Les cameleons de la finance populaire au Sénégal et dans la Diaspora : dynamique des tontines et des caisses villageoises entre Thilogne, Dakar et la France

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English Summary

This dissertation is an attempt to explain the impressive dynamics of popular financial arrangements in Senegal and among the Senegalese Diaspora in France. I did my research in three different areas: in Thilogne, a village of 5,000 inhabitants in the Senegalese river valley, in Dakar, the capital of Senegal and in France among the Senegalese immigrants. For different people, Popular Financial Arrangements (PFA) are the most used tools to save, to get access to credit and for insurance. Contrary to what many people think, PFA are not used only by poor but also "middle class" and rich. Depending on the economic situation of the participants, the contributions vary considerably from one tontine to another. While the participants at tontines of neighbourhoods in Thilogne contribute rarely over 500 F CFA, participants at tontines in markets and work places in Dakar, and among Senegalese immigrants in France contribute can easily reach 100,000 F CFA per individual. The success of Tontines (ROSCAs or ASCRAs) and Village funds and the failure of the classic financial system (banks, insurance companies, official social security and financial establishments) raises some challenging and urgent questions.

What explains the massive participation of Senegalese, and particularly women, to Tontines? What are the variations, if any, between tontines organised in rural and urban areas and those we find among Senegalese immigrants? What are the motivations to participate in these financial arrangements? For what purposes the participants use the money they accumulate in tontines? How and to what extend participants in tontines combine, on the one hand, economic logic, calculation and accumulation strategies and, on the other hand, social goals, especially solidarity and social capital? How the participants succeed or fail to build, maintain and perpetuate trust relations? Which strategies are used to influence trust? What are the relations between popular financial arrangements and the banking system?

For many researchers the plausible explanation for the popularity of informal financial practices is the exclusion of the great majority of Senegalese households from the banking system. The financial dualism theories present the development of popular financial arrangements as the result of the incapacity of banks to satisfy the large majority
of households in developing countries. In Senegal only 10% of the active population has access to the banking system. My research shows that the limited access to banks is only a partial explanation for the massive adhesion to popular financial institutions. In fact, access to banks has always been very limited and popular financial arrangements have been dominant in the Senegalese society.

The success of popular financial arrangements in comparison with the banking system is due to their extreme flexibility which gives the participants a considerable capacity to adapt to various socio-economic situations. Thus, tontines attract altogether rural and urban people, men and women, poor and rich, etc. Each of these categories of people finds in these popular financial arrangements original solutions to their specific financial and social needs. Like chameleons, PFA change to fit the means and needs of their participants: from the housewives in the village of Thilogne, to the well travelled Senegalese women in Paris, and to various informal entrepreneurs, women and men, in the neighbourhoods, markets ans work places of Dakar.

Some analysts thought that these forms of financial arrangements are intermediary in the development from tradition and modernity. My research shows that tontines and village associations existed in the pre-colonial era. They are not the result of the shock between the traditional economy and the modern one. It is true that, the monetization process which goes hand in hand with the modern economy played a major role in the transformation from labour and handcraft product exchange to money exchange in PFA. But, these changes do not lead, as Geertz think, to the transformation of popular financial arrangements to real banks. On the contrary, they lead to an original mixture between economic or financial logic and social preoccupations. The motivations of participants are different from one participant to another. While some participants satisfy economic and financial needs, others focus on social capital formation and solidarity in times of need.

Contrary to what many researchers concluded, popular financial arrangements (PFA) are not only used for luxurious consumption or for the payment of familial ceremonies such as marriages, funerals or birth celebration. My research shows that tontines play major role in financing the micro enterprises of the informal economic sector. In market places, the money mobilised by tontines is used to create income generating activities or to expand and diversify existing enterprises. For most of the
participants of PFA in market and working places as well as among Senegalese immigrants in France, popular financial arrangements constitute an import instrument for investment in economic activities. When one looks at the large amount of money drained by these arrangements, the growing importance of their role in the financial landscape of developing countries like Senegal can be easily understood.

Trust relations between participants of Tontines is a key element. My research shows that trust is a result of a process of social relations building. I notice various strategies to prevent or to punish default in tontines. In neighbourhood tontines for example the leaders manipulate the lottery to prevent some people from getting the kitty at the first position because the later are considered as potential defaulters. The organisers privilege trustworthy persons by allocating to them the kitty at the first rounds. This shows that trust in tontines is based in some cases in mistrust or distrust and suspicion. Thus, trust is far from being inherent to the African societies as the conclusions of some authors seem to suggest.

With the international migration, popular financial arrangements are becoming more and more transnational. Village mutual funds are among the most well organised of these financial arrangements. While working within different countries and continents, people from the same village participate in same association. This association is called Village fund. It provides social security for migrants in their host society and finance many development projects in the village.

There is not a rigid separation between popular financial practices and the banking system as the financial dualism theories seem to defend. Dualism is the result of the fact that the great majority of financial transactions in developing countries take place outside the official financial system. The banks ignore and neglect small savings because of high transaction costs and low profits drawn from these savings. At the same time, the bank avoid the provision of credit to informal entrepreneurs and poor households because of high risk of non-repayment. The people excluded from the banking system create popular financial arrangements to satisfy their needs in terms of saving and credit. The parallel existence of these two systems is apprehended wrongly as a clear cut opposition by dualism theories.
In fact, my research shows many cases where we found an original combination between the two systems. The money collectors and the tontines' organisers in market places play a major role in the interface between popular financial arrangements and banks. They have bank accounts where they put the money they collect from small savers. In that way popular financial arrangements actors help in channelling small savings to the official financial system. This combination, as shown in my research findings, helps to reduce considerably the transaction cost for both the small savers and the banks.