

Introduction

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Relations between state institutions and market or street traders attract growing attention in theory and policy discussions because of the emerging significance of these relations to contemporary economic and political systems. Traders are among the most visible of a diverse set of commercial, service and production workers operating outside state registration or regulation. Although continuity with pre-capitalist activities is evident, international integration and new technology have changed and expanded these unofficial activities, rather than freezing or shrinking them. Current economic crisis conditions seem to be stimulating further multiplication of such work, in both Third World and post-industrial countries. It represents a substantial proportion of the real economy, in either GNP or labor force terms. Efforts to understand or control economic relations therefore must give unofficial economies their share of attention.

Unofficial or black market traders threaten or defy state control of the national economy. This control is problematic for relatively new governments struggling to gain control over internal and international linkages, but also for established government struggling to retain such control. Whether illegal or simply extralegal, traders' highly visible activities advertise the inadequacy of official distribution channels and the existence of fundamental problems related to migration, employment and pricing. They may supply needs for food, consumer goods and incomes which recognised sectors are unable or unwilling to meet, but in the ideal economy these functions would not be necessary.

Dramatic, even violent confrontations, replicated in many parts of the world, provide substantial evidence of hostility and tension between specific sets of traders and government functionaries. Arrests, confiscations, demolitions and deportations, as well as direct policy statements, testify to the desire of many governments to reduce or eliminate unofficial trade. Less dramatic tactics of restrictive licensing and taxation are even more widespread.

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Traders' active counter-strategies validate presenting their relations with the state in terms of antagonism, a term presuming agency on both sides, rather than of victimization. In the cases presented here, traders have responded with demonstrations, strikes, party politics, legal and ritual maneuvers, and group and individual negotiations. More indirect confrontations, from simple evasion and persistence to the innovation and expansion of trading roles, also reflect traders' pursuit of independent agendas.

This collection of case analyses shows that, while none displays all of these features, they appear frequently enough to suggest patterns of conflict. Both state and traders' strategies display recurrent themes, emphasized and combined differently in specific contexts. These papers identify labor mobility, employment, urban food supply, political legitimacy, taxation and land use as sources of tension in many parts of the world. These issues may be primary, secondary, or relatively trivial in a given case, depending on which resources are most hotly contested in the specific local historical context. The resulting contrasts highlight significant aspects of local political and economic formations, including their placement within international systems.

Conflict, whether overt or covert, clearly does not require either monolithic or homogenous adversaries on either side. If it did, very few conflicts of any kind would last long today. As these papers show, the confronting categories of state and traders are complexly constituted from diverse segments or interest groups that do not always work smoothly together, to say the least. These divisions deeply affect the nature and course of conflict between them, without necessarily reducing it. Traders are divided by gender and ethnic group, as well as by commercial characteristics such as wealth, location or commodity. These divisions shape the goals attractive to them and the effectiveness of their tactics. Likewise, parts of the state apparatus, such as civil servants, soldiers, or local police, have specific interests and strengths in carrying out or evading policies.

Antagonism between traders and the state arises despite, and partly because of, substantial linkages and mutual dependence between specific groups of traders and agencies of the state. This interdependence only fuels the continuing hostility, since neither can afford to ignore the other. Actors within each half control access to certain resources important to the others.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

Controversies over the degree of these economic linkages and their benign or malignant character lie at the root of much of the recent argument over the terminology of "informal sector" and "petty commodity mode of production," to name the two most influential alternatives (Moser 1978). Analysts like Moser and Hart (1973) try to identify specific linkage relations or organisational features which they can plausibly argue are typical of the group as a whole. On the basis on this single relation or coherent set of relations, they go on to diagnose the economic position or development potential of the entire group. These implicit or explicit ideal types are repeatedly contradicted by the heterogeneity even within a subdivision such as traders, so consistently as to call into question the whole project of typification on such a basis. Without endorsing the premise, however, one can acknowledge the great expansion in understanding of the selected linkage and organisational relations that research inspired by these two competing approaches has produced.

The concept of the informal sector was pioneered by Hart (1973) and enthusiastically adopted by the ILO (1972) and others (McGee 1978). The classic definition, later modified in response to some contradictions, describes activities with minimal linkages to the "formal" industrial or bureaucratic sector. Organisational characteristics used to define enterprises as informal include low capital, meagre physical facilities, easy and frequent entry and exit, reliance on kinship or other non-contractual working relations and lack of written records. These features both reflect lack of access to major resources of capital or training and enable informal entrepreneurs to retain autonomy from formal or state control, evading most taxation and surplus extraction.

These same characteristics also give informal enterprises the potential for rapid expansion of employment and wide distribution of income, justifying recommendations of public policy support for this sector from the early advocates mentioned above. Once further studies revealed that many enterprises with the defining characteristics in fact had subordinating linkages to the formal sector and apparent severe constraints on their income and employment expansion, these analysts renounced this terminology. It persists, however, among other analysts who still emphasize the accumulative intent and entrepreneurial possibilities of enterprises of this type.

By contrast, analysts favoring petty commodity terminology consider subordination through industrial and international

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linkages more typical of small-scale production and commerce. According to this model, although petty commodity traders (and producers) retain control of their working capital, these linkages ensure low capital accumulation. These structural constraints make trading a dead end for participants and planners alike (Moser 1978, Williams 1976). The development prognosis is correspondingly gloomy, with policy support of minimal long-term benefit. These analysts can point to many concrete cases of increasing subordination over time, with a greater percentage of traders depending on outside capital through credit and commission sales. Some analysts take these overtly dependent relations as typical for the sector as a whole. They consider petty trading a form of "disguised wage labor", like subcontracting in production, that in itself worsens participants' subordination (Scott 1979; King 1979; Gerry 1979; Moser 1980; Babb 1987).

The wide range of variation undoubtedly found challenges the basic distinctions of both approaches, between industrial/bureaucratic enterprises and either informal or petty commodity enterprises. Specific organisational features, such as kinship recruitment, small size or unstable organisation, can be found in both formal and informal enterprise (Peattie 1980; Green 1981). The frequent evidence of disarray and personalism in state agencies and corporations, apparently spreading in response to economic crisis, makes informal/formal sector distinctions even more problematic. Counter-examples to the petty commodity approach are also plentiful. The lack of accumulation and international subordination considered typical there are all too frequent among state and large-scale private enterprises not plausibly distinct from mainstream capitalism. At the same time, relative personal autonomy and the chance of accumulation remain a factor attracting erstwhile waged workers into trade. Trager suggests that variation between the analysts' home regions explains some theoretical divergences (Trager 1987). For example, subcontracting and capital accumulation seem more common in South America and West Africa, respectively. But rather extreme heterogeneity clearly remains within regions and even within single towns and cities.

These debates take the form of arguments over which kind of relation is truly typical of traders worldwide, but their failure to reach a satisfying conclusion suggests a need to redefine the question. The very heterogeneity of both linkages and organisational relations, constantly remarked by these observers among others, seems more typical than any given relation. Escaping from this theoretical dead end would seem to require restating the issue in such a way as to make wide

variation consistent with the process analysed, rather than contradictory to any proposed analysis.

Rather than any specific form or level of dependence or independence, a more consistent unifying feature emerges in the terms of the struggle which has constructed these specific relations. As case studies accumulate, relations to the state-sponsored apparatus of banking, registration, regulation, licensing, and taxation appear useful to locating a wide variety of enterprises within their national and international economic contexts and explaining their response to changing political and economic conditions. An adversarial relation to the state produces a historically specific configuration of wins and losses, compromises and withdrawals, which changes over both time and space to support the specific relations that vary so widely. As remarked earlier, this adversarial status implies both a relation and a degree of relative separation, much like the concept of marginality. Terms like unofficial or underground economy or black market address the contrast with state-sponsored or protected activity. They are spreading in use, although the authors in this volume use even these general terms sparingly (Trager 1987; Hansen n.d.).

The term unofficial economy avoids an overly restrictive focus on illegality that creates problems comparable to those with the term informal. The concept of an illegal or black market economy lumps illegal trading and small-scale production together with violent criminal activities usually considered intrinsically immoral by state and society alike. Activities such as theft, extortion, corruption and bribery are usually conceptually distinguished from illegal or extralegal trade and production, not least by traders themselves.

On the other hand, the connection is not purely generated by unconsidered terminology. Official propaganda and public opinion frequently also conflate illegal traders with thieves and prostitutes, to legitimise attacks on traders. In some cases the same people are undeniably involved in both types of activity, either opportunistically or through mafia-type organisations (Hart 1973, Green 1981, also J. Smart). Traders' illegal status not only makes them seek or succumb to such connections, but the criminalisation of productive and commercial activities essential to the survival of the poor is a significant aspect of destabilising and intensifying the oppression of the lowest levels of society.

In many cases, including some described here, trading enterprises are legal or illegal depending on location or licensing. Property and working relations may be virtually identical, and the same enterprise changes status with few other associated changes. While illegality is far from a trivial

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issue for some of these traders, it seems unreasonable to place them on opposite sides of a primary division. The boundary between legal and illegal trading sometimes shifts so rapidly and reversibly that legal status seems to function as a disputed asset rather than an enterprise characteristic. For example, in the Hong Kong district discussed by J. Smart here, traders in the illegal location were eventually legalised, while those in the legal market found themselves evicted for a building project, not to mention those who had legal places but traded in the illegal area.

The amount of energy traders devote to obtaining and protecting their legal status and extending effective recognition to more legal rights, as documented in these studies, argues convincingly against considering their legal status irrelevant. Their frequent evident desire for legalisation also argues against romanticizing them as the antithesis of the state. Traders evidently value specific state relations that they feel improve enterprise survival and long-term profit levels. The attraction of closer or more distant relations to the state depends upon the relations affecting local commercial needs and the efficacy and orientation of the local state.

The concept of unofficial trade bridges not only the legal or illegal status of individuals or categories of traders, but variations in the level of hostility or rapprochement with the state. Relations with some states, and still more often some segments of the state apparatus, can be justly classified as benign neglect, toleration, or even promotion, showing little of the open conflict depicted here (E. Smith). But even legal or tolerated traders still lack the full protection of the state, when compared to stores, factories and other enterprises with more official status. For example, traders in legally recognised markets in Ghana and India were summarily deregularised and evicted. Although they paid taxes or rents, they received little or no compensation for their stall rights, compared to procedures governing more general kinds of property rights, such as land ownership. Hong Kong made a similar distinction in awarding resettlement rights to traders and householders in squatter clearance areas (Clark, Lessinger, A. Smart).

RELATIONS AT ISSUE

The unified voice of these papers arises from taking a certain set of relations seriously, rather than from defining them as the same. Relations linking and dividing traders and state institutions, and various constituents of each group, become problematic because they consider all involved parties

as actors. Explicit and implicit alliances determine the alternative strategies available and successful in a given context. A comparative focus emerges on demonstrations and negotiations, arrests and demolitions, but parallels and divergences become equally illuminating. Issues which are not the primary focus of conflict in a given paper frequently emerge as secondary issues on closer examination, or on other occasions in the same location. The configuration of issues and strategies proves quite revealing about contradictions in the larger process of state formation.

Migration

Migration issues focus trader/state tensions where urban/rural relations remain highly problematic. Kerner's paper on the recent "Hard Work" campaign in Tanzania presents a national policy aimed at physically reversing unauthorised rural/urban migration. Traders and other unofficial workers were arrested and deported to rural areas. Regional variations in implementation reflected the state's dominant local problem in control of the countryside. Plantation labor supply, export crop production, gender subordination or border controls appeared as local "beneficiaries" of the exercise. The "housecleaning exercise" in Ghana displayed a secondary concern with urban/rural migration. Women traders were also exhorted to return to honest labor on the farm, although not physically sent there (Clark).

Mushrooming numbers of street and market traders draw attention embarrassingly to the rural problems that lead to uncontrollable urban/rural migration. In the cases described by Babb, Kerner and Lessinger, specific combinations of problems with access to land, excruciatingly low incomes and unacceptable working conditions keep farmers and farm workers migrating to the cities despite difficult urban conditions. Publicly accepting their presence in the cities would require publicly acknowledging the depth of rural distress. Kerner depicts a government attributing widespread unofficial activity to laziness and parasitism, with the assumption of adequate rural wages and conditions, in order to divert attention from serious rural problems. Babb describes very similar propaganda in Peru and suggests similar motives. By providing some urban employment, trading supports some freedom of movement, enabling rural people to "vote with their feet."

Where governments construct legal barriers to control urban migration and settlement, traders' oppositional status is

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directly linked to their association and identification with illegal "squatter" communities. Babb discusses the Peruvian situation, with parallels throughout Latin America, but the cases from India and Hong Kong also show direct parallels (Lessinger, A. Smart and J. Smart). Squatter settlements in East and Southern Africa had a similar pattern of illegal trade and housing provision (Nelson 1979; Parpart 1986; Mbilinyi 1955). In these cases men and women migrants had markedly different legal statuses.

The high percentage of recent or illegal migrants in unofficial trade, due to considerable barriers to their entry into official occupations, makes migration a secondary issue in almost every case. International migration has special prominence in the cases of Hong Kong and Washington, DC, where internal migration is less of a problem (A. and J. Smart and Spalter-Roth). Although the articles here address other episodes, Ghana and Nigeria have each carried out massive expulsion of each others' citizens since independence, aimed specifically at unofficial workers and traders.

Segmented Labor Market

Unofficial trade also articulates with employment structures, gaps and policies at the national level. Social groups excluded from jobs in industry or the civil service become identified with the unofficial economy, so that ethnic and gender tensions find expression in commercial policies (Robertson 1984). In four of these eight chapters the traders in question are predominantly female, reflecting women's exclusion from full-status urban jobs (Babb and Kerner). Exclusion from smallholder export crop production also concentrates women in trading (Eames and Clark). In the African cases, hostile commercial policies take on a strong element of gender hostility. Loss of economic control over traders is equated with loss of sexual control over women.

Even ostensibly gender-neutral policies can affect women traders disproportionately because of their specific economic or social position. In Washington, DC, male street harassment made locational issues more critical to women traders, who needed to band together for protection. Male traders also harassed them for economic motives, but also more often had the resources to meet new licensing and equipment costs (Spalter-Roth). Lessinger has described elsewhere how Indian women's strong association with home and privacy provokes tension or hostility when their trading brings them into public space (Lessinger, 1986).

Subordinated ethnic groups, such as blacks in Washington, DC and Indians in Peru, also face restricted entrance to the urban economy. As in Mexico, in Peru market trading is strongly associated with Indian ethnic identity, and especially with Indian women (Chinas 1973). Ethnic prejudices and tensions find their expression in attitudes towards traders, as in urban/rural relations generally, but also provide a basis for popular support for traders. Peruvian politicians courting Indian and lower class votes adopted trading policy as a symbolic and practical issue attractive to their constituents.

In Nigeria, the strength of indigenous political institutions, upon whom local administrations still depended, provided a comparable arena for expression of gender solidarity (Eames). Women leaders within the local chiefly hierarchy, firmly identified as traders' representatives because of the sexual division of labor, had powerful ritual/constitutional sanctions against the male town chief. Women leaders in the Ghanaian case, not strictly identified with trade because women also farmed actively, failed to come to women traders' defense (Clark).

Unmet Needs

Street and market trading provide evidence of serious problems in the officially recognised urban economy as well as the rural economy. With or without ethnic and gender barriers, it usually can absorb only a small proportion of the actual residents at respectable levels of subsistence. Unofficial economic activities testify not only to rural problems, but to controversial urban conditions of low wages and restricted opportunities preventing full absorption into waged work. In Peru, stagnant industrialisation and abysmal wages and conditions in domestic service swell the ranks of illegal traders (Babb). In Tanzania, as in Zambia, Ghana and Uganda, increasing numbers of government and industrial workers, even at the upper levels, must supplement their wages with unofficial incomes to survive (Kerner; Hansen, n.d.; Green, 1981). Attributing these supplemental activities, often illegal, to individual immorality obscures the underlying structural problems generating them.

While undermining state control over its workers and policies on the one hand, unofficial trading preserves state institutions on the other hand by defusing potential civil unrest. The marginal social groups already discussed are to some degree placated and subordinated by employment at minimal incomes. Unofficial institutions like marketplace systems also incorporate marginal parts of the country or region as sources

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of foodstuffs, export crops and labor. By settling for indirect access, the state incorporates areas where direct access would be too costly or difficult, such as highland Peru or rural West Africa (Babb, Clark).

In a context of grossly inadequate official channels, the unofficial economy likewise enables the state to retain some access even to waged and salaried workers, in industry or government service. Large employers such as the state itself lose many working hours from employees committed to unofficial trading, but without second incomes these workers would depart or rebel. When unofficial marketing channels provide second incomes, and supply food and consumer goods at lower cost, wages can remain within official revenues. Even elites may rely on unofficial channels for luxury goods to preserve their middle-class status (Hansen, n.d.).

As an employer, the state has a direct interest in price levels in the unofficial economy, leading to direct intervention. Unofficial prices are strategic to the intensely contested issue of relative wage and price levels, especially when most worker needs are met unofficially. The "wage subsidy" function of the unofficial economy depends on low income levels in unofficial trade (and production) and low prices for farmers. The balance of power between the state and suppliers, whether local farmers or multinational firms, proves critical to the success of those efforts.

State Credibility

Several of the papers here show the short-lived impact of enforcement alone, when substantial demands remain unmet. In Ghana, the government succeeded in shutting down unofficial urban food supply channels at enormous social cost, but could not provide any viable alternative (Clark). Hong Kong street vendors survived raids twice or three times daily because of the pressing demand for their products, mainly among waged workers (J.Smart). If the inability to eradicate unofficial trading undermines the legitimacy of state institutions like the police, the inability to challenge it economically undermines the legitimacy of the official economy.

Ineffectual interventions in local foodstuffs marketing show states' limited control over the farm population. The price controls attempted in Ghana would have made traders the enforcers of low farm prices. Instead, farmers simply kept food off the market until the urban-based state abandoned the effort (Clark). Direct sales from farmers to urban dwellers had equally little success in Ghana and Peru (Babb). State staple marketing boards in Tanzania also faced substantial

competition from unofficial trade (Kerner). Basically, the official economy is unable or unwilling to provide an equivalent level of service to the producer or the consumer.

Price controls in imports and manufactures founder on the rock of dependency. Traders are often held responsible (in Peru, Ghana and Tanzania) for price rises in imported and manufactured commodities that arise from worsening terms of international trade and foreign exchange shortages (Babb, Clark and Kerner). Even where states successfully attack local traders, they cannot keep prices down or supplies on hand themselves.

Unofficial trading not only fills in gaps and shortcomings in the official economy but depends on their persistence for its survival. Unofficial traders operate in the spaces left or wrested from state-sponsored economic activity. Many enterprises rely on supplies, customers, capital or personnel from the official sector. Substantial increases in enforcement activities can put formerly tolerated or permitted unofficial traders out of business for as long as the government can sustain them (Clark and Spalter-Roth).

Closing such gaps positively would require increasing the coverage of official channels of distribution to provide adequate goods, jobs and wages to those presently marginalised. Economic crisis and deepening stratification between and within states reduce real wages and create a growing demand for lower-cost food and consumer goods. This makes official provision of affordable goods increasingly difficult for Third World countries, and accounts for the recent resurgence of unofficial activity in industrialised countries (Spalter-Roth).

Taxation and licensing policies try to bring traders more closely under the control of state agencies, and make their resources available as public revenue. Public support for these controls and taxes depends on the credibility of state and state-recognised institutions. In the Nigerian case, increased taxation was the major issue (Eames). Markets with official recognition already contribute substantial revenues in stall rents or daily ticket fees, but this does not necessarily protect them from further tax demands. Along with other unofficial workers, traders pay no income or sales taxes. Smugglers among them also evade customs duties, often a major concern (Green 1981, Kerner and Clark).

Licensing initiatives can reflect revenue concerns, but are most often a disguised tactic for simply reducing numbers. Land use is the real issue, as larger businesses with fixed premises feel entitled to control surrounding public spaces. In highly urbanised locations, here represented by Hong Kong and Washington, DC, licensing was reluctantly substituted for

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outlawing traders altogether, after appeals to employment considerations (J. Smart and Spalter-Roth). Numbers and locations were both restricted to limit competition. Cosmetic and sanitary issues likewise disguise class-based definitions of appropriate land use.

In newly industrialising locations, such as India and Peru, land use is an issue of open political confrontation as competition for downtown sites occupied by traders intensifies. More capital-intensive land use promises higher government revenues, as well as higher returns on capital for politically dominant classes. Pressure from the local elite investors is partly balanced by populist pressure from workers who depend on unofficial trading for food and supplemental employment. Outcomes depend on the relative local strength of these forces, including the depth of divisions among traders. In India and Peru, existing sites won official status and legal protection, but new sites did not benefit (Babb and Lessinger). Cities in a position to place serious land pressures on street and market traders are also more likely to provide legal and electoral avenues for traders to seek protection. Electoral systems and patronage networks provide useful arenas for traders, but party allegiance often fails to provide lasting political access (Barnes 1985; Lewis 1976).

HISTORICAL TRENDS

Historical analyses of Africa and Guatemala make the point that this kind of confrontation is hardly new (C. Smith 1984; Guyer 1987). It has been a consistently important aspect of constructing the relations between rural and urban parts of a national economy and between international capitalism and specific incorporated and subordinated communities. Guyer's collection portrays the longstanding state intervention in African urban food supply systems. Smith's article highlights the influence of local political and economic resistance on the rate and terms of articulation of pre-capitalist areas to the world system. Both authors stress the importance of active agency on the part of both local traders and the national or imperial governments they faced. Wide variations in marketing systems found from place to place represent different outcomes of parallel struggles. These outcomes reflect the agenda of neither the coloniser or the colonised in a simplistic way.

This line of analysis turns the characteristic heterogeneity of unofficial trading into a fruitful, rather than a frustrating condition. It takes the mediating position of traders, between

national or international and local systems, as their defining characteristic, rather than any particular form of linkage or economic organisation currently found. Specific relations, such as periodic markets or subcontracting, arise from the degree to which and the ways in which this mediation has constructed local autonomy or subordination. The unofficial enterprises and the systems they help articulate change over time and place, but these actors remain recognisably in between.

The persistence and expansion of unofficial economies also becomes less surprising in this context, considering the continuing reproduction of heterogeneity within the international capitalist system. Inequality between parts of the system persists and intensifies, while continually changing its form. This process ensures a continuing need for mediation, and continuing conflict over the changing terms of articulation of various parts of the system. Under such conditions, unofficial economies must grow, to bridge these growing gaps, and constantly change and diversify in form. Despite the confused and confusing terminology sometimes used to define this category, the occupational and social strategies it includes remain distinctive or recognizable because of this historical continuity, as they keep growing in size.

The papers collected here take this line of analysis a step further by offering comparisons beyond the regional level. Paradoxically, focussing on local rather than regional processes clarifies the action of issues and relations that are of wider interest. The authors provide important insights into the workings of the specific social formations mediated by the traders they study. Their detailed accounts of trader/state conflicts reveal much about the nature of relations between state agencies and other parts of the economy linked to it through traders. At the same time, they provide insights into the oppositional dynamics at the root of unofficial economic growth in general.

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