

Abstract

Women play a prominent role as traders in the central market of the regional capital of Kaolack, a multi-ethnic, predominantly Wolof city in Senegal. This article examines gender and class in relation to the social uses of space that reproduce social hierarchy, while facilitating challenges to the dominant social order. Challenges take the form of activities such as smuggling, seen as an assertion of regional autonomy. The terms “center” and “periphery,” along with the concept of hegemony, are used to explore tensions between structures of domination and assertions of autonomy at both the macro and the micro levels. Wolof cultural values linking hierarchy to physical activity are important to this dynamic.

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Class and Gender: Social Uses of Space in Urban Senegal

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CLASS AND GENDER: SOCIAL USES OF SPACE IN URBAN SENEGAL

The central market in Kaolack, Senegal--called the Big Market in Wolof (marse bu mag)--is a focal point of economic activity for the city and the surrounding countryside. In and around the Big Market, women play an active and highly visible role as traders and entrepreneurs, as well as consumers. This article on women and trade in the city of Kaolack examines what Giddens (1984) calls the "regionalization" of social practice, that is, the way that social activities are spatially distributed. This may be described in terms of centers and peripheries, relevant on the regional, national, or international level in discussions of uneven development (Frank 1967; Smith 1984; Wallerstein 1979). At the same time, as Giddens (1984:130) argues, these concepts may also usefully be applied to the study of the face-to-face setting. The activities that take place at Kaolack's central market reveal center-periphery dynamics at both the "macro" and the "micro" levels.

Center-periphery relations reflect the tension between structures of domination and assertions of autonomy. This dynamic is a pivotal aspect of the concept of hegemony, described by Williams (1977:112) as the control exercised by dominant groups in a society which "is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own." This paper will examine how this process and its spatial dimensions affect the lives of the women and men who come together in the Big Market.

METHODOLOGY

From October 1980 to May 1982, while conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Kaolack, I made frequent trips to the Big Market. For three months in 1981, I carried out intensive participant-observation and open-ended interviews in the market, with the assistance of Bernard Birame Thiaré. The interviews were conducted in Wolof, with the exception of those that Mr. Thiaré carried out in Séréré, his native language, and translated into French or Wolof.

THE PHYSICAL SETTING

Located in one of the city's oldest and most densely populated neighborhoods, the Big Market is a sprawling assemblage of structures, which according to local accounts, is the largest market in West Africa. Its core is a collection of large halls with high ceilings built by the French during the colonial period, the perimeter defined by stucco walls topped with crenelated parapets and pierced by pointed-arch doorways. This central

structure is surrounded and largely obscured by a congeries of stalls, shelters, and tables, most of them erected over the years by the vendors themselves to expand the space designed by the French.

More recently, the municipal government has constructed neat rows of stalls on the outside edges of the market. In its present form, the market has emerged among its potentially antagonistic interests, with officially sanctioned structures and unauthorized construction coexisting side-by-side. Other dimensions of the social use of space in this West African city also reflect an ongoing tension between official and unofficial, dominant and oppositional, practices.

THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

Dakar, the national capital of Senegal, is clearly the most prominent central place in the politics and economics of the nation-state. At the same time, Kaolack is a central place in its own right, constituting an alternative locus of power. The relationship between Kaolack and its hinterland is directly reflected in seasonal changes that occur within the Big Market. The relative poverty or prosperity of the rural cultivators in the surrounding peanut basin is mirrored within the market by the fluctuating availability of goods, and in the cyclical presence or absence of vendors and their clientele. Again and again, the traders I talked with linked business in the market to the agricultural cycle, that is, the movement between the rainy season (nawet) when crops are grown and harvested, and the dry season (nor) when rural cultivators come into town--first to exchange the harvest's profits for merchandise, and later, as resources dwindle in the countryside, to look for work. Many said that the time immediately following the harvest (January, February, and March) was the only period of active commerce in the market, and that vendors operated at a loss the rest of the year.

Beyond individual effort and capabilities, the women who work in Kaolack's Big Market are faced with the constraints imposed by the relationship between business in town and the quality of the harvest in the countryside. "Nawet bi su baaxe njaay mi dinë neex" (If the rainy season is good, sales will be, too), says Mariama Seck, selling her wares from an open air table located at the street's edge across from the market. She has sold metal bowls and plastic household utensils there for five years. Buying and selling (jind ag jaay) is something, she says, that she was born into. Her mother was a vendor; Mariama watched her and learned as she was growing up. Mariama's own career as a trader began early on, and continued without interruption when she married a merchant. A woman with a quick wit and a considerable gift of gab, Mariama attributes success in the world of commerce in part to verbal facility: "Language is trade, talk is trade" Lámmiñ moy komers;

wax moy komers. The successful trader knows how to accept limitations; profits and losses go hand-in-hand, says Mariama. Even the smallest sale is not to be discounted; encountering difficulties, including the seasonal fluctuations in economic conditions that are shared by city residents and rural cultivators, a trader has to be ready to sell at a loss.

Center-periphery relations are directly experienced in the daily life of the people of Kaolack. While the seasonal ebb and flow of merchandise and revenues affects all of the traders in the Big Market, some of them experience the link between the city and the country more directly. After the harvest is in, women and men from rural villages come to town in search of income to sustain their families during the dry season. Many have come to the Big Market year after year, working sometimes for a well-to-do urban patron, sometimes on their own account. They buy and sell whatever they can, trying to turn necessity into opportunity. Some of the cultivators who come to Kaolack remain in the city, when the next rainy season begins, rather than returning to their village. Persistent drought, coupled with soil depletion from more than a century of peanut cultivation, has intensified the impoverishment of the rural populace.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND THE USE OF SPACE IN THE BIG MARKET

Space is at a premium in the market; its use is controlled by the city government, whose agents circulate through the market on a regular basis to collect vendors' taxes. Those with the wherewithal to do so pay 2500 cfa per month (about US\$12.50 in 1981) for the use of permanent stalls, or suk. Traders of lesser means pay the daily jutti (probably from the English "duty") of 100 cfa. The latter group includes the vendors seated on the ground around the market's periphery, whose only territorial claim is the tarp or piece of cloth on which their wares are displayed. Still others, ambulant traders (the women, men, and children known as bana-bana) may try to evade the tax collectors by staying on the move, carrying all of their merchandise with them, stacked carefully atop the head or on a hand-held enameled metal tray, or festooned along an outstretched arm. The use of space within the market defines a hierarchy among the vendors, reinforced by the agents of governmental authority.

Just as larger-scale political-economic relations in Senegal can be described in terms of the spatial configuration center-periphery, this model is also useful in depicting the politics of local socio-spatial practice. Most of the well-established traders in the Big Market occupy sites in the market's interior or center, within the structure originally built by the French during the colonial period, where the rooms are illuminated by skylights set into the tall ceilings. These are the vendors whose level of prosperity permits them to pay the municipal vendor's tax on a

monthly basis in return for an added measure of security on a day-to-day basis. Some of the traders in the center of the Big Market have occupied the same site for thirty years or more.

In addition to the centrality of his or her worksite, a vendor's status can be gauged as relatively permanent, based on the material used to demarcate the site and to the ongoing presence of the vendor. Low status on both counts would accrue, for example, to the women from rural areas working in the Big Market during the dry season, who sit on the ground at the periphery of the marketplace, their worksites defined solely by the remnant of cloth or patch of ground on which they have placed their merchandise. A taabulkaat--a person who sells goods that are displayed on a free-standing table--would enjoy a higher status than an ambulant trader or a vendor seated on the ground, but still a lower status than one of the occupants of the permanent stalls.¹

The cultural moorings for the socio-spatial hierarchy described above lie in Wolof ideas about the relationship between status and activity or physical movement (Irvine 1974). Restraint (kersa), both verbal and physical, is seen as a key element of high status demeanor. At the same time, wealth (alai) is also considered essential to the hospitality (teranga) that a person in an elevated position should extend. This presents a dilemma for many of the vendors in Kaolack's Big Market--actually a more pervasive contradiction for the people of Kaolack, within the context of the dominant Wolof culture. Except for those at the top of the social hierarchy, most traders, while pursuing the material gain necessary to acquire and maintain high status, have to engage at some point in behavior considered inappropriate to their elevated social standing.

Vendors working in peripheral or transitory locations--the more heavily trafficked sections of the Big Market--are constantly interacting with potential customers, bartering vigorously, often aggressively hailing passersby. According to one of these traders, a woman whose stall was on one of the sidewalks alongside the market, "Wax moy komers" (Talk is trade). Yet, the banter of active trading, not to mention the perambulations of the roving bana-bana, represent a level of activity which is in principle inconsistent with high status restraint.

The social geography of the Big Market reflects the centrifugal and centripetal impulses generated by this contradiction. The Big Market has its more secluded, less hectic center where well-situated, prosperous traders, such as women who sell bolts of cloth, are sought out by an established clientele. They have the wherewithal to conduct their sales in a less assertive, more restrained manner, thus demonstrating the restraint appropriate to high status. Selling more highly valued merchandise, they generally encounter customers less frequently than the more active, less securely placed traders; they also enjoy

a higher profit per transaction. Then there are those entrepreneurs who demonstrate an even greater degree of *kersa*, and thus of high status, by carrying out their trading activities largely through the intermediary services of subordinates, clients, or younger relatives.

The women traders in the Big Market who enjoy the material success and social standing described above are, of course, relatively few. For the others, working in the more public, less central areas of the market, their livelihood depends on the social hustle-bustle of active trading; their social practice speaks in a low status code. For some, involvement in more active forms of trade may be seen as a necessary stepping stone in their pursuit of higher status. This is consistent with the notion that, although social asymmetry is accepted as an ordering principle in Wolof social relations, it is not thought to fix any given individual into an immutable position in the hierarchy.

The life stories of some of the women working in the Big Market reveal a progression from more mobile or physically active forms of trade in their younger years, toward more leisurely, securely situated enterprises. One older woman described her start as a *bana-bana* during her girlhood, carrying trays of kola nuts through the Big Market. From there, she moved up the cultural hierarchy to a stationary position selling metal bowls and other utensils. Now she was comfortably installed in the interior of the market, selling bolts of luxury cloth. This is much better, she says, than the work she did when she was younger, which was "too tiring." The former work would also be considered inappropriate to a person of her status, which is indicated by her title, "Adjaratu," evidence that she has completed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

On the other hand, some of the Big Market traders, like Mariama Seck, respond to their cultural dilemmas by valorizing the way that traders use language as a tool for trade. "Language is trade; talk is trade," she says proudly, and goes on to say that her husband, also a trader, moves around so much that no one ever knows where he is. "He's like a bird, flitting from here to there." Here, then, is the oppositional voice, confronting head-on the contradiction between the dominant code that prescribes restraint and the realities of what most traders face day-to-day.

PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONS IN THE BIG MARKET

Patterns of patronage, often linking urban patrons and clients of rural origin, give rise to relations of autonomy and dependence among the traders in Kaolack's Big Market. Gender enters into the dynamics of patron-clientage in complex ways. Women and men may be either patrons or clients; most people occupy both positions, either in their relations with different people, or at different

points in their lives. At the bottom of the social hierarchy are those, often immigrants from rural areas, who apparently have no patron (kilifë) in the city to rely on. Still others from the rural hinterland depend directly on the largesse of a particular patron, which may be sustained over the long term.

The Wolof proverb "Xarum waay, gaynde waay" (A sheep to some, a lion to others), offers insight into the socio-spatial dynamics of clientelism. It refers to an individual's double positioning in the stratified Wolof social system; in reference specifically to patron-clientage, it speaks to the notion that nearly everyone occupies both the role of patron (Wolof) to some and the role of client to others. In spatial terms, this points to far-reaching patron-client networks, comprising a chain of enduring, face-to-face relationships stretching across a hierarchy of central places and their peripheries.

The practices of patron-clientage, shaped by the conditions of the immediate social, spatial environment, give rise to "folk models" based on

an equation of social grouping on the one hand and physical space or distance on the other.... [Patron-clientage] is based on the perception of a social gap, which is bridged by the patron or the "broker." In fact, it will be noted that this gap is a physical one, in many cases corresponding to the rural-urban gap itself (Kahn 1978:110-111).

Aida Dabo, the wife of a retired politician who is herself active in Kaolack party politics, has maintained a long-term patron-client relationship with a man named Ngor Fày. A member of the Séréré ethnic group from a village in the coastal region west of Kaolack, he speaks only a little Wolof. During the past ten years Fày has spent several dry seasons in Kaolack, working for Dabo. He is only one of the many clients, some from the countryside and some year-round residents of Kaolack, whom Aida Dabo supports.

Fày's relative autonomy in relation to his kilifë (patron) is evident in tracing the history of his dry season activities since his first employment with Aida Dabo. Fày began work for Dabo doing laundry in the dry season of 1972, after being introduced by a friend from his village who also worked for her. Since that time, for several years Fày has found ways to support his family while remaining in the countryside. One year he participated in a village gardening project. After this, he worked for two years as a laborer for the peanut cooperatives. The following year, he sold fresh fish in his village, taking either money or millet in exchange. Now, he says, with the bad harvests, there is neither millet nor money in his home region, and his own harvest this year

was negligible. So, once again, he has come back to Kaolack, and to the ongoing relationship with Aida Dabo.

Aida Dabo pays the monthly rent for the stall in the Big Market where Fày sells breakfast in the morning and cold drinks in the afternoon. The back wall is covered by colorful bands of distinctive strip cloth woven by the Njako weavers who also rely on Dabo's support.² She pays for the thread, offers them meals, and gives them a portion of the profits, once the cloth is sold. Njako cloth, highly prized, is expensive, though Fày says none has sold recently. Hand-painted on a board nailed overhead across the front of the stall is the message, "Cantine P.S. Adjaratu Aida Dabo Xaritu ñëpp." The slogan proclaims, first of all, that the proprietor of the shop, or cantine, is a loyal partisan of the ruling party, the Parti Socialiste. The honorific title adjaratu identifies Aida Dabo as a woman who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. It then makes the claim that she is "xaritu ñëpp," the friend of everyone.

To be a patron (kilifë) entails responsibilities as well as power or prestige. The term kilifë, which, in this instance, denotes the patron in a patron-client relationship, also refers to others held responsible for the well-being of their subordinates: husbands or male heads of household, elders, Muslim religious leaders. Aida Dabo describes her business in the Big Market as a means to meet the many obligations of her position. She is a prominent figure in the women's section of the Parti Socialiste in Kaolack, as well as the wife of an important retired politician. His past reputation and her ongoing involvement in politics bring constant and often costly demands for assistance.

Due to her husband's advanced age and failing health, the burden of meeting these demands falls on Aida Dabo herself, leading her to open the stall in the Big Market. This is her first venture into komers, the direct involvement in buying and selling merchandise; previously, she had only dealt in strip cloth, in her role as kilifë to the weavers. She wants to be able to accumulate enough money to stock her stall primarily with marsandis du yago "merchandise that doesn't spoil [such as plates and spoons] and more cloth." The food and beverages that Fày sells for Aida Dabo need to be constantly replenished, so that, she says, whatever she earns, she has to pay out again immediately.

Aida Dabo talks about the hardship of meeting her many obligations. Though a never-ending struggle, she sees it at the same time as a matter of honor, which she describes with such terms as varu, to be polite or well brought up, teggin, another word for politeness that also connotes discipline, and teranga, hospitality or fulfillment of one's social obligations. "Sonn naa waaye Yalla baax në," says Aida Dabo. (I am tired, but God is good.) These values are integral to the notion of kersa (honor, restraint), which is central to the politics of reputation and the social use

of space. It is important to note that it is through generosity to her subordinates, or clients, that Aida Dabo strives to distinguish herself among her equals, her potential political allies and rivals.

In the evenings, two of Aida Dabo's daughters take over Fày's role, preparing brochettes of lamb grilled over a small charcoal stove, and serving them with chilled beverages to the young civil servants who come after work to snack and socialize. As argued earlier, it would be inappropriate for a person of Aida Dabo's social standing to engage too directly in those activities of daily trade that Fày performs on her behalf. She therefore preserves the appearance of restraint appropriate to her position by relying on the services of her subordinates, both kin and clients.

Nevertheless, as the heat of the day and its commercial bustle give way to the relaxed sociability of the cool twilight hours, Aida Dabo herself sometimes makes an appearance. Perhaps the convivial evening atmosphere signals a shift toward a more intimate context, where she can appropriately receive acquaintances and associates.

The social uses of space shape the dynamics of patron-clientage, as the above examples demonstrate. Relations between patrons and clients reflect the cultural restrictions that the pursuit of kersa (honor) places on high-status individuals. At the same time, patron-clientage illustrates the concrete articulation of the urban-rural gap in daily social practice. The next section of the paper looks more closely at the elements of the regional political-economic system in which Kaolack and the surrounding hinterland are located.

TOWN AND COUNTRY: THE REGIONAL LANDSCAPE

The Big Market is located on the main road through town. Toward the north, it leads to the Garage Dakar, an open air lot where taxis depart from the national capital, Dakar, and beyond to the former capital, St. Louis, which is located near the border between Senegal and Mauritania. The roadway stretches southward past the market and the shopfronts that are concentrated in the central district of the city to the Garage N'oro. Along one end of this large, dusty lot, and down the adjoining streets, is a cluster of small restaurants known as pasyong (perhaps from the French pension), rows of adjacent wooden stalls where enterprising women sell hot food to weary travelers. At the Garage N'oro passengers bound for the surrounding rural communities climb aboard pickup trucks, their beds outfitted with canopies and benches. Here, too, is the waiting station for taxis and buses heading past the customs post at the edge of town toward The Gambia, and on to the Casamance Region of southern Senegal, beyond which lie Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.

Kaolack lies at the intersection between the north-south artery running past the Big Market, and the road and rail routes leading eastward to the terres neuves, the land made available for peanut production through construction of the railroad in the early part of the twentieth century. With Kaolack's location in the center of the peanut basin, the fortunes of city and hinterland are closely linked. At the same time, the city occupies an interstitial position between the national capitals of Senegal and The Gambia.

The transportation conduits that pass through Kaolack also connect the city and its hinterland with sources of goods and markets that present alternatives to legitimate trade. Smuggling in this peripheral region reflects the fragmentary character of centralized authority, with actors asserting their autonomy by stepping outside the state-controlled system. The widespread practice of smuggling--which involves women and men alike as both long distance and local traders--underscores the ongoing relations of autonomy and dependence between the state and the region in which Kaolack is located.

ALTERNATIVE HEGEMONIES: LEGAL AND ILLICIT TRADE

The size and vitality of the Big Market are an index of the city's status as a central place in the peanut-producing region in which it is located. The political-economic processes linking Kaolack to the surrounding communities of the peanut basin are clearly reflected in the annual cycle of activity in the Big Market, with the volume of transactions reaching a peak just after the peanut harvest and diminishing sharply a few months later. The number of vendors who work in the market, as well as the quantity and character of goods they sell, varies markedly according to the season.

The city is built along the banks of the Saalum River, which is actually an estuary of the Atlantic Ocean. Local inhabitants more astute, it would seem, than the European cartographers responsible for the river's misnomer, refer to the estuary as gèèi gi, the sea. During Kaolack's heyday in the 1920s and 1930s, the waterway was kept dredged and open for the ocean-going ships that transported peanuts from this inland trading center to overseas destinations and brought back manufactured goods. Today, peanuts are transported overland to the national capital; the port, now rarely dredged, is in desuetude, supplanted by the port of Dakar. Although eclipsed by the progressive centralization of power and resources in Dakar, Kaolack is still an important crossroads of traffic in people and products, both legal and illicit.

In the early decades of this century, the centrally located railroad junction and an inland port called Kaolack emerged as a major marketing center in the peanut trade. Although Kaolack's

former importance in the political economy of Senegambia has been overshadowed by the hegemony of the national capital, Dakar, efforts to maintain regional autonomy, within the context of dependence on the national political-bureaucratic elite, have not abated. To understand how this dynamic is played out, it is important to broaden the perspective on the regional political economy to include two additional central places. Each, although peripheral with respect to Dakar, represents what Williams (1977) calls alternative hegemonies, alternatives to the power of the Senegalese state. They are, first, the former British colony The Gambia, located less than a day's drive to the south of Kaolack, and secondly, the city of Tuuba, the holy center of the Senegalese Islamic order, the Muridiyya, which is actively involved in peanut production.³ These locales, regional centers of power, are the sites of activities that challenge the hegemony of the Senegalese state and at the same time make claims to regional autonomy.

Along with Kaolack, Tuuba and Banjul are the focus of smuggling activities, some of which directly involve the trade in peanuts and some which concern the circulation of contraband goods into Senegal. Such merchandise is readily available in Kaolack's Big Market, which occasionally becomes the setting for struggle between the customs agents representing the state and the region's traders, especially women on the market's periphery whose involvement in contraband trade is most visible.

CONTRABAND IN THE BIG MARKET: SPACE, CLASS AND GENDER

The stalls and tables inside the Big Market and around its periphery are well-stocked with contraband, most of it from The Gambia. Some traders, both women and men, are candid about the allure of smuggling, with its potential profits. Others seem reluctant to discuss the presence of contraband, particularly those with well-established locations in the central sections of the market.

There are certain vendors who market their smuggled merchandise quite openly, among them the women who sell medicines and beauty products outside one of the market's entrances. Displayed on tables that line both sides of the pathway leading into the market, the goods that these women sell include what they call garab angale or English medicine: pharmaceutical and patent medicines, along with women's beauty products, such as skin lightener and hair straightener, originally packaged for the Afro-American market in the United States. Getting started in this business requires initial capital, though less than in some other enterprises in Big Market, such as cloth vending, in which women are also well-represented. One of the traders reported that she purchased her Gambian wares each morning at a daily cost of 25,000-30,000 cfa (about US\$50 to \$60 in 1981).

The fact that their merchandise is readily identifiable as contraband, along with their highly visible location, makes these women particularly vulnerable to official sanctions. According to one woman, their work is a matter of luck, wërsëg. At any time the customs agents can appear, confiscate the goods, and impose stiff fines on the vendors. Most of the women report that they suffer these losses on a regular basis. Asked why they continue to sell contraband in the face of such insecurity, one woman replied, "Miin nëñu ko (We're used to it), and continued that it was their way of meeting the needs of their families.

CUSTOMS RAID

I arrived at the Big Market one mid-morning, when it was late enough for the women who sell garab angale to be in full operation, and noticed immediately that something was amiss. Only a few vendors were at their tables, and those tables were scantily stocked. My initial hunch that there had been a customs raid was verified, as a block of tan-uniformed customs police cut in between the two rows of tables and headed into the interior of the Big Market. A friend, a table vendor (taabulkaat) located inside the market, reported that the agents had arrived from all directions at once, in both plain clothes and uniform. Then a second wave of uniformed officers arrived, searching for hidden goods.

Meanwhile, many of the contraband vendors at the entrance to the market were already back in business. Some displayed only legal merchandise--items like soap--while others were bringing out the balms and pills that had not been confiscated. One woman said that all of her stock had been taken, along with the cash that she had accumulated, thanks to an informer who had directed the police to the spot where she had hidden her goods. Other women repeated stories of similar treachery, committed mainly by small boys, who were paid petty sums of money by the customs agents in exchange for information. One of the traders said that agents would continue to comb the market all day; she had hidden her goods in a number of places, from which she would retrieve one particular item at a time to fill each customer request. By lunchtime, no fines had been levied. The rumor was that the confiscated goods had been taken to the customs station on the road to Banjul and burned.

In another section of the market a trader, said to be a prostitute, was complaining vociferously about having been picked up by the police late the night before for not having proper identification. It seems that she had contacts within the local police force, and that an officer with a personal grudge against her had violated their tacit agreement. Later in the day, I heard passengers on a city bus, in an animated discussion that involved most everyone, share information both about the customs raid and about a citywide sweep the night before, in which prostitutes

without proper identification were arrested. The consensus was that the two events were connected.

One of the passengers on the bus, an old man, began by reporting the rumor about the burning of the contraband along the road to The Gambia. He maintained that the orders for the raid had come from Dakar, that is, from the national administration of President Abdu Juuf. Up to that point, he said, the PDS--the opposition party that has enjoyed strong support in Kaolack--had managed to keep the customs officials out of the Big Market. This last claim expresses a sentiment shared by many people in Kaolack: that involvement in the contraband trade, like support for the PDS, represents an assertion of the relative autonomy in this peripheral region from the control of the centralized national government. In the dialectic of autonomy and domination, this is the oppositional voice in center-periphery relations, redefining and valorizing a practice that is, in the eyes of government authorities, a sanctionable offense.

CONTRABAND: AUTONOMY AND DOMINATION

In the aftermath of the customs raid in Kaolack's Big Market, it was clear that its greatest impact was felt by those who were the most vulnerable, the women selling contraband on the market's periphery. While it appeared initially that gender was the factor that distinguished these vendors from others selling smuggled goods in the market, class differences in fact, are more important. The more prosperous traders, both women and men, selling contraband cloth, sugar, and tea from permanent stalls in the center of the Big Market emerged from the raid unaffected.

On the one hand, the contraband trade reflects the dialectic of autonomy and domination in relations between the center, represented by agents of the state apparatus including the customs police, and the periphery, represented by the inhabitants of the peanut basin, the peripheral region that includes Kaolack, the Gambia, and the Murid holy city of Tuuba. On the other hand, at the level of local social relations in Kaolack, it is apparent that relations to the national center of power are not the same for everyone, as the outcome of the customs raid reveals. Wealthier traders, like their less fortunate consociates, exercise their autonomy from the center by engaging in the contraband trade. At the same time, as members of the regional elite, their interests and those of the national ruling class often overlap. In the Big Market, structures of asymmetry are both directly experienced and contested in ongoing social practice, at the same time that they are reproduced through the dialectic of autonomy and domination.

CONCLUSION

This essay has examined the way in which the everyday practices of women traders in Kaolack enter into what we might call the social geography of hegemony. The social uses of space are structured around centers and their peripheries, both in day-to-day business in the Big Market and in the cycles of life that link Kaolack to the politics and economics of the region. At the same time, we see that center-periphery relations--at both the micro and the macro levels--are shaped by the countervailing forces of autonomy and domination. The practices of smuggling and contraband sales, and those reflecting the dilemma of kersa and commerce demonstrate that notions of what is legal or illicit, appropriate or inappropriate, necessarily coexist. The boundaries of appropriateness are defined in hegemonic terms, in relation to potential transgression. At the same time, they illustrate the ongoing dialectic between dominant and oppositional interests.

Notes

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1. The Wolof word taabulkaat means literally, a person responsible for a table (Wolof, taabul).
2. Njako is the term used by the Wolof. The English word for this ethnic group is Manjak, the Portuguese, Manjaco. See Le Cour-Grandmaison (1969) and Mintz (1971:255) for discussions of women cloth jobbers in Dakar.
3. There is an extensive literature on the Muridiyya. See, for example, Copans (1980) and Cruise O'Brien (1971, 1975).

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