

Gendered Market Spaces: Vendor Roles and Placement as Socio-Economic Indicators in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa

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Abstract

Guinea-Bissau's market spaces offer an interesting glimpse into gender stratification as it appears in the public sphere and demonstrates how their economic dynamics physically structure the spatial orientation as blueprints of future markets and the national economy. This study identifies the traditionally practiced roles of male and female vendors within the market regarding what commodities they sell and where they are expected to conduct business. Encompassed in this study are personal accounts from the researcher recorded within thirteen of Guinea-Bissau's markets over a period of one month and photographs of current and future markets which are under construction. These records were gathered in order to illustrate how gender spatially structures the public realm of the market. By conceptualizing the placement of vendors within Guinea-Bissau markets, this study emphasizes the part in which women play in furthering the economic flow and development within the country.



Figure 1. Bandim Market



Figure 2. Antula Market



Figure 3. Sao Domingos future market



Figure 4. Female vendors in Bubaque

Methodology and Data Collection

- Research Methods: surveys, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, continuous monitoring direct observation of 13 markets throughout Guinea-Bissau.
- 153 surveys were conducted with individual business owners, 18 of which were female and 2 of which were mixed.
- 13 markets surveyed including 10 neighborhood markets in the capitol of Bissau.
- Each informant was asked for consent to complete the survey, record the correspondence between the researcher and respondent, and photograph their place of business.
- Fieldnotes documented interactions within the markets and observations of the vendors.
- 5 semi-structured interviews were done with select business specialists.

Sex	Avg. Salary (net)/Day	Avg. Salary (net)/Month	Avg. Rent/Day	Avg. Rent/Month
Female (N=17)	\$3.50 (N=2)	\$90.40 (N=13)	\$9.40 (N=4)	\$198.75 (N=8)*
Male (N=134)	\$15.29 (N=7)	\$126.33 (N=51)	\$31.33 (N=4)	\$209.74 (N=73)

Figure 5. Average Salary and Rent based on Survey Data, 2014.

*Two outliers were removed from the calculation, a grocery store (\$2,000.00/month) and a Chinese boutique (\$900.00/month).



Figure 6. Female vendors in Bubaque

Results and Discussion

A. Market Structures

1. Vendor Placement

- Men can afford the permanent stalls within the markets while women usually sit on the ground or stand at a table (Figures 1 & 2). While men pay more in rent than women, they also typically make more money (Figure 5).
- Male market stalls face inward toward a centralized area where women sell local produce (Figures 2 & 4). Based on this observation, gendered locations within newly constructed markets are predictable (Figure 3).
- Space is limited. Market flow affects patronage (Figure 2).
- Market women organize their products to appeal to consumers (Figure 4).
 - "Men hung their products on walls or displayed them on shelves...I enjoyed the stacked fruit the women would set up on their tables; it defiantly made me want a mango or two [Figure 4]" (Fieldnotes 1/12/2014).

2. Gendered Commodities

- Men sell imported goods from China, Europe, and elsewhere. Women sell domestic produce (Figures 2 & 6).
- Food is purchased in small quantities based on immediate needs, but does not generate much income (Figure 5).
- Women sold perishable foods such as fish, chicken, vegetables, fruit, roots, and spices that are used daily for cooking and other in-the home purposes (Koenig 2006:55).
- Men owned businesses that catered to a specific need such as construction materials, pharmaceuticals, clothing, and symbolic items such as tobacco, cola nuts, or livestock.

B. Public and Private Sphere

1. Family and Home

- Women are expected to take care of the home and family so they work to support the family.
- Schooling is expensive; many younger children accompany their mother in the market instead of going to school (Figure 6).
 - "Every morning we bought doughnuts from the 'Doughnut Lady' and her daughter. They were the best doughnuts and they made them perfect every time... if only the 'Doughnut Lady' was nicer" (Fieldnotes 1/14/2014).

Conclusion

Gracia Clark found that women "trader's actions not only helped their families to survive but affected for better or worse, the survival capacity of their communities and nations" (1995:26). The market structures I observed throughout Guinea-Bissau are socially and economically stratified along gendered lines. The markets are comprised of permanent, rectangular stalls that form a large square around a center area (e.g., Figure 3). The stalls face inward on all sides of the women's area in order to maintain control of women who have been allowed by their husbands to sell within the market creating tension between public and private domains (Clark 1995). While men typically sell imported goods, women purchase perishable produce daily and sell their commodities to people within their neighborhood. Due to the need for families to purchase food daily, women who sell produce are able to contribute to their family's yearly income and perpetuate economic stability in the country.

*References are available upon request.