

BEYOND THE ‘GENIUS OF SUFFERING’: THE PARADOX OF AN ALIENATED BORDER REGIME - REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN CROSS-BORDER DAGANA (SENEGAL-MAURITANIA)

ABOUBAKR TANDIA

Gaston Berger University of Saint-Louis
tandiaaboubakr@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT This article explores the nature and role of border regimes from the perspective of refugee regimes and integration. It looks at refugees as part of a border people whose agency informs the close relationship between border and refugee regimes. It analyses the transformative potential and achievements of refugee practices in local integration and their effects on borders and on refugee regimes. Focusing on the experience of a refugee community based in the cross-border zone of Dagana between Senegal and Mauritania, it contends that refugees are agentless even in the context of a rigid boundary regime. On the contrary, as authentic and legitimate actors of local integration, refugees participate in the transformation of host communities and the border regions they live in.

Introduction

Partition has never been an absolute reality in Africa. As in many other places in the world, people permanently challenge state borders through various social, cultural, economic and political activities (Asiwaju, 1985). Notwithstanding this breakthrough into the enquiry of post-colonialism, some groups of people are still deemed unable to significantly challenge state borders. Because they are minorities residing outside or inside state borders, though most of the time systematically settling along or across them, refugees for example have been portrayed as deprived of agency in bordering processes. Implicitly problematic is the assumption that while border regimes define refugee regimes it is inversely unlikely that refugees have much to do with border regimes.

This article “goes against this trend” by cross-fertilising a growing literature within refugee and border studies with empirical observations in a refugee and borderland context. Building on the social historical perspective of this context, this research brings out the agency and impact of refugees in border regions and regimes. It addresses the implications on the nature and role of borders of the integration of Mauritanian refugees in Northern Senegal. The key question is how such integration has been possible despite a structurally closed border regime. The first part characterises the borderland regime in cross-border Dagana between Senegal and Mauritania and the subsequent refugee regime it has yielded. The second section analyses the settlement and integration of Mauritanian refugees in Northern Senegal, and specifies the way and the extent to which refugees are involved in their integration.

Map 1: Border regions of the Senegal River Valley



Source: Google © 2012. Reworked by A. Tandia.

Cross-border Dagana: twin-towns broken apart by deportation

Of importance in this section about the refugee problem and asylum regime is how the boundary regime has impacted borderland interactions. Rather than cooperation and integration, patterns of “alienation” and “coexistence” (Martinez, 1994) prevail at the same time, each in turn depending on concrete situations. The historical instability of the border regime is such that borderlanders and other border crossers are never able to foresee the disruption of border flows, or even anticipate bilateral crises.

In cross-border Dagana – both in the town of Dagana-Senegal and in the rural villages of Gaé and Gani – consequences in the borderland regime basically crystallise in the perceived “national divide” based on the cultural and even racial (re)bordering that policy has been nurturing between Beydan, Haratin, and Negro-Africans (Fulani, Wolof, and Soninke) within Mauritania and amongst nationals of neighbouring countries (Fresia, 2006; Santoir, 1998). Though disheartening to borderlanders (Dagana had been the main trading and administrative post of the colonial administration and was made a town at independence),³⁶ the borderland regime is described as follows by the Prefect of Dagana-Senegal:

The crossing of the river is determined by a *convention* that has been signed at the level of governments of the neighbouring states. We sensitise our peoples to

³⁶ The former village was made a commune on 1 February 1960 and Makha Sarr from the Parti Socialiste (PS) at the time was elected first deputy and mayor of the town.

prompt them to use the *normal tract* in order to circulate freely without prejudice to the *sovereignty* of states. The normal route is to request from the prefecture a *circulation permit* and pay a CFA150 fee. Despite such measures, we find it hard to avoid disputes as clandestine crossing is favoured by the locals, though the gendarmerie and the border police as well as the customs are there to ward off violations and smuggling. Local councils around here also indulge in sensitisation to foster *statutory circulation*. (M. Sane, Prefecture of Dagana-Senegal, 1 August 2011)

This reflects a situation of coexistence where neighbouring states reduce their tensions to a manageable level, “tolerate violations of their sovereignty along borders, as long as these violations are not made public and do not become part of political conflicts” (Nugent, 2008: 495; Donnan and Wilson, 1999: 51), and *public* here meaning inter-state and political conflicts referring to bilateral skirmishes. Patterns of coexistence are most of the time reduced to illicit interactions, through a repressive regime of border policing, as suggested in the discourse of the Prefect of Dagana-Senegal:

The problem is that clandestine crossing is a guise for smuggling. But we don't spare our *sanctions* as we must *preserve our national economy*. We are doing our best to deal with this plight though we know it is not possible to eradicate it! We give firm orders about that to *crush trouble-makers* and contain harms on national economy. If it happens that nationals from either country violate statutory regulations, through joint action or not, *we make sure that the law is effective*. (M. Sane, Prefecture of Dagana, 1 August 2011)

Interactions never happen legally and no cooperation exists as it used to, apart from a few contacts before the arrival of Ould Taya in 1984. Serving on the spot since 1996, the Secretary of the Municipality of Dagana-Senegal acknowledges this pattern of coexistence:

Since my arrival I have never attended a meeting of representatives of the neighbouring constituencies of Dagana-Mauritania and Dagana-Senegal. I am not aware of any organism or authority of our commune charged with such collaborative tasks with the other bank. On the contrary, even if worse, there is no contact, though seemingly peace has come back between the two countries... Hey! I must say that is just apparent! I must acknowledge that there is still a feeling of distrust and defiance on both sides. In reality, the impression is that since 1989 the page has not been turned over for good. Indeed we have very limited encounters and it's all about crossing the river. Besides that, there is nothing else! (Y. Samb, Dagana-Senegal, 2 August 2011)

A sound difference exists on border regimes in urban and rural cross-border Dagana. While illegality is common to both border areas, in the rural border village of Gaé (5 km away to the north of Dagana Senegal) and Gani (300 m on the other bank opposite Gaé) a clandestine crossing post is tolerated by the Municipality of Tékane, 12 km to the east on the right bank, and looked after by the Senegalese local council. The reasons for this rural exception are mainly economic and have to do with patron-client relationships linking the latter with government officials and business men in the heartland:

The Mauritanian Government prefers to turn a blind eye to this situation that is the result of local arrangements that regard notabilities and formal authorities. The clandestine landing stage is close to the national road while cross-border trade, agriculture and fishing depend a lot on its existence. People do farming, fishing and trade along and across the river. Fishing is more rewarding in Mauritanian

waters and fishing agreements at government level are favourable to borderlanders since as they concern only maritime fishing. This clandestinely arranged order does not encourage cross-border cooperation between administrative authorities, exactly because it would be questioned. The bulk of cross-border trade is illicit around here. Inhabitants of Gaé who work in Gani send back money to their families in the form of provisions and goods that are cheaper there. The closure of this landing stage would be seriously damaging to the fragile order around here as we are still facing the challenges of deportation and Mauritanian soldiers just left in 2007. Some returnees have their kids still going to school in Gaé where we in Gani cross over to go to for a dispensary. Ours here is 12 km away and expensive.³⁷ (I. Seck, Village Chief, Gani, 18 July 2010)

As a manifestation of this unstable border regime, the current crisis between Mauritania and Senegal on trade and transportation is seen as falling under the exclusive authority of governments.³⁸ Local authorities on both sides – they are never seen around in Dagana-Mauritania – simply handle daily emergencies and struggle against smuggling. It was in this context that the deported of the 1989 events moved from one side to the other along with other “refugees” newly resettled from other parts of Mauritania and Senegal. Accordingly, how such alienated coexistence is perceived by borderlanders and how such perceptions resurface and circulate across the border is of much relevance to refugee settlement, agency, integration and eventual impacts on the border regime.

The genius of success: from deportation to integration

After a brief introduction to the settlement of refugees in Dagana-Senegal and Dagana-Mauritania (for the returnees of 2010), we will link this borderland regime to the asylum regime that has developed from the policy framework of the relief industry, all the more as both regimes are drivers of refugee integration in the borderland.

Exiles at “home”

Santoir (1990: 587) pinpointed the strong cultural and linguistic similarities across the border. Invoking these cultural patterns, Marion Fresia (2006: 2) notes about Fulani refugees in Ndioum and Matam, respectively 95 km and 383 km to the east, that they “did not arrive in an unknown place”. Just as their forefathers, farmers as well as cattle breeders used to come and go across the river, from one bank to the other, where they had their various livelihoods. However, the off-loading of exiles as of 1989

³⁷ But there is another strong variable that structures this local order-making which is religion. Gaé is a religious town founded in 1826 by Madickou Koura Guèye Fall after a forced migration from Gani, formerly called Kajaar and inhabited by the Wolof and kin of Mandickou. Today Black Africans in Gani are allied with leaders of southern Mauritania Sufi brotherhoods. Today Gaé hosts one of the most important religious events in Senegal for the Tidjania brotherhood whose founder Cheikh El Hadj Malick Sy was born in this border village in 1855 on the day French colonial army led by Faidherbe invaded Gaé.

³⁸ The Mauritanian government has recently decided – the official reason is illegal immigration and security policy – that Senegalese transporters cannot cross the border in Rosso anymore. Senegalese transporters have fiercely insisted that their government apply a reciprocity measure, which is likely to happen given the strength of national union, unless Mauritania defers its policy move. The case is still pending and is awaiting a durable written resolution as we write.

prefigured the complexity of the refugee problem in Dagana, as many among them were not “refugees” in the conventional sense of the term.

Refugee figures and settlements

The situation in Dagana-Senegal does not really differ much from those in other places of the River Valley. Just as the sites of Thillé Boubacar (183 km eastward), Ndioum and Matam, (Fresia, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009; Marty, 2003; Santoir, 1990, 1998; Seck, 1991), Dagana-Senegal had its share of exiles estimated at 3,000 in urban settlements and 1,000 in rural Gaé (Trémolières and Gnisci, 2004: 30). Among them was a first group of deported (Black African nationals of Mauritania having but remote ties with local Senegalese hosts), a second group of repatriated (nationals of Senegal who resided and had jobs in Mauritania) and a third group of “intruders” or “expelled” populations (deemed to be nationals of Senegal, but many of whom had both nationalities, among them “cross-border peasants” (Seck, 1991, 2005) who had farming land on the right bank claimed by the Nouakchott Government (Santoir, 1998: 107). This influx does not only concern exiles from the other side in Dagana-Mauritania, but also “refugees” from other parts of Mauritania relocated to this border town from the Senegalese cities of Thiès and Dakar.³⁹

The site of the town of Dagana-Senegal we worked on was a cluster of a couple of camps whose sociological differences are not only evocative of the politicised dimension of the refugee problem and how it resembles ethnic trimming of the state apparatus in Mauritania. This variation in profiles and settlements also indicates how difficult the refugee problem would become when appropriated by host communities and political structures. The first camp, Dagana 1, to be set up was named “camp des autres” (the “others” camp) gathering illiterates and the bulk of the Wolof and some Fulbe herders. The second camp, Dagana 2, was called “camp des intellectuels” (the “intellectuals” camp), in comparison to the illiterate status of the “others”, because it contained deported civil servants and literate, educated Senegalese from the public or business sector in Mauritania. Ethnically, this “elite” camp was composed of the bulk of the Toucouleur whose political leadership at the fore of the whole refugee movement made them stand out. A few among the deported in this camp were former farmers along with most of the Senegalese intruders and repatriated. Another distinction is between those who were totally despoiled (intellectuals and Fulbe stock breeders), those who were warned of unrest and were able save some baggage, and those who left before the events with property and baggage (Santoir, 1990: 587). There were none from the last group in the Dagana-Senegal urban camps.

³⁹ Overall the influx of the whole administrative region of Dagana-Senegal was settled in 47 sites amongst the 280 existing along the border (Fresia, 2006, 2009) (see Lindstrom, 2002: 20; Santoir, 1998: 107).

As regards rural Gaé, M. Sarr refugee and former agent of the Senegal United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) office and the NGO Office Africain pour le Développement et la Cooperation (OFADEC)-Senegal meaningfully captures the situation as follows:

We had a lot of predicaments to face on arrival and they pertained to the way things happened there in 1989. I would say that there is God's will behind the events. Yet many people did not take time to realise that. They just rose up and started butchering and humiliating the luckier and expropriating them, without showing any respect to the human beings they were. Mauritania considered all the deported as nationals of Senegal; that is why it immediately broke ties with them here. It had expelled its own citizens! Like my father, I was born there on the right bank in the village of Gani and grew up there and knew no other place prior to deportation. Can you imagine when one day someone wakes you up and asks you to belong and live somewhere you know nothing about?" (M. Sarr, Gaé, 17 July 2010).

The refugee regime: politicisation and the humanitarian stalemate

As a result of the borderland regime described in the previous section, the refugee regime in cross-border Dagana has been politicised by the web of actors involved from local to national and global levels. Arguably, this is perhaps the most prominent pattern of the refugee situation there as in all the other sites from Saint-Louis to Bakel. Of particular note is the illustrative fact that politicisation started from deportation in the sense that the "campaign of terror" bred by the national identity contention induced the confiscation and/or destruction of birth certificates of expelled nationals (Lindstrom, 2002: 20). As they say, refugees did not flee war, drought or famine (Santoir, 1998: 117): "we are nationals of a country which has never made efforts to accommodate us as if it had never considered us as belonging there" (O. Bâ, Chief Nurse, dispensary of the camp of Dagana 2, 16 July 2010).

At national level, both governments not only kept the relief system on the lead, but also tightly handled the refugee associations and political organisations in Mauritania and Senegal. Because they are deemed to be the most politically "dangerous" population in the camps, the refugees of the "elites' camp" in Dagana 2 were infiltrated and kept under close intelligence watch by the Mauritania and Senegal governments (Fresia, 2006). The Mauritanian government tried to spread division amongst refugees in order to tone down the national resonance of their ethnic nationalist mobilisation at the sites of Senegal by delaying the organisation of the census of refugees and making it drag on from 1992 and 1995. Most refugees believe that the "selective repatriation" of the early 90s was a government strategy oriented towards this end, while today "organised repatriation" has been blocked over the issue of reparations. Reparation would entail despoiling new riches and political clients that count for the weakened military and intellectual ruling ethnicity.⁴⁰ The Senegalese government on the other hand was seeking diplomatic and

⁴⁰ This explains the current numerous border crises with Senegal. Commercial decisions are directed by business shares for these elite and local patrons (new wealth) and clients (franchised Haratin and some Soninke and Marabouts) in Nouakchott and border towns of the River Valley like Dagana, Richard-Toll and mostly Rosso on both banks of the river.

strategic leverage on Mauritania by instrumentalising refugee organisations and political mobilisation through sponsors or by depriving them, depending on the nature of bilateral relations and the global context. M. Harouna, a former civil servant who now teaches in the elites camp of Dagana 2, gives a description of state strategies within the refugee regime:

Senegal created OFADEC-Senegal to replicate and thwart OFADEC-Mauritania and both structures are dedicated to attracting external aid and influencing the UNHCR. Senegal saw refugees as a lever to weaken and put pressure upon its *rival-neighbour Mauritania* on the issue of the river waters. In turn, Mauritania could see the question of repatriation as just a threat to the national Arabisation project. As a matter of fact Mauritania will never take us back! Every country might as well spy on the UNHCR and sabotage its mission to its own neighbourhood politics. (H. Mansour, Dagana-Senegal, 19 July 2010).

From the perspective of the UNHCR and NGOs the disengagement of the former and retrieval or handover of the latter to local associations and governments is due not only to the drying up of funds (Trémolières and Gnisci, 2004: 30),⁴¹ but mainly to political pressure from western donors who played on aid as a lever to direct Nouakchott's foreign policy and internal politics – i.e. the Israel-Palestine issue and democratisation options (Santoir, 1998: 114). Neither the Senegal or Mauritania government wanted to recognise refugees so as not to upset the neighbour (Fresia, 2006, 2009; Santoir, 1998: 113). Refugees' provisions were rationed,⁴² decreasing from 12 kg per person in 1989 to 9 kg in 1993 and 7.5 kg before a complete stop in 1995. Some NGOs like the Red Cross felt they were “of hindrance to the UNCHR and contending governments” as complains Vieux Diop (Dagana-Senegal, 18 July 2010) from the local Red Cross office of Dagana.

Several justifications (a new resettlement phase replaces emergency measures for some donors like the World Food Program – WFP) were given to the disengagement of the UNHCR and western donors to conceal a strategy aimed at forcing refugees into repatriation in 1992. Ultimately, this was meant to hide or suppress the humanitarian “black mark” and solve a conflict that was proving to be an increasingly serious threat to political democratisation in the post-Cold War context and foreign direct investments that had been achieved in the framework of new externally driven privatisations.⁴³ There was a poorly hidden intention of major external actors to keep the refugee problem invisible and win donors' favour. On a local scale, peoples and authorities showed an undeniable promptness to assist when relief interventions and subsequent channelling of donor funding were handed over by humanitarian NGOs (OFADEC-Senegal, Red Cross).

⁴¹ In Dagana-Senegal and other places along the left bank, the World Food Program is deemed as to have defected the refugees, even though it had been funding collection for the UNHCR and local NGOs (See also Trémolières and Gnisci, 2004: 25).

⁴² Provisions consist of 15 kg of red sorghum, sugar, salt and a litre of cooking oil.

⁴³ This explains why the European Union (EU), probably dragged along by France, was often sanctioning Mauritania and putting pressure on Senegal.

These asymmetries in political priorities consequently left many issues either unattended or unresolved. Despite the 1991 Bissau agreement secretly patronised by France (Santoir, 1998: 103), the 1989 border dispute that led to the massacres has been forgotten. Hence the failure of selective repatriation: among the 2,000 thought to have left Dagana-Senegal, many have returned, while another few are plying between the two countries on circular and short trips. Obviously, this humanitarian stalemate leaves us with the question of how integration has been going since 1989 and how refugees and local hosts have been responding to the underlying border and refugee regimes that have clearly affected local borderland processes and refugees. A peculiar concern is how this response transpires in refugees' integration and agency and to what extent it has impacted and triggered any changes in these regimes.

Refugee integration: practising the border, transforming the borderland

Integration in cross-border Dagana is a social process in which the austerity of the refugee regime as described above concurs with the refugees' own perceptions of formal relief policy and experience of deportation and the host communities' appropriative hospitality.

Approaching local integration

"Locality" indicates the borderland space as a "centre", the core scale, of policy and practice of different actors, of course without negating the externalities induced in this dynamic. Therefore, the logics and scale of integration are at the same time cross-border, national and transnational. Besides the geospatial aspect of local integration as perceived here, a social-historical dimension involves much more than in situ and day-to-day inclusive experiences of refugees (Jacobsen, 2001; Valtonen, 2004). Policy outcomes or values of such day-to-day asylum processes may indeed derive much from wider policies of order making than mere relief as suggested by Jacobsen's definition (2001). As it manifests itself on the borderlands and through the variety of refugee figures and spaces (crossing returnees), local integration does not preclude either indefinite settlement in the host community (Crisp, 2004) or repatriation in the country of origin (Polzer, 2008a). Permanent asylum and repatriation can be coterminous in borderland settings where they may be linking in a vicious circle.⁴⁴ In this case, local integration seems more empirical than normative, contrary to what Crisp (2004) and Jacobsen (2001) suggest. Instead, it is a "social and political process of negotiating" modalities of social capital and cohesion such as inclusion, connections, possibilities, opportunities, and resources (Strang and Ager, 2004: 596-99; also see Polzer 2008a: 3). In the case of borderlands and border peoples, these elements suggest that refugee and host communities

⁴⁴ In particular, when as in cross-border settings, both country of origin and host country offer different opportunities, like some peace and stability' in the first country and different opportunities such as secured property and safety (Crisp, 2004).

favour flexibility and opportunism in their social encounters, as well as socio-historical assets such as shared memory and culture.

In a more systematic way, local integration refers first of all to more than assumed conformity or non-compliance with policy frameworks. It is a political process of *incorporating* exiles into a social and political cross-border community. Second, it may refer to *local actors* and their *interests* who may be both formal external masters of order-making and various internal actors of the border landscape. It is therefore about *power relations* between stakeholders. Third, local integration involves *resources* that refugees locate, mobilise and expect from the immediate host borderland community and space, or from remote transnational outsources. Fourth, it is about the *tactics and strategies* implied by resourcing processes and power relationships above. Fifth, local integration as a political dynamic cannot therefore preclude *identity resources* which are status and attached rights of refugees.

Among the *sectors* of local integration, “identity processes” or identity strategies of resourcing borders and asylum regimes raise the issue of citizenship. On this point, integration does not mean assimilation or acculturation; it would be practically endangered if reduced to that (Strang and Ager, 2011: 592). However, more than a legal status, citizenship as a form of identity or belonging is a role of social engagement in civic and civil life without necessarily or exclusively resting on status and rights (Smyth, Stewart and Da Lomba, 2010: 412). Of particular importance is the comparative analysis that can be made of Polzer’s (2008a) wider framework. It has been useful in distinguishing between urban and rural peculiarities of local integration in cross-border Dagana. Arguably, the transformative potential of refugee integration is better revealed through the comparability of local integration in different border and refugee settings and processes.

Refugees’ political awareness: from assistance to emancipation

We already hinted at it and local integration is incepted at the interstices between the austerity of the asylum regime and the perceptions of this regime by refugees and hosts. We will now highlight the way in which perceptions of this austerity shape and make sense of the personal initiatives and the process of refugees’ involvement in local integration.

This limitation and the previously experienced origin and character of deportation have been structuring of the refugees’ perception and subsequent awareness of relief and of the challenges and responses to it.

The UNHCR can only help refugees survive from immediate emergency crisis. They did help us for a certain time, but since as it has stopped its emergency assistance since 1995 refugees make their living now by their own possibilities and means. (Harouna, M., Dagana-Senegal, 18 July 2010).

Reminiscent of the origin and violent character of deportation, the issue of national identity is also championed in the construction of perceptions of relief policy and the motivations for integration. The

principle of assistance as such is resented and discarded shortly after (re)settlement of intellectuals from the elites camp in Dagana-Senegal, all the more because there was no welfare state as in northern Europe (Valenta and Bunar, 2010).

We cannot forget that despite the hospitality kindly offered over here, space is limited in Gaé. We cannot all settle and live here for good and undertake our various activities. However, we do not pretend that we will be provided everything we have been offered here in Senegal. This country is not to be compared with Mauritania in terms of safety and mental and material wellbeing. And here we can at least speak Wolof with no fear. (M. Sarr, Gaé, 17 July 2010).

We want to be heard, we need people to feel we are coming back home. We are aware that we need to indulge in local politics if we want to be considered as a community that has its specific challenges and its own interests to safeguard! (F. Sarr, returned female refugee, Gani, 18 July 2010)

These accounts are cross-cutting on the assessment of the refugee problem and subsequent formal assistance in terms of how they triggered the refugees' self-awareness and political consciousness that drive them to get organised and involved in local politics before and after their return. While for remaining refugees in urban Dagana-Senegal and rural Gaé limited resources and possibilities count in spurring ideas of self-help, returnees on the right bank in the village of Gani show a more ambivalent experience. Though yearning for self-mobilisation and re-integration in their home country, F. Sarr displays a sort of returned identity of self-defence and preservation. Her attitude may be explained by a lack of consideration in her home country on the one hand, and by opportunities still existing in the host country on the other, which were decisive in shaping her seemingly independent attitude. This prompts us to consider the extent to which conditions in the host community influenced refugees' imaginations and attitudes towards local integration.

Local community integration championed: hospitality and appropriation

Valtonen (2004) insisted that in the analysis of the processes of local integration attention should be also directed towards the institutional environment of the receiving society in relation to the capacities of the settling refugees. In cross-border Dagana, the integration of refugees draws not only from societal resources but also from local government and traditional powers. In the rural villages of Gaé and neighbouring Gani, which share a common attachment to religious capital and affinity that tie both communities, refugees benefited more from cultural resources than in the urban Dagana in Senegal and Mauritania. Polzer (2008a: 11) indicated how an analysis of resources enables us to look at patterns of "co-ethnic integration" as involving "existing resources such as language, cultural norms, reciprocity, kinship ties, common spiritual-religious origins (ancestors), etc., which act along with more material considerations". Yet, co-ethnics are more widely thought here in terms of racial or ethnic identities that coexist, mix or merge into borderland cultural and socio-spatial belonging and solidarities, between the Wolof rural villages of Gaé and Gani on the one hand, and between Fulani and Wolof in the towns of

Dagana-Mauritania and Dagana-Senegal on the other. This means that hospitality is a pervading pattern that triggers integration, as shown in the accounts below.

On our arrival in Senegal, it was as if we were *coming from hell to enter heaven*. To be honest, thank God, the President of the rural council and his people welcomed, relieved and accommodated us. They told us we were coming *home*, and that we were the *same people*. You see? As a deported or a stateless person, one loses confidence, calm and much more. He, *the President who came along with community elders gave us back such states of mind* that enabled us to keep our face up and *uphold* our fate. We crossed the river from Medina Salam⁴⁵ to Gaé." (M. Sarr, Gaé, 17 July 2010).

I don't know what the situation was in the other sites in Senegal, but in Dagana-Senegal we were given *everything we could expect from local authorities and the people* around here. We were given a developed site to build on, which was our main challenge and utmost need. We now live on the site we were given. It is totally safe. If a refugee and a local are driven to the gendarmerie by a dispute, *the gendarme doesn't care who is from where*. We feel as equals with locals in Dagana! We have built strong ties with our local host populations and we feel really integrated and attended. (H. Mansour, Dagana-Senegal, 19 July 2010).

Of course, as noted elsewhere by Strang and Ager (2011: 598), signs of recovered self-esteem and confidence for refugees manifested in the hospitality of hosts are as a source of emotional support. But more interestingly, there are mental and experiential dimensions of early-stage integration implying cognitive processes of cultural discovery and learning. Besides host-exile constructions of *home* and *self*, refugees develop a critical experience of host political culture exemplified in their perceptions of local governmental responsiveness, rule of law and justice. Actually, the reference to "home-state" through the comparison between home-land (hell) and home-place (heaven) and the story about the gendarme's righteous stance in justice delivery are constructed as imaginaries of a model of a "good public morality" that has to travel home (from Senegal to Mauritania) where statehood is precisely not ruling out of law and justice.

While it is true that the effectiveness of integration is influenced by experiences from the moment of arrival' (Strang and Ager, 2011: 595), hospitality is not the only incentive to such welcoming experiences. In some respects, it shrouds a more utilitarian relationship of hosts with the influx of exiles. As Bakewell (2000) and Polzer (2008a, 2008b) already explained about Zambian and South African borderland hosts of Mozambican refugees, the influx of refugees often means new opportunities. While refugees may constitute an input of manpower, attending them may add to the prestige of community elders and local councillors as well as administrative authorities. In addition, returnees are potential farmers to hire for elders who are important land owners and dealers as well as local business operators. In Gani, where 30 returnees have resettled from Gaé, hospitality goes with some utilitarian expectations on behalf of hosts:

⁴⁵ Medina Salam is the other name given to Gani. Actually it is the name used by Negro-Africans while Gani is a Beydan word cherished by Moors. Returnees from Gaé tend to identify it with the spot or district where they have been resettled, 3 km north of the border spot of Gani.

It is fair that we share the resources we have in here and which they contributed in the production for those who left Gani. It is equally normal that they share what they brought along, if they brought something. *Their provisions and food are something to be shared with kin and neighbours. That is how we have been living ever since.* However, cows and other equipment are reparations for the wrongs they suffered individually. These are their *personal fated property*. As a community we have set up this *arrangement* with them as soon as we are informed of their imminent return. (I. Seck, Gani, 18 July 2010).

No doubt that the sharing or exchanging of resources may be morally legitimised with regard to the social history of the same people of Gani and Gaé. However, it may be a kind of regulatory arrangement drawn from cultural conventions to break the inconveniences of their return, as the idea of leaving returnees with their “personal fated property” testifies to that. Indicative of new power relationships in social interactions, the emergence of new regulations, arrangements and identity or cognitive experiences often epitomise social transformations that it would be interesting to deal with in further studies.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the agency of Mauritanian refugees in northern Senegal in the process of their local integration. The aim was, on the one hand, to understand the relationships between refugee and border regimes, and, on the other, to demonstrate how despite their being a socio-political “minority”, refugees actively took part in their integration. In effect, it comes out that the relationship between a border regime and a refugee regime is not unidirectional.

Though they have been caught by a 22-year asylum regime in which they did not escape or challenge all the structural and formal determinants, refugees appropriated local integration as well as the underlying refugee and border regimes by means of various resources in the border region and from national and international spheres where they are linking with their diaspora. It is true that this has not led to functional or complete recognition as expected and claimed by the exiles' political leadership, even after two waves of selective and organised repatriation which was officially put to an end on 5 January 2011.

Effective refugee agency largely illustrates the need to go beyond the warehousing paradigm of refugee integration. Posing the hypothesis of a post-humanitarian academic and policy paradigm of refugee studies may yet require a deeper understanding of the ways in which borders and refugees are much related. Situational and comparative analyses of this link have been offered by other studies which we tried to invite in a new empirical context. Like these studies, borders are admittedly socially and historically uprooted instruments of state policy, mainly in contexts where there are loose or inexistent limits to state power and inter-state enmity, as is the case in Senegal and Mauritania. This raises the ethical issues about borders in a context of cultural “debordering” and political “rebordering” entailed by forced migration. In this guise, border regimes challenge both the moral economy of African regional integration and unity and the trajectory of state-building in Mauritania national.

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