

The Production of the City and Urban Informalities: The Borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer in the City of Pikine, Senegal

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The Concept-city is decaying. Does that mean that the illness afflicting both the rationality that founded it and its professionals afflicts the urban populations as well? Perhaps cities are deteriorating along with the procedures that organized them.

Michel de Certeau¹

Informality and the Production of the City

In the many publications about the African city, the factors of ever-growing urbanization and ever-deepening poverty — indeed, a constantly accelerating pauperization — are often pinpointed to such a degree they begin to seem solely responsible for bringing the urban crisis to its current acute level.

There is no doubt that urbanization is one of the most remarkable revolutions Africa has witnessed in recent years. The phenomenon has been characterized as “out of control and anarchic.” Most often paired with demographic growth, urbanization is considered to be the essential factor aggravating the urban crisis, which takes such forms as unemployment, lack of housing, rampant poverty, environmental degradation, weak — or absent — social services, and the inadequacies, negligence, or incompetence of the state and its organs.

True to this reading of the urban African context, a substantial number of studies have focused on the problem of sustainable development and the struggle against poverty.² These are in turn supported by an epistemology of normative action (on the part of governments and municipalities) or alternatives (on the part of nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], community organizations, economic interest groups [EIGs], and so forth). A number of problems are analyzed according to this perspective. They are related to urban administration (citizenship, decentralization, participation, good governance); urban infrastructure and services (water, electricity, roads, sanitation, education, health, transportation, housing, and so on); and exclusions, marginalities, and forms of deviance (such as crime, violence, prostitution, drugs). Because of the gravity of the symptoms — whether or not they are actually linked to these causes — all are agreed that there is, indeed, an urban crisis and that action is urgently needed. Recommendations, when given, are mostly concerned with elaborating programs and projects of a strongly technocratic character. A few actors (the state, administrative services, associative structures, NGOs, and so forth) are called on to administer, either separately or together, the conception, elaboration, and implementation of whatever project or program is under discussion.

As a result, the elucidation of real processes and dynamics sometimes finds itself reduced or even conjured away. There is a failure to recognize the complexity of the transformations at work in African urban contexts, and particularly their historical depth. As René de Maximy has rightly remarked, the “urban crisis,” or “poverty,” type of analysis, whether structural or conceptual, is based, in effect, on a theoretical stance, one that is supported by an eminently normative and remedial course

of action. Moreover, he writes (with much timeliness), “to speak of an urban crisis is not innocent. It suggests that the phenomenon is fleeting and therefore that the decisions required will be a function of this particular state of malaise or unhappiness.”³

This crisis, as real and as deep as it is, is no less a crisis of theory and practice. As such, it is based on the problematic of regulating and/or regularizing those aspects of urban life that might be called informal, spontaneous, irregular, and illegal. The terminology of this regulating/regularizing discourse is generally shaped by the economist, the political scientist, the civil engineer, and the urban planner, all of whom find in it the explanation for the urban crisis and the justification for interventions that restrict or repress so-called informal activities.

Now, if such an approach to informality is reductive, it is indeed a sort of approach that envisions the dynamics of informality exclusively in the following terms: revenue generation; research into ways to better living conditions; the connections between the informal and so-called formal sectors, or between the informal sector and the state. But it is necessary to enlarge this perspective. To do so requires going beyond a normative and legalistic vision and embracing a constellation of phenomena whose combined effects accelerate the changes shaping urban African contexts. To merely *describe* these phenomena is not to *explain* all of the dynamics involved. Their effects on populations and, above all, the reactions of the populations to their impact form an essential — and insufficiently analyzed — aspect. Anyone who wishes to elucidate the transformative processes at work in African urbanity must take them into account.

These changes clearly point to the notion of confluence between state regulations/controls and social dynamics, whether of a political, economic, land-related, or other nature. What we call “informality” is derived from the tension between these two poles, their coexistence and connections. Understood in this sense, the concept is one and the same with the process of urbanization. It is the lever by which the city is made. Urban transformations are conceived here as part of the evolution of this duality, of the combined course and interrelations of these two poles.

The category of informality is inscribed in Africa’s political, economic, and social history — informal premises and characteristics were discernible in precolonial African cities, perpetuated and consolidated during the colonial period, and have developed — and finally exploded — in the postcolonial period, notably within the residential, social, and professional dimensions.⁴ Seen from a historical perspective, the processes of urban change may be analyzed within the political order, that is, within social and cultural forms of organization. Informality is rooted, therefore, in the long-term. It translates, moreover, into a tension among phenomena that reveal what is regulated by a state entity and what escapes that regulation.

The concept of informality simultaneously reveals social frameworks, the construction of the state, and the regular changes taking place within the structures and natures of powers.⁵ This makes it a pertinent category through which to examine urban transformations. It permits us to take into account the complexities of an evolving process, a set of interactions not only among actors, nature, and the object of their actions, but also the stakes and strategies that they employ in constructing a form of urbanity that is as animated by the formal sector as it is by the informal sector. Informality also presupposes an analysis of the articulations of this space through the ever-larger circles that influence it in one way or another. In sum, informality has an eminently political function. It is a relation to power that, through actors and structures, brings together registers and resources that provide individual or collective opportunities to give direction to lives.

This text proposes to study this interaction and these informalities. It is here that urban transformations reveal themselves in all their singularity. The problematic is based on an analysis of the modes of (re)configuring space, the social connections and networks of relations that ultimately regulate the process of politics and economics, and the appropriation and use of space. It takes into account the diversity and variety of initiatives and actions at the heart of the flows that traverse and animate the urban body. Social and institutional organs and corporations of complementary, or even contradictory, interest form the web of this flux according to constructions that are sometimes planned, organized, and negotiated but are just as often unpredictable and fortuitous. This approach conceives of urban establishments according to a double perspective: on the one hand, we examine the modes of production and decision makers and, on the other, we seek out the role of those local social actors who develop popular initiatives and strategies (individual or collective). For these, too, though they are certainly responses to multiple facets of the urban crisis, are also a mode of constructing and reproducing the city.

This study will emphasize the observation of urban changes in their spatial and economic dimensions and their connection to politics. This perspective is perfectly illustrated by the case of the Senegalese borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer and one of its neighborhoods, Santhiaba. Here one can see urban changes in correlation with the construction of space. Here one can observe how a condition of informality is connected to a process of urbanization as well as to the power relations between different authorities and different forms of legitimacy.

The Production of Space: Urbanization, the Stakes of Property, and the Stakes of Power

Santhiaba is a neighborhood in the borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer, which itself is part of the city of Pikine. The latter was constituted in 1952 as part of the expanded zone of the national capital, Dakar.⁶ Pikine was established as an autonomous city in September 1996 and consists of 16 boroughs (*communes d'arrondissement*). Although it is still strongly linked to Dakar's urban agglomeration, this new city is also characterized by its own specific dynamics and problems. Several factors make Pikine a unique observatory for examining the current phenomenon of urban transformation: its strong rate of demographic growth, the overpopulation of its neighborhoods, the considerable rate of unemployment, several very specific environmental problems (such as pollution along the coast, periodic flooding in certain zones, and an inadequate sanitation system), and the recent increase in violence and security concerns. Equally interesting are the multiplicity of popular responses regarding the administration of public services, employment, the environment, and so forth.⁷

The territory of the borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer is estimated by the authorities to be about three square kilometers. It is a small area squeezed between the coast and National Route 1, which connects the Senegalese capital to the rest of the country. It is bordered by the boroughs of Tivaouane Diacksao and Guinaw Rail to the north; by Diamaguene-SICAP Mbao to the east; and by Daliford to the west. Thiaroye-sur-mer is bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean. Situated on Dakar's periphery along the southern coast of the Cape Verde peninsula, the community was originally a traditional village inhabited by Lebou farmer-fishermen.⁸ Like other villages of the same type, Thiaroye-sur-mer was gradually integrated by the process of urbanization.

The borough's already reduced space is symbolic of the encroachment of urban territory onto the Cape Verde peninsula in general and the city of Pikine in particular. It illustrates increasing population density in the peripheral zones of Pikine. Due to natural growth as well as the progressive arrival of populations from rural areas, parts of Dakar, and other boroughs of Pikine, residential space in Thia-

roye-sur-mer is disappearing. In 1998, the zone had an average density of 14,538 people per square kilometer. This gives a very precise sense of the tremendous demographic pressure on the space. According to the most recent census (1988), Thiaroye-sur-mer counted 30,290 inhabitants, distributed in 1,934 compounds (called concessions),⁹ or 3,181 households. There were 15,194 men and 15,096 women. A projection made in November 1998 based on these figures estimated a total of 40,700 inhabitants. This population growth has spurred a rapid expansion of built space imposed on grounds previously used for market gardening of vegetables (*maraîchage*). This has greatly raised the stakes connected to issues of access to and control of real estate and buildings as well as the informal practices that support them.

In this district, the production of space is at the heart of the process of urban change. The gradual taking over of space shows a neighborhood in which the multiple uses of the terrain give it a texture characterized by a dynamic of complementary and antagonistic interactions among different actors. Most notable among the modalities of this dynamic are strategies to accumulate income from land and buildings. The stakes for control over a territory illuminate the forms of informality that support and, to a certain extent, dictate the management of land patrimony.

From an initial rural, village configuration, Thiaroye-sur-mer is taking on an increasingly urban, working-class character. The initial residential core, situated on a sandy elevation along the shore, still retains the characteristics of village spatial structure, even if the construction materials are more durable today than they once were. But the buildings in this original core are now considerably denser, without empty plots along the narrow winding roads. Dwellings are arranged according to concessions (or compounds), and extended families now live in extremely close quarters; the situation has changed from one in which a single family made up the concession to one in which some ten families (some of whom share no family ties whatsoever) live together within the same compound. Thus, urbanization — that is, the incorporation of Thiaroye-sur-mer in the urbanizing process — has modified the mode of inhabiting residential space and disarticulated traditional social and familial forms of organization.

Over the years, the inhabited area has grown increasingly dense. This has necessitated an acceleration of movement and extension northward to the neighborhood Santhiaba, where there is still some open space. But in fact, the process of expansion dates back to the colonial period, when the space of the city was extended in order to meet needs that were simultaneously residential, industrial, administrative, and related to social services.

Spatial Expansion

The first encroachment of habitation on fields used for agriculture dates to around 1939. Since then, such expansions have taken place at closer and closer intervals. Thus, in 1953, 1955, and the years that followed, lands were broken up into smaller and smaller parcels in order for owners to set up family members or, under straitened circumstances, to sell to third parties, always called “foreigners.” It was, in fact, only at the beginning of the 1980s that the expansion of Thiaroye-sur-mer began to attract inhabitants who came from zones beyond Thiaroye-sur-mer itself. Thus, at an ever-growing rate, areas often ill suited to habitation — low grounds, drained marshes, and agricultural lands — have been reclaimed. In Thiaroye-sur-mer, this mode of creating urban space is the form of informality par excellence in matters of building and real estate.

In addition to lands used for habitation, areas have been ceded to industry. Land transfers are executed by sale or by tacit contracts granting employment priority to the inhabitants of Thiaroye-sur-mer.

Thus, a shoe factory was set up (SOFAC, sold to Lebanese nationals), along with industrial complexes for textiles (ICOTAF, SOTIMA), the conservation and processing of fish products (CAP VERT, later COTONNIERE), and a matchstick factory (CAFAL). A large number of people, today in retirement, have worked in these operations. The establishment of industries occurred after negotiations in which the residents of Thiaroye-sur-mer stipulated that they be given priority in recruitment of the workforce. This was granted in most cases. The workforce in the industrial complexes is largely furnished by the men of Thiaroye-sur-mer, who abandon market gardening at about the same rate as the space available for agriculture shrinks. Much like the spread of built space, salaried work has served as a mechanism for the urban integration of the community, which adopts the life rhythms required by the modern economic enterprise's model of organization (with its fixed hours and the monthly posting of salaries).

The production of space here also concerns the borough's relationship with the state, which has, since the colonial era, set up amenities and services on traditional familial lands. The progressive installation of amenities and social services in Thiaroye-sur-mer — for the most part in Santhiaba but serving the entire borough — is thus one element that integrates this space into the irreversible process of urbanization.

The national route, the principal, indeed sole, land mode of entry to the Cape Verde peninsula, reached Thiaroye-sur-mer in 1924. The route reinforces the borough's connection to the rest of the city. The first school was established there in 1927 near the fields of the Mbayène family. Thiaroye-sur-mer's first health clinic was set up within the school compound. It would later be moved onto land owned by a village family, the Diobènes, who consented after a certain amount of opposition. Electricity reached homes in 1953/54, along with public water pumps.

The effort to provide amenities and social services — synonymous with urbanization — did not, however, progress without a certain amount of conflict with the colonial administration. The latter pressured the customary local authorities to reduce social conflicts and facilitate negotiations between public powers and customary owners. Throughout the colonial period, there were violent conflicts in which control of lands was mixed with political competitions. These continue to nurture animosities among certain families even today.¹⁰

Generally, however, since the time that certain facilities were provided to the residents of Thiaroye-sur-mer, the objections of customary landowners were negotiated by the authorities and political figures who had some influence with residents. This process of dialogue and negotiation with customary landowners stemmed from a tacit recognition by the colonial powers of the rights of the Lebou people to the Cape Verde peninsula.¹¹ Moreover, during this time, the landowners still had some real estate reserves at their disposal. But as quickly as the population grew, the needs for residential space as well as for basic social services continued to make themselves felt.

The massive influx of rural peoples, pushed off their land toward Pikine by drought during the 1970s, threatened to fully saturate the area. This created a double movement in the adaptation of space. While public powers continued efforts to provide amenities, traditional landowners became active in selling and/or building on agricultural lands.

A health center was constructed in 1995, financed by the World Bank. A birth clinic, built in 1989, did not in fact begin operating until four years later, due to lack of personnel and sanitary equipment. In addition to a health infrastructure, during this period Santhiaba housed structures for public, private, and professional education: two public primary schools, a Franco-Arab school, a private school, and a technical training center for women. A youth and cultural center was built in 1981 on

lands of the Démène family. It should also be noted that Santhiaba¹² has a large mosque, a Muslim cemetery, and several public spaces that, though laid out, are not maintained and are therefore in an advanced state of disrepair.

The Assault of Built Space on Urban Market Gardening

This zone is also one in which market-scale vegetable farming had developed, with an essential economic function, even if today it only consists of a few hectares. The cultivated zone plays a role in provisioning legumes to a large portion of Thiaroye-sur-mer's population, along with that of the surrounding boroughs. Indeed, it ensures the existence of entire families. Roger Navarro, describing the perimeter of his area of study — Guinaw Rail, an irregular district of Pikine that joins Santhiaba to the north, across the national route — writes the following:

On the southern coast of the Cape Verde isthmus, Genaw-Rails (which means "behind the Rails" in the Wolof language) faces the village of Thiaroye-Guej (Thiaroye-mer). From these heights, as far as the Rufisque route [the national route], one can easily see the quarter's southern edge. The area gives a double impression. First one sees the Cape Verde's great market garden, known as "the Niayes." These gardens, shaded by sparse stands of palm trees are tended by the Lébou of Thiaroye-mer, a people of fishermen who traditionally own the lands of the Cape Verde. Right next to this agricultural zone the terrain looks like a vast construction site. A number of buildings are being built here (in permanent materials). Masons are busy everywhere; piles of "bricks" (that is, bits of rubble made of sand mixed with cement and baked in the sun) mark the appropriation of parcels and clearly signal the projects of their owners for all to see.¹³

Since construction is, at this point, more profitable than agriculture, farmers are gradually losing their primary source of revenue and means of subsistence as houses are erected on spaces that they once used. In a dozen years, the total area devoted to vegetable farming has been cut in half. Based on the current pace of construction, urban market gardening will disappear entirely from the zone within a few years. Faced with this threat, the farmers took the collective initiative of forming an Economic Interest Group (EIG)¹⁴ with the goal, first, of preserving and maintaining their livelihoods and, second, of mutually reinforcing their opposition to the spread of the construction. The speed at which these activities have developed indicates the enormous stakes connected to the land, particularly to the bitter struggles (a dialogue of the deaf) taking place in the entire low-ground known as "the Niayes" among traditional proprietors, municipal authorities, representatives of the national lands, farmers, building developers, and so forth. These actors have all developed strategies for appropriating or conserving the property. Such strategies appear to be a consequence, according to the actors, of legal procedures, informal measures, or even a combination of both. Mamadou Diouf accurately sums up the situation:

Urban morphology, in many situations, seems to be produced by an architecture in which the most dynamic element is a "recomposition" of one's identity or ethnicity in order to appropriate land. Such recompositions often entail plural forms of logic, which have, as their outcome, requests for different land-related systems. The resulting superposition of systems and extremely heterogeneous forms of appropriation have had consequences not only for urban morphology but also for social relations and networks of solidarity.¹⁵

The superimposition of rights (per Law 64-46 of June 17, 1964 regarding the national state territory¹⁶ and the customary land rights of the initial occupants) and the designs of public powers in general and municipal authorities in particular incited the customary owners to construct on their lands and/

or to sell parcels to third parties. Third parties come from other zones of Dakar's agglomeration in search of reasonably priced rents and real estate properties. At a distance of twelve kilometers from Dakar, Thiaroye-sur-mer is one of the city's closest peripheral zones. As Navarro describes it, "each day, construction gnaws away at more of the agricultural lands. This situation of rapid urbanization is typical of the entire zone of Pikine. Furthermore, in the other neighborhoods, the 'buildable' spaces are already saturated."¹⁷

Thus in this zone of expansion, in the neighborhood of Santhiaba, the construction of dwellings for rental use pleases the customary owners as well as increasing numbers of "outside" proprietors. We are confronted here with an entirely new situation. The question of real estate is doubled by a booming construction economy.¹⁸ The customary owner, once a territorial chief in charge of distributing land resources according to the family's needs for subsistence agriculture, has transformed himself into a real estate developer who sells parcels in exchange for cash.¹⁹ We are far from the 1950s and the way customary authorities granted parcels of Thiaroye-sur-mer's old familial lands during that era.

This situation has engendered latent, occasionally open, conflict between customary owners and municipal officials. Beyond issues of land access and control of land-related resources, this involves a confrontation of two types of legitimacy and legality. The municipality wants to enhance the value of a portion of these lands in order to resell the parcels at a substantially higher price. It also wants to implant a socio-educational project: in one case, a high school and municipal sports complex. The customary landowners, farmers, and new residents of the zone tend, rather, to see this as a threat to their property and building rights. Numerous meetings between the different parties were cut short. The strong resistance of the inhabitants of Thiaroye-sur-mer eventually forced the city to seek another location for its high school. The customary landowners and the customary authorities — who are often one and the same — adopt different strategies according to the circumstances. They even mobilized Thiaroye-sur-mer's residents to petition for customary rights to portions of the Niayes zone that are in fact situated beyond the district's borders. To this end, a petition was circulated and the services of a lawyer (of Lebou ethnicity) were solicited.

But the most popular strategy is that of the *fait accompli*: a building is erected on the ground in question. Construction sites are constantly in progress. Some, though begun years ago, show no signs of reaching completion. In fact, a sizable portion of the built space in this zone is uninhabitable because of regular flooding in the rainy season and a very shallow water table. Stagnant waters invade the houses year round. Rather than habitation, the customary owners are aiming at a strategy of marking their territory. For it is this act of construction — more than a property title — that is the surest means of appropriating a space. At the time this text was prepared, these structures remained standing, in spite of a recent campaign to demolish illegal buildings in the urban areas of Cape Verde. It is unclear, however, whether they will escape demolition efforts in the future.

The production of space and the phenomenon of urban expansion are, of course, normal to a city's evolution. However, to approach the phenomenon of urbanization through the conceptual framework of pure spatial geography — that is, the material configuration of space — yields very little and masks its complexity. To read this complexity requires putting into place a certain triptych consisting of perceived space, conceived space, and the lived spaces of representation.²⁰ In sum, it requires going beyond materiality and joining to it the different cultural, religious, and political imaginaries that shape one another.²¹ Such a perspective permits us to clarify the behavior of actors in competition for an urban milieu in which contradictory interests carry the potential of enormous violence. But more fundamentally, it also shows the relationships of force that exist between legal and informal

procedures that draw their legitimacy from historical and traditional points of reference. Such points of reference still have enormous influence within urban African contexts, even if — from a social, cultural, and economic point of view — they have undergone substantial change.

Beyond issues of access to and control of lands, there is the question of the confrontation of two political imaginaries, of two types of legitimate authority. This fundamental aspect of Thiaroye-sur-mer's life and relations is even more pronounced in the exercise of local power.

Local Power: Dual Forms of Territorial Legitimacy

The heritage of the traditional village survives in Thiaroye-sur-mer's forms of organization and traditional modes of decision making. These are specific to the Lebou people. Its sociopolitical organization is that of a gerontocracy; social, parental, and familial connections are very tight; and communal identity is strong. This structuring of political and social organization is the foundation of a vigorous political imaginary existing alongside communal authority.

Although Thiaroye-sur-mer has been completely integrated into the city of Pikine and has lost nearly all of its rural character, its inhabitants continue to consider it and to call it a village. Achille Mbembe calls this attitude the "re-enchantment of tradition,"²² that is, the invention of a collective imaginary that constructs itself from the referents found in communitarian discourse, beginning with the two poles: on the one hand, the "rehabilitation of origins and of belonging," on the other, the reclaiming/appropriation of territory (upon which identity construction is founded and legitimates itself). This phenomenon of reinventing tradition finds its embodiment in Thiaroye-sur-mer in the constitution of a local political authority and an "administrative" net for the territory.

Thiaroye-sur-mer has a council of notables presided over by the village chief. Each council member carries a membership card. This authority installed a twenty-four-member executive organ, created in 1991, called the Association des Freys, which replaced another structure, the Até Togne (a type of tribunal). It also named five representatives and a neighborhood chief to each of the borough's twenty neighborhoods. The council of notables is influenced by the Collective of Imams and two dignitaries, the president of the Diambours and the representative of the Caliph of the Mourides.

The role of the council of notables is to manage "all the customary and religious problems of the village, in close collaboration with the borough." Its organs execute its decisions. It decides everything from the ordering of family ceremonies, the prohibition of music and tam-tam playing during the winter period, and neighborhood security, to the carrying out of measures concerning urban planning and renovation as well as other matters. The council has the right to seize "competent authorities" if its decisions are not respected.

In reality, the customary powers of Thiaroye-sur-mer dictate the whole life of relations in the community. The president of the Freys attests to this when he comments, "everything that enters Thiaroye-sur-mer passes before the Freys, and so does everything that leaves it." The decisions, initiatives, and actions of the customary authorities are irreversible.

The reified notion of the village is an eminently political category, a category that subsumes a space and its human and material components under a legitimate authority. Those who possess this authority "naturally" assume their role of administering the community's destiny. Thus, superimposed on

an urban space, we see a territorial identity that legitimates a local particularism, even if the configuration of space shows the strong presence of “non-native populations” and a highly visible cosmopolitanism. This opens the way to exclusivist practices and/or attitudes that have obvious political and cultural foundations.

The customary and religious authorities have thus inherited the legacy of a political organization of the village type that, even if it is no longer what it once was, continues to leave a marked impression on the decision-making process. Traditional political actors maintain their important roles while continuing to give themselves carefully structured powers of decision, in addition to efficient channels of communication and information. This situation is made possible by upholding a symbolic system of origins and belonging, and through identity construction that is manifested in territorial control. At the same time, it must be said that this authority adopts a modern vocabulary and positions itself theoretically as a structure that pressures municipal and administrative authorities; the council of notables meets as a “General Assembly,” keeps “minutes” of its meetings, endows itself with an “Association,” and furnishes its members with “membership cards.”

On the other hand, the notables also declare their willingness to cooperate with the city and act as police for the population on behalf of “competent authorities.” It is here that the ambiguity of the council’s position becomes clear, not to mention the ambiguity of its relationship to the local administration. One example is the ban on festive noisemaking during the winter period. This law was devised by the notables, but it was the administrative authority — the prefect — who signed the measure. The example attests to the dominance of traditional authorities over the population but also their strong capacity to influence the decisions taken by local administrators. Control over the territory is real.²³ Following the example of urban processes instituted in the boroughs of Tivaouane and Guéoul,²⁴ Thiaroye-sur-mer’s traditional leaders demonstrated a desire to exert more influence in matters of local government. The production of space is, in this framework, a political trump card that depends on the convocation of symbolic resources and history. These come together to legitimate and concretize the valorization of the ground.

Although it is a country with a long tradition of decentralization, Senegal in 1996 instituted a major reform in the name of regionalization. The reform created, among other things, the borough system. The lowest administrative sphere is thus set up as a local collectivity endowed with its own financial, human, and technical resources. By transferring a portion of its prerogatives to this sphere, the central power of the state seeks to reinforce its powers of intervention, most notably concerning local needs such as the allocation of public services and the efficient, optimal regulation of space. Territorial control is exerted by a municipal council and its various organs. Its legitimacy stems from the devolution of authority from the central level (the state) to the local level (local collectivities). Its political base is a territory within which the bearers of this power — who are elected — enjoy the exercise of public power.

The borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer was created by the 1996 law on decentralization. Its municipal council consists of thirty-six members, six of whom are women. Its members come from three political parties: And Jëf/African Party for Democracy and Socialism (And Jëf PADS, two members), the Socialist Party (PS, six members), and the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS, twenty-eight members). The mayor and his two deputies form the cabinet. The secretary general manages, in addition to the borough’s secretariat, four services: markets and marketplaces; general administration and finance; patrimony and civil records; and youth, sports, and leisure. The borough has set up ten commissions: finance; culture; youth, sports, and leisure; markets and marketplaces; planning; environment and fish-related resources; administration and legal affairs; education; health, population, and social programs; and management of territory and housing.

The adopted model of organization is geared toward the territory's successful administrative and operational management. By classifying the municipality's areas of responsibility according to sectors of activity, the model seeks to give the necessary organizational means to its mission of local development, making it efficient and effective. But its financial means and qualifications must be up to its ambitions. The borough's budget is proposed by the mayor, voted in by the municipal council, and approved by the sub-prefect, a representative of the state. In 1997, the borough's budget was 59,100,000 CFA francs, but only 16,166,511 CFA francs of the projected budget were covered (that is 15.73 percent). In 1998, the projected budget was 63,145,538 CFA francs, but the subprefect approved it at 57,531,289 CFA francs. Only 27 million CFA francs were covered on December 31, 1998. The borough system is new, and the municipal team lacks sufficient experience. Moreover, its human, material, and financial resources are still extremely limited when one considers not only its prerogatives for local development but also the diversity and complexity of problems it must solve.

The establishment of boroughs thus created a new pole of power, which necessarily comes into conflict with the already established traditional and religious authorities. Two forms of logic for territorial administration thus confront one another at the same time that they pursue dialogue. They agree on some aspects of local administration and diverge on others. Moreover, instances of political divergence and competition between political groups affects the relationships of local decision makers. At the same time, spaces and channels of collaboration exist and are being developed. The stakes of power emanate from this political duality. Such stakes make themselves clear in the course of Thiarye-surmer's social, economic, political, and cultural life. The coexisting powers can each take advantage of a certain legitimacy that has its source in totally different registers. These sources of legitimacy are the recognition and influence of the people for whom decisions are made and with whom the activities are carried out.

These different powers are necessarily caught up in a logic of tolerance, complementarity, instrumentality, and mutual competition. Their dynamics thus influence, consciously or unconsciously, a specific construction of this environment, with the primary stake being a strong presence in public space at the heart of which the play of actors seems to open new perspectives on urban government and new horizons on the exercise of power. Nothing short of the stark process of redefining the cadres who control local public space is underway. Associations and networks play a crucial role in this dynamic.

Associations and Networks: An Informal Model of Construction and Urban Economy

Decentralization reveals a failure of the model of the central state. Lat Soucabé Mbow describes it in these terms:

With the political and economic changes that began in 1981, a rupture between the state and the city has emerged from the policies practiced in the past three decades. After dominating the urban sphere with the help of a suffocating legal arsenal and the massive use of capital in development programs conceived and realized through its organs, the central power, confronted by multiple challenges, took to its heels. In doing this, it returned to the local collectivities and to the population their portion of responsibility in urban administration, in order to better ensure its functions of orientation, coordination, and control.²⁵

In fact, the loosening of state control, via the injunction of international financial institutions and bilateral sponsors, opened public space to a tremendous development: the trend of setting up associations. This signified an extremely high ability to adapt to social and institutional constraints of the environment, which is itself in constant evolution.²⁶ The activities of these associations provide for the individual and collective needs of their members. They also serve, to an increasing degree, the municipality in sharing its functions of administration and the allocation of social services. Due to the legitimacy that they have acquired through their capacity to mobilize, associations “organize resistance and impose on establishments and public powers collaboration on the occupation of space.”²⁷

What can be drawn from these developments is a process of *autonomizing* economic initiatives. On the one hand, these take the forms of modes of municipal regulation and, on the other, of the regulation of public space. This autonomizing process is illustrated by the extraordinary development of practices of self-organization and investment of public space carried out by people who negotiate and take different tacks with public powers. In doing this, the populations are in the process of constructing “new imaginaries and new arenas of power.”²⁸ They create new forms of solidarity and construct forms of citizenship that enable them, in their own way, to expropriate territory. This liberation of popular initiatives is even clearer in the economic domain and can be noted from the 1980s onward.

Neoliberal reforms have in fact strongly marked African economies and have not resolved the economic crisis — far from it. This persistent crisis has had as a main consequence the progressive development of an “informalization” of the modes and mechanisms of generating revenue. This is a constantly evolving urban phenomenon that has become massive. In this regard, it is the clearest manifestation of a certain type of structuring of economic activity in African cities.

Forms of economic informality in Thiaroye-sur-mer are substantial. These consist of activities connected to the fishing industry (men engaged in small fishing establishments, women in processing and selling fish), urban market gardening, commerce, artisan production, carpentry, auto repair, private telephone (calling) centers, car and hardware sales, a garage for stationing heavy loads, and so forth. A kernel of industrialization exists in the hand-fabrication of flagstones. A whole range of related activities may be added to those listed here, throughout the communal territory: water pumps (allegedly public, though one must in fact pay to use them), several retail shops of the Mauritanian type (based on proximity), small markets for retail sales, and so forth.

Across the range of these economic activities, a significant number of Thiaroye-sur-mer’s young people, men, and especially women are active participants. They participate not only for the survival of their households but also, perhaps even more so, for social intercourse. Women are particularly dynamic: they manage the water pumps, sell vegetables, are involved in food preparation and the restaurant sector, and make up the majority of members and participants in informal systems for accumulating money (such as tontine arrangements and mutual savings and loan organizations.) But above all, women process and sell local products in diverse settings and forms of organization. These settings have become the true elements structuring urban life, notably through their size, economic, social, and indeed, political weight. The authors of the summary commissioned by the French Ministry of Cooperation on urbanization in Africa have written:

*The informal economy has not only been a means of producing and selling, gradually integrating the elements of modernity into traditional structures. It has also been — above all — the centerpiece of a mode of effective sociopolitical regulation, largely determining urban forms and types of interventions on them.*²⁹

Among the forms of generating revenue outlined above, Economic Interest Groups (EIG) and larger groups such as unions and networks are being adopted with increasing frequency. This phenomenon has evolved significantly since the mid-1980s. This is the site of informality par excellence; the phenomenon has taken place on such a mass scale that its function and its role have become essential to social intercourse in the territory and to the construction of African urbanity.

These large groups and networks thus constitute a powerful instrument for the accumulation of capital that begins with informal activities. What we are effectively seeing is a switchover from tontine arrangements to mutual savings and loan organizations. A sliding is taking place; savings are being spent not only on subsistence and social and prestige expenses (like familial and religious ceremonies and feasts), but are also applied toward productive investments. This emerging phenomenon is at the same time accompanied by a movement of individualization of wealth through the enlargement of the scale of intervention or the nature of the activity. We are witnessing the birth of a new form of entrepreneurship in which women occupy the most powerful positions.³⁰

In the borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer, groups like Pencum Sénégal and Pencum Demba are active in the buying, processing, and marketing of fish products. They sell in Senegal and in a few other African countries. Pencum Sénégal is comprised of five EIGs and counts 290 members, both men and women. For their part, the Lebou guii network is not insignificant. The network consists of sixteen women's groups and numbers 416 members. Groups are involved in various activities related to the processing and marketing of marine products, local products (such as juices from local fruits), tailoring, embroidery, and so forth. According to its president, the network has a turnover of 10 million CFA francs per semester.

The various structures working in fish processing in Thiaroye-sur-mer are grouped together in the Thiaroye-sur-mer Local Union of Fishing EIGs, which is the source of discussions and regulation of activities for processing and marketing fish products. This structure has an eminently political role. It is affiliated with national organizational cadres for this sector.

As we have shown, Thiaroye-sur-mer's economic associations, groups, networks, and unions are locally anchored structures that are at the same time open to the rest of the country. In the fish industry, for example, supplies come from numerous fish wholesalers who are also intermediaries between small fishermen and the economic operators for export circuits. The clientele consists of merchants (both male and female) from different markets in the capital, regions, and even certain countries in western sub-Saharan Africa.

Strategies of territorialization (having a local anchor) and deterritorialization (distributing their products beyond Thiaroye-sur-mer) in the revenue-generating activities of this new type of economic operation are linked to the requirements imposed by economic changes that have intervened in the past decade. Among these are the weakening of state regulation brought about by the liberalization of markets, the employment crisis, and unrestrained competitiveness. Regrouping and communalizing resources are one means of obtaining information about markets, as well as opportunities to gain knowledge and know-how without a concomitant obligation to share this information with other network members. Doing this, the operator multiplies and maximizes his or her business opportunities. The network is also a milieu of fierce competition over resources.

The economic network is in reality multifunctional. It follows a double logic: while other segments converge on it, others detach themselves from it. As a metaphor, the scales of a fish come to mind. The fish scales are woven together based on relations of family proximity, neighborhood, friendship, politics, and so on. According to common interest, certain knots consolidate and others fray or

distend themselves. Thus, the network is the place for crystallizing heterogeneous urban identities through the formation of interest groups and a diversification of their social, economic, and political uses. The existence of such structures thus reveals the impressive capital of psycho-sociological resources of these actors, these animators of urban space.³¹ The operators move within and among various types of relationships (familial, parental, religious, political, and so forth) and play on registers marked by extremely unstable modalities of construction. The registers are unstable because they make use, in a very unpredictable way, of opportunities for mobilization and/or access to economic, financial, or other resources.

The Pencum Sénégal coalition is a good example of how the network functions. The coalition is made up of two women's EIGs involved in the sale, processing, and marketing of fish products. Derived from a private initiative dating to 1962, Pencum Sénégal became an EIG in 1990, structuring itself in the form of a coalition of two EIGs: Bok Jom and Feek Beeg Jamm. The Pencum Sénégal coalition has regrouped 117 members of these EIGs. These women employ 56 other women and 43 men. Their annual turnover is about 200 million CFA francs, according to a representative from the departmental fishing service. They have clients in Senegal, in certain African countries, and the United States. This coalition has very quickly recognized its importance and sees a need to develop itself further. Furthermore, it has linked relations of partnership and exchange with other structures on the national as well as the international level. Its members have thus been able to benefit from professional and training sessions in areas such as smoking, salting, and drying fish; the financial potential of derivatives of primary materials (such as the air bladders of fish and shark fins); and the conservation of processed products, hygiene, and quality. Members have enjoyed courses in literacy and administration. In sum, the women of Pencum Sénégal have developed an expertise that has earned them consideration as among the best specialists in their realm of activity.³² Their fame gained them entry to the International Fair in Dakar in addition to several other national forums. The coalition has also received financing that enables them to organize travel for exchange and study in certain countries in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Gambia and Ghana, and to participate in a meeting in Paris organized by an NGO.

The Pencum Sénégal coalition embodies the sort of informal activity that involves the highest level of professionalization and enlarges its scale of activity, notably through its strategy of anchoring itself in the local while connecting to the global.

This union for transformation and commercialization has become so important that the president of Pencum Sénégal has been obliged to accept political office, a replacement seat on Thiaroye-sur-mer's municipal council. Today, Pencum Sénégal's members play a crucial role in lobbying the municipality. They want to obtain a dock close to their site for unloading the catch of fishermen. They are also demanding the construction of a day-care center, since they already pay a municipal tax for the use of communal land for commercial purposes. This would allow the workers more time for their activities. They are simultaneously putting pressure on the customary authorities to help them win the case.

An analysis of the types of economic informality in the underprivileged urban milieu made from the perspective described here shows that actors have a tremendous capacity to adapt to this type of economy in an urban fabric that is in a state of perpetual decomposition and recomposition. The ability and fluidity of this economy can be explained by the close link of the informal economy to social and political processes and dynamics, notably by recourse to the services of networks. It is tightly enmeshed in a political and social environment at the heart of which the operators move within associations and networks based on various relationships (familial, parental, religious, tactical, political, and so forth) and play on registers whose modalities of construction are extremely mobile, since

they weave themselves in a very unstable way, according to the opportunities for mobilization and/or access to economic, financial, or political resources.

Conclusion

In sum, the category of informality is simultaneously spatial, political, professional, and economic. It acts on a given political situation and has a deeply historical dimension. It is a mode of interaction between two logics of structuring space: the normative logic of the state, symbolized by municipal authorities; and the so-called informal logic, which is animated by the customary authorities. The functioning of politics, the occupation of space, and the flow of economic activity are determined according to them. It is in the convergence, divergence, and strategies of regulation on these two levels that the specificities of African urban contexts are constructed. Their relationships are the engines of production of the city and the levers of change.

The modes of informal regulation of the urban space of Thiaroye-sur-mer constitute the engine driving the current urban transformations. They are already inscribed in the urbanizing process, notably through strategies for the production of space. They organize economic activity and guarantee social intercourse. At the same time, they do not reestablish the prerogatives of the state. But state controls over issues ranging from the use, access, registration, and allocation of real estate resources, to financial drains on building properties and economic activities are marked by a culture of side-stepping, of negotiation, and of tolerance. The relationship between different actors is founded on postures, attitudes, and practices of accommodation.

From an economic point of view, Thiaroye-sur-mer's many Economic Interest Groups have become as important in terms of membership numbers as in terms of activities, financial accumulation, and the variety and diversity of their connections to other partners. Through a variety of individual or collective strategies for generating revenue, informality is the mechanism linking the local to the global. Associations and larger and larger networks allow for the development of economic activities through access to diverse resources. The accumulation of capital does not generally follow a capitalist logic. Revenues and benefits are more often invested in the reproduction of the system and in the preservation of a clientele and forms of political support. They fulfill a more social purpose, even if individual wealth is being created as well. But these benefits are beginning to be reinvested in production and distribution.

All in all, informality is the mode of regulating the life of relationships and the urban environment of contemporary Thiaroye-sur-mer. It structures the changes currently underway. In this respect, it is actually the sole mode by which Thiaroye-sur-mer is constructing itself. As such, informality should be viewed as an instance of the sort of urban transformation underway in many underprivileged urban contexts today.

Translated from the French by Miranda Robbins.

Mohamadou Abdoul. *The Production of the City and Urban Informalities: The Borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer in the City of Pikine, Senegal.* In: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): *Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos. Documenta11_Platform4.* Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, pp. 337-358.

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- 1 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 95.
- 2 Within the formidable body of literature on the subject, some characteristic publications are: Richard E. Stren, Rodney R. White, and Michel Coquery, eds., *Villes africaines en crise: Gérer la croissance urbaine au sud du Sahara: Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, Soudan, Sénégal, Tanzania, Zaïre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993); Annick Osmont, *La Banque mondiale et les villes: Du développement à l'ajustement* (Paris: Karthala, 1995); ISTED (Institut des Sciences et des Techniques de l'Équipement et de l'Environnement pour le Développement), Working Group on the Mechanisms and Logic of Urbanization, *Dynamique de l'urbanisation de l'Afrique au sud du Sahara: Dans les pays du champ de la Coopération française*, presented to the French Ministry of Cooperation (Order Number 900373) on March 27, 1995. For cases specific to Senegal, this tendency is reflected in the following studies: A. Sané, *Étude monographique de Pikine* (Dakar: Enda—Programme Développement Social Urbain et Coopération Nord-Sud, September 1996); Salimata Wade, *La dynamique associative en milieu urbain ouest africain, synthèse régionale* (Dakar: Enda—Programme Régional de Formation et d'Appui aux Associations Locales et Initiatives de Base en Milieu Urban Ouest Africain, 1999); Momar Coumba Diop, *La lutte contre la pauvreté à Dakar: Vers la définition d'une politique municipale* (Accra: Programme de Gestion Urbaine, Bureau Régional pour l'Afrique, 1996).
- 3 René de Maximy, *Le commun des lieux* (Sprimont, Belgium: Margada; Paris: Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, 2000), p. 47.
- 4 See Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "L'informel dans les villes africaines: Essai d'analyse historique et sociale," in *Tiers-monde: L'informel en question?*, ed. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Serge Nédelec (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), pp. 171-196.
- 5 See René Gallissot, "Société formelle ou organique et société informelle," in *ibid.*, p. 21.
- 6 For more information on Dakar, see the descriptive summary in Roger Navarro, "'Irrégularité urbaine' et genèse d'africanité urbaine au Cap Vert (Sénégal, Pikine)," in *ibid.*, pp. 215-237. See, in particular, the section entitled "Histoire de l'urbanisation du Cap Vert et genèse de l'urbanité africaine," in which the author highlights the different phases of this urbanization in relation to the incorporation of Lebou villages into the urban territory. Today Dakar, capital of Senegal, covers less than one percent of the country's total area, which is 196,722 km². Located on Africa's westernmost point, Dakar's geopolitical position is strategic. Since September 1996, the capital region has consisted of four municipalities (Dakar, Pikine, Guédiawaye, and Rufisque). To facilitate administration based on proximity, these cities are subdivided into boroughs (*communes d'arrondissement*). There are 19 in Dakar, 16 in Pikine, 5 in Guédiawaye, and 3 in Rufisque. Demographically, the population of Senegal was estimated in 1995 to be 7,884,257 inhabitants. The urban community of Dakar, including all four cities, has a population of 1,659,514 (21 percent of the total), of which 795,969 (48 percent) are men and 863,545 (52 percent) are women.
- 7 Pikine experienced two large-scale demographic influxes beginning in the 1970s: the arrival of populations that had been forced out — often by the military — of Dakar's working-class neighborhoods and shantytowns, and the arrival of people caught up in the rural exodus. The latter contributed considerably to the city's growth during the 1970s and '80s. Today the city of

Pikine is said to have close to a million inhabitants, distributed over an area of about 80 km².

- 8 The Lebou people were the first occupants of Senegal's Cape Verde peninsula. The 14 villages they inhabited constituted the "Republic of Lebou."
- 9 Concessions are dwelling units characterized by the grouping of the extended family around the dwelling of the family chief. The chief directs the whole social and economic life of the family; he determines roles and tasks, and orders and assigns resources.
- 10 Residents are reluctant to describe the details of these land conflicts because they are connected to the political struggles that took place on the national level between Léopold Senghor and Lamine Guèye over representation in the National Assembly.
- 11 The colonizer required the relocation (with indemnification) of villages situated in areas affected by its urban plans. Thus, between 1858 and 1914, Dakar's first urban plan (known as the Pinet-Laprade plan) required the relocation of the villages of Kaye, Tann, N'Garaf, Thérigne, and Hock, among others, in order to create the area that today makes up the city center (Dakar Plateau). The Lebou people did not, in any case, fail to take advantage of the statute of citizens, which entitled them to residence in the four communes and preserved their customary land rights.
- 12 Santhiaba is one of twenty neighborhoods in the borough of Thiaroye-sur-mer. Its population is about 3,000 and is made up of several ethnic groups. The preponderant group is that of the Wolof/Lebou (66.66 percent). The population is 50.54 percent male and 49.46 percent female, and 99.99 percent Muslim. Women make up 27.34 percent of all heads of households.
- 13 Navarro, "Irrégularité urbaine," p. 216.
- 14 The Economic Interest Group (EIG), according to Law 85-40 of July 29, 1985, basically offers a legal framework that is very well suited to the exercise of economic activities of the association type, which is in any case one of its primary conditions. It entails the constitution of a group of two or more (physical or moral) entities intended to facilitate or develop the economic activity of its members or to improve or increase the product of this activity.
- 15 Mamadou Diouf, "La société civile en Afrique: Histoire et actualité, notes provisoires," in Proceedings of the Ninth General Assembly of CODESRIA: Globalization and Social Sciences in Africa, December 14-18, 1998 (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1998), pp. 19-20.
- 16 This law stipulates that unregistered lands and lands on which no clear proof of use (agriculture and construction) exists belong to the domain of the state.
- 17 Navarro, "Irrégularité urbaine, p. 216.
- 18 For a comparison with other situations, see Patrick Canel, Philippe Delis, and Christian Girard, *Construire la ville africaine: Chroniques du citoyen promoteur* (Paris: Karthala, 1990). See the third chapter in particular: "Une appropriation conflictuelle du sol urbain," pp. 37-60.
- 19 See Michel Coquery, "Secteur informel et production de l'espace urbanisé en Afrique," in *Tiers-monde*, pp. 197-213.

- 20 See Nick Oatley, "L'apparition de l'Edge (of) City: Quels mots pour les 'nouveaux' espaces urbains?" in *Nommer les nouveaux territoires urbains*, ed. H  l  ne Riviere d'Arc (Paris: UNESCO,   ditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2001), p. 19.
- 21 See the well-documented thesis by Cheikh Gu  ye on the holy city of Touba. This describes in great detail how the production of space by "urbanizing dervishes" shapes urbanization around the axis of symbolic representation. It also constructs a form of allegiance that includes the representatives of the state in religious powers. Cheikh Gu  ye, "L'organisation de l'espace dans une ville religieuse: Touba (S  n  gal)," Doctoral thesis, Louis Pasteur University, Strasbourg, 1999.
- 22 Achille Mbembe, "   propos des   critures africaines de soi," *Bulletin du CODESRIA*, no. 1 (2000), p. 15.
- 23 The central importance of controlling space as a means of influencing politics on the local level is abundantly illustrated in several studies. On Sal  , Morocco, for example, see Abdelghani Abouhani, *Pouvoirs, villes et notabilit  s locales: Quant les notables font la ville (Morocco: URBAMA [Urbanisation du Monde Arabe], n.d)*. But in contrast to Thiaroye-sur-mer and other Lebou territories on the Cape Verde peninsula, the situation in Sal  , Morocco does not consist of a confrontation between local notables and municipal authorities. Rather, the municipal council is itself controlled by the notables, who take advantage of their positions to preserve and consolidate their own land interests and gain power.
- 24 See Oumar Sow, "Territorialit  s concurrentes et gouvernance des villes: Les enseignements des petits et moyennes villes du Vieux Bassin arachidier au S  n  gal," unpublished paper, p. 3.
- 25 Lat Soucab   Mbow, "Les politiques urbaines: Gestion et am  nagement," in *S  n  gal, trajectoires d'un   tat*, ed. Momar Coumba Diop (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1992), p. 205.
- 26 See Abdoulaye Niang, "Les associations en milieu urbain dakarois: Classification et capacit  s d  veloppantes," *Afrique et D  veloppement* 25, no. 1-2 (2000), pp. 99-159.
- 27 Diouf, "La soci  t   civile en Afrique," p. 23.
- 28 Salimata Wade, Mohamed Soumar  , and El Housseynou Ly, eds., *Organisations communautaires et associations de quartier en milieu urbain ouest-africain* (Dakar: Enda, 2002), p. 26.
- 29 ISTED, *Dynamique de l'urbanisation*, p. 78.
- 30 See Fatou Sarr, *L'entrepreneuriat f  minin au S  n  gal: La transformation des rapports de pouvoirs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), p. 218.
- 31 See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
- 32 The Pencum S  n  gal coalition participated in the eighth annual competition for the Presidential Prize for the Advancement of Women. It won second place and was awarded a diploma, a check for one million CFA francs, and a mill valued at four million CFA francs.