.” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigéen, December 16, 2015)



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“At this level, I think that we have a strong partnership with UN institutions, Canadian Institutions, etc. because we work with CECI, CECI Canada. We work with UN Women, the World Bank, USAID, Intrahealth. Voila, we have strong partnerships and they have confidence in us. And voila.” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015)

“Because when certain donors pursue, us, we have the means and the fields with regard to sectors. Us, we have the means to orient them to the sectors [...]towards education, for family planning [...], for the authorization of women, etc., etc. So, those who give funds also, consequently, are of some of the pursuits and the total aspiration. And also from time to time, our values.” (Personal interview with the supervisor of follow-up and evaluation, December 14, 2015)

Rather than responses that pinpoint international funders as imposing problematic requirements as indicated by the literature, funders approach them as a result of their work that is rooted in globally shared values and this gives them a certain power in determining which sector they will use their funding for. In addition, the work that they do is not specific to a certain sector or domain, as their vision and mission require diverse, multi-faceted approaches. In fact, it becomes clear that the organization has been able to access many different sources of funding from beyond the borders where their work takes place. However, despite the fact the Réseau benefits from a certain credibility among its beneficiaries, the state, and the international funding community, funding was always discussed as a challenge to their work. They've even been approached by funders, such as the mayor of Barcelona, to work on projects together, but they face challenges in finding consistent and long-term funding for their work.

“Euh, the few difficulties that most civil society organizations face entirely or within our organization, is the renewal of our partners. The partners who finance. Because most of the time, they are programs and if the programs end, there is not a good strategy to paralyze the projects of donors it's usually projects” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015)

“The other challenge is the financing of our activities. The renewal.” (Interview with director of activities, December 14, 2015)

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“But when it comes to the funds of big projects, there, [claps hands loudly over voice], with the flight of banks, the partners equipped with funds...” (Personal interview with the supervisor of follow-up and evaluation, December 14, 2015)

“Yes, this lack of funding and financing is said... to be the cause of the world financial crisis. Increasingly ...because it must be said that there are Northern organizations and Southern organizations and even increasingly at the level of the North there are demands for more and more requirements...” (Personal interview with the supervisor of follow-up and evaluation, December 14, 2015)

“So this is at the heart of our obstacles at the level of [hits the table and drowns out word] funds.” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigéen, December 16, 2015)

Questions regarding challenges the organization faces and whether the donors have an influence on the work they do always received an answer linked to funding. The influence is linked not to agendas, but to access. This appears to be contradictory to other responses where the respondents discuss the various sources of funding they've had as a result of their credibility. The paradox emerges out of these two responses where both hold truth as funding is available, but insufficient. Credibility is seen as a means to attract funding, which has been the case for the organization, but it has also been a challenge to find sustainable sources of funding. In the case of Réseau Siggil Jigéen, the organization becomes a space where feminist activism and neoliberalism cross the paths of one another as their engagement in gender activism is influenced by their level of funding.

In addition, it must be noted that their access to funding, stemming from intergovernmental sources like the UN and Northern based sources like Canada, allow their values to proliferate both nationally and transnationally. Funding allows globally and transnationally shared values to extend beyond intergovernmental spheres and internationally-agreed documents where these values are translated into action within local contexts. This action is done and made possible by a variety of actors, such as nongovernmental organizations, states,

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coalitions and campaigns for advocacy, local communities, religious and community leaders, and even the media. Borders become irrelevant in the organization's ability to engage in partnerships and find a certain solidarity with actors who share values that are committed to relationships of gender equality and women's rights as human rights. Although the responses received do not discuss financial partnerships as a source of conflict where agendas in the name of these shared values differ from those of the organization, these agendas are still existent and rather they provide the organization the means to engage in a multi-faceted gender activism where partnerships are formed for different approaches to these values. For example, some donors like the UN provide support for workshops for women in governance while others, like their partnership with Intrahealth, work toward health initiatives and access to family planning methods. It is in these partnerships that shared values broaden the scope of the organization's work and open up new networks.

### *Gender and development: Organizations as spaces for solidarity and networking*

Bernal and Grewal discuss the relationship between NGOs, neoliberalism, and feminism where they argue that "neoliberalism may thus create a recognizably homogenous framework for contemporary NGOs working on women's issues, but it does not control all the practices and agendas of these organizations" (2014, p.13). Neoliberalism combined with a global trend of gender mainstreaming creates these private spaces where different forms of feminist activism proliferates under different focuses, such as health, education, literacy, and economic development. Gender permeates all aspects of development work and a relationship is formed between the two at the levels of discourse and intervention. Réseau Siggil Jigéen is an organization that stands alone and within a network of other local women's organizations

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working in Senegal. It is through the data I collected with RSJ's partner organization, l'Association des Femmes de la Medina, that I was able to identify this theme as a meta-theme that brings together the various components of the data. Development efforts surrounding gender, or rather the incorporation of gender into development, creates a new, diverse field of intervention where many actors are thus committed to the shared values of gender equality and women's rights that guide gender and development.

Réseau Siggil Jigéen works primarily on advocacy and has its own community-based projects; however, they are also involved in an explicit network with partner organizations that are concerned with specific issues and sectors pertaining to women. This network strengthens their multi-faceted approach to gender and development as it works alongside and with organizations that intervene in different domains that are crucial to women's empowerment. The network becomes a means to link scattered efforts towards women's empowerment and gender equality to come together in solidarity. It brings together local actors that share the same values, but take different approaches. Subsequently, their beneficiaries become integrated into these values as well and a broader range of women are reached through their collective efforts. As a result, these organizations become "sites of feminist struggles as they promote various constructs of "women" and as their activities produce new categories of women" (Bernal, Grewal p.11, 2014). Although the wording and approaches may be different in the context of each partner organization, it is the meaning embedded within their words and visions that connect different approaches to shared values of women's rights and gender equality by integrating women into development efforts and ensuring that development acknowledges women .

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“Making up a network has a lot of advantages it must be said. There are a lot of advantages because today we are 17 organizations and each organization has something that they can bring to the network and so on. In the network, there is an association of midwives, there is a human rights organization, organizations that work on entrepreneurship. So each organization can bring something to the network.” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015)

“We have in some ways been a pressure group. The network could be a pressure group.” (Interview with the Coordinator of Programs at Réseau Siggil Jigeen, December 16, 2015)

“But for her, the development is going happen rather through the woman because when the woman works, it is the society that develops. So for development you must integrate women.” (Personal Interview with member of l’Association des Femmes de la Médina, November 24, 2014)

“The principal issue is to do..to get women out of poverty and not to say that women should stay at the house all day. It’s to say that the man is important, but not more than the woman” (Personal Interview with member of l’Association des Femmes de la Médina)

“Because women are touched by poverty. And there, we do all all all so that the woman can develop and work in the jobs, for example, or rather it’s to say how to take action to develop the woman because to take action to develop like the man.” (Personal Interview with member of l’Association des Femmes de la Médina)

“We do all to gain the maximum for women.” (Personal Interview with member of l’Association des Femmes de la Médina)

It must be re-emphasized that the community-based work they do is closely linked to institutionalized gains they make in advocacy and allows their values to emerge in local, national, and international domains of interest. The organization’s various partners within and outside of its borders, at institutional and societal levels, constitute the various strategies and networks that Réseau Siggil Jigeen engages with in its work. This theme emerges as a meta-theme of the data where it links together the range of themes that I’ve identified and signifies how the relationship between gender and development positions Réseau Siggil Jigéen’s work within globally and transnationally shared values surrounding women’s rights as human rights and gender equality. These shared values emerge out of numerous commitments and action

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made for gender and development by the state, other organizations, and international funders.

This links the organization's many unconnected, but seemingly connected, partners and networks that are working on gender and development. As a result, an informal network emerges as Réseau Siggil Jigéen works with these actors and through diverse strategies, such as advocacy and participatory development, to achieve their mission in various contexts. A discourse surrounding gender equality and women's rights in relation to development is what allows these values to be shared both globally and transnationally while legitimizing various interventions. As a result, implicit and non-organized networks work within this field of development where gender becomes a central concern.. It is in this sense, I view transnational networks as unbounded, non-organized and discursive where it is these shared values alone that project and connect feminist struggles beyond borders. This is different from the explicit, bounded transnational networks that Keck and Sikkink identify in their work as they are organized actors working on a similar issue where in this case the network is purely discursive as it is the issue in the form of a shared value that functions as a discourse. It is through these discursive networks that Réseau Siggil Jigéen adds depth to its mission and works alongside many different actors within and beyond its borders in a multi-faceted approach to gender activism.

These transnational discursive networks can be seen as a form of multi-faceted feminist activism that occurs through and within NGOs. The actions made by Réseau Siggil Jigéen and its transnational network are particularly confined to local structures as boundaries to women's rights and gender equality. However, it must also be emphasized that women in the Global South face marginalization from a variety of social and economic factors that are not spatially-specific. Chandra Mohanty discusses this in her essay "Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist

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Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles” where she states “I believe there are causal links between marginalized social locations and experiences and the ability of human agents to explain and analyze features of capitalist society” (2003). As neoliberalism and globalization create spaces where transnational discourses and solidarity emerge, they also contribute to the conditions that lead to the creation of these spaces. These transnational discursive networks that are defined in global forums, such as the UN conferences on women, do not always recognize global economic order and disparate power relations as within the realm of globally defined values. A praxis of transnational feminism offers the opportunity for even more transformative change at an international level because it recognizes power relations at both micro and macro levels that manifest socially and economically, while also retaining the localized uses and understanding of globally shared values. This requires even more systematic analyses of gender inequality as well as economic inequality among nations where a transformation of power relations could mean empowerment that extends beyond borders.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed how a nongovernmental organization in Senegal communicates globally and transnationally shared values surrounding gender equality and women’s rights, and how they facilitate community-based work as a result of those values. I used a participant observation method, semi-structured interviews, and a section of reflexivity to discuss my research process and do a thematic data analysis. One limitation of this study is the time frame, as I was an intern for only about two months. Another limitation of this study concerns intercultural communication and my perception of the data; however, I have included a section of self-reflection to discuss how I navigated intercultural research.

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I've argued that Réseau Siggil Jigéen relies on diverse strategies and networks within and beyond its borders to engage in gender activism and enhance the position of Senegalese women socially, economically, and legally by showing how these networks allow them to broaden the focus of their work. These diverse strategies are reflected in my themes where advocacy and representative participation highlight the value of local knowledge and perception as integral to their work. These strategies also approach their shared values at institutional and social levels to ensure that environments are created that are favorable to women while their networks contribute by extending the scope of the work that Réseau Siggil Jigéen does. The organization is involved in an explicit local network, but has many partnerships outside of its network as well. The organization works with a variety of actors, such as organizations within and outside of their network, coalitions and campaigns for advocacy, the state, intergovernmental institutions like the UN, and international funders that are integral to their multi-faceted approach to their values. These partnerships and their local network connect them to many different approaches to their shared values of gender equality and women's rights. I argue that informal, non-bounded networks emerge out of a discourse surrounding these shared values of women's rights and gender equality that connect these actors that take different approaches to these values. I conclude by arguing that these discursive networks are transnational and feminist, allowing collaboration and intervention stemming from within and beyond the borders of Senegal. However, my analysis advocates for a transnational feminist praxis where these networks can become politicized by recognizing power relations and structures of oppression at both global and localized levels to engage in a process of empowerment that happens beyond borders as well.



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