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From Isolation to Integration? A Study of Chinese Retailers in Dakar

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the late 1990s, more and more Chinese have migrated to Senegal, concentrating and opening small shops along the Boulevard Général de Gaulle, one of the major roads in Dakar.

Le Centenaire, the wider area around this major road, is also in the process of changing. During the 1970s the area was declared a residential zone, originally reserved for government employees and civil servants as the result of an initiative of President Senghor. Over a period of 30 years, however, the area has evolved into a Chinese market venue. This raises several important questions regarding the choice of this area by the Chinese, the fact that so many of the residents along the street have rented out their front yards to small-scale Chinese retailers and the development of an extended informal market run by locals.

Over the years, tensions have arisen because of this development, resulting in protests against Chinese products and the competition they present to local retailers, culminating in a major strike in 2004 organised by UNACOIS, the largest Senegalese retail and industrial association. Even though there was counter-action from the local customs union (ASCOSEN) in favour of Chinese goods, the Chinese retailer community has had to readapt itself to these specific local realities and readjust its strategy.

Although generally the Chinese presence in Senegal appears to be spatially and numerically quite limited, the vast number of actors directly or indirectly affected by their presence turn it into a very complex reality.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASCOSEN	Association of Senegalese Customers
EUR	euro
PRC	People's Republic of China
UNACOIS	National Union of Senegalese Retailers and Industrialists

INTRODUCTION

Should you drive across Senegal's capital, Dakar, from the outskirts towards the city centre situated on the Plateau, at one point you will reach a large avenue with clear signs of Chinese presence in what was once an exclusively Senegalese area. Starting from the late 1990s, more and more Chinese have migrated to Senegal, concentrating and opening small shops along the Boulevard Général de Gaulle, one of the major roads in Dakar. Such has been the combination of changing realities in China and Senegal over the last decade that today nearly the entire street is occupied by Chinese shops.¹ This is part of a wider trend of Chinese migration to Senegal over the last decade that has seen the numbers of Chinese living there rising into the thousands.²

In order to understand this recent evolution, this paper endeavours to identify and detail the reasons for this arrival of Chinese retail traders in Dakar, as well as the choice of and concentration around this area. Furthermore, the study focuses on the spatial impact of the Chinese retailers on a very local scale and shows how over time the original residential function of this neighbourhood has evolved.³ It raises the question of how the Chinese managed to settle in this very central and formerly prestigious area. On the other hand, as this area is more and more frequently referred to as Chinatown by locals, it is interesting to assess whether and how the Chinese integrate into Senegalese society and how they adapt themselves to local realities. Le Centenaire, the wider area around this major road, is also in the process of changing, a related process that is also examined in the paper.

THE ARRIVAL OF CHINESE RETAILERS IN DAKAR: A COMBINATION OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

During the 1970s, within the area around Boulevard Général de Gaulle called Le Centenaire, a large housing project was developed as the result of an initiative of the first president of Senegal, Leopold Sédar Senghor. Initially the area was declared a residential zone, and the project was to offer adequate and affordable accommodation for Senegalese government employees and civil servants. Given its fairly central localisation — the outer areas of the agglomeration were virtually connected to the Plateau — and the well-equipped houses, Le Centenaire was renowned for being a comfortable and rather prestigious area to live in. And because the Boulevard Général de Gaulle is on the parade route for the annual Independence Day celebrations, there was initially a strict policy prohibiting residents from modifying any of their houses' external features.

Over a period of 30 years the character of this area has slowly but surely evolved into a Chinese market venue. This raises the question of how the Chinese have managed to occupy and transform the front yards of most of the houses along this main thoroughfare.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the vast majority of the civil servants and first occupants of these houses either retired or died, in both cases limiting the financial income of the household. The impact was even stronger since, firstly, each household usually had only one salary and, secondly, most families were large, at least partly the result of a tradition of polygamy. In addition, the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 deepened the

financial problems of these residents, especially if the wage of the head of the household was relatively low to begin with. Sometimes the death of the latter caused tensions within the family, especially with regard to family members not living in Le Centenaire, and raised the issue of how to split up the inheritance. Eventually, such tensions often resulted in the property being sold.

Meanwhile, during the 1980s, as part of bilateral co-operation between China and Senegal, Henan Construction, a Chinese company, built several soccer stadiums in Senegal. At one point the contracted Chinese workers realised that some Senegalese retailers were making a fortune selling Chinese goods to the local population. During this period, Senegalese retailers were travelling directly to China to get their supplies and selling them at a large profit on their return. Recognising the origin of the products and knowing that they were highly overpriced in Senegal, some of the Chinese workers or their relatives who were arriving from China sensed the business opportunity in this situation and decided to stay and start their own retail enterprises in Dakar. Since they were able to rely on a much more developed network of connections and therefore pay lower purchase prices in China, they could be more competitive and undercut the prices of their Senegalese counterparts.

As its name implies, Henan Construction was originally from Henan Province in China, which explains the high percentage of Chinese from this area who came to Dakar. In a simplified interpretation, one might say that most of the Chinese retailers from Henan (between 60% and 70% of the retailer community) are former Henan Construction contract employees. However, Antoine Kernén argues that the explanation of this phenomenon is far more complex.⁴ Diplomatic ties between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Senegal were cut off between 1995 and 2005, because Senegal established diplomatic relations with Taiwan during that period. Migrants from the PRC, however, continued to settle in Dakar during the 1990s, and even though the PRC officially cut off all political and economic links with a country that recognised the Republic of China (i.e. Taiwan), Henan Construction never left the country. Therefore, since the PRC had no diplomatic representation in Senegal, the firm found itself being asked to provide PRC nationals with work permits (real or fake), since migrants from the PRC kept on coming to Senegal.⁵ One could therefore say that this company played the role of a Trojan Horse in Senegal, earning extra income by facilitating the unofficial settlement of Chinese migrants.

Alongside the Chinese retailers, some state-owned and parastatal Chinese companies also operate in Senegal, although in limited numbers. The key companies are Huawei and ZTE, working in telecommunications and IT, respectively, but whose impact is rather small. Within the construction sector, the most prominent company in terms of its establishment is Henan Construction. Furthermore, most companies involved in construction and public works respond to invitations to tender for government-commissioned projects, which means that they stay only for the duration of the contract (e.g. the company carrying out the Kawsara business district project). Another relevant point is the presence of small and medium-sized enterprises run by Chinese businessmen, which seem to be well established and integrated into the Senegalese economy. The fact that they have adapted to the local market does not make them stand out as being solely Chinese-run companies, especially since their workforce comprises mainly locals. Examples include Li Jicai, who runs Datong Afrique International (a company that supplies farming and agro-industrial equipment); Mr Yin, former head of Senegal Pêche (a large fishing company) who now owns a PVC

window firm and restaurant (*La noix d'or*); and Qian George, president of the Chinese chamber of commerce, who manages several building equipment factories as well as being involved in the supply of electronic equipment. However, the number of Chinese working in these sectors is relatively small and largely dependent on the ongoing Chinese-run projects in the country.

Initially, starting from the mid-1990s, Chinese retailers opened or took over small shops around the crossroads at the Peterson Avenue bus station. Rapidly the number of retailers rose around this very central and visible area to a point where, after a short time, almost all of Peterson Avenue was occupied by Chinese shops, which extended the Chinese economic presence towards the Boulevard Général de Gaulle. Nevertheless, there were some major differences between these two areas. The most important is a functional difference: the commercial activity around Peterson Avenue was linked to the bus station from the start, whereas initially the Boulevard Général de Gaulle was predominantly residential, with only a few grocery stores concentrated around the two roundabouts along the road.

By selling affordable products to the local population, the Chinese became quite popular. Consequently, they were able to extend their success story and open new shops on the Boulevard Général de Gaulle. More and more Chinese gradually settled along this major road, rented the front yards, built stalls there⁶ or transformed the existing garages into shops.

For residents experiencing the problems referred to earlier, the arrival of the Chinese in the area was an unexpected but welcome source of income. The possibility of the locals solving all their financial problems by renting out a small section of their front yard for a large amount of money explains why this phenomenon so rapidly took on the dimensions that it did. The Chinese would usually make an offer through a local real estate broker and agree to pay 200,000–300,000 CFA francs per month (approximately EUR 300–460) for a 15-square-metre store. To crown it all, they would very often immediately pay the rent a year in advance and in cash. This made it even easier for the residents to decide whether they were prepared to rent out a small part of their homes.

Even though initially there was a strict policy of residents not having the right to change the outward appearance of their houses and properties, soon most of them were modified. For instance, the first building undergoing significant change was a well-known fashion design business called Shalimar Couture, which designed clothes for the wives of leading government figures.⁷ This connection to well-placed government officials, as well as laxity on the part of the authorities and other more pressing issues such as the bad economic situation, could explain why neither the municipality of Dakar nor the district municipality of Medina (which is in charge of Le Centenaire) took any legal action to prevent these changes.

These properties, which are currently occupied by both the Chinese tenants and the initial residents, are structured in the following way. In some cases, there is no link between the initial house and the 'extension', while in others, a small passage connects the two (to allow the use of bathroom facilities and an outside kitchen by the tenants). While in some households there may be random contact between the two communities (mostly for the reasons mentioned above), in general such contacts are kept to a strict minimum. Thus, apart from mutual financial benefits, interaction between the Chinese and local Senegalese is rather limited.

The continuous arrival of Chinese immigrants in this area was linked to the development of an additional market, but this time run by Senegalese. Through the process of former street hawkers (locally referred as *bana-bana*) settling along the Boulevard Général de Gaulle, this thoroughfare turned gradually into some sort of informal market,⁸ increasing still further the visibility of commercial activity in this area. The reasons for this additional settlement seem quite obvious: firstly, ‘table retailers’⁹ get their supplies from the Chinese (playing the role of wholesalers), and it is far easier to do business if they are close to their suppliers; secondly, the parallel roads linked to the boulevard provide a possibility for expansion, compared to the lack of space on the Plateau; and, finally, the presence of an initial commercial function offers economies of scale attracting large numbers of customers. Most of the Senegalese interacting with the Chinese in Dakar — whether by working directly in their shops or by buying goods from them and opening their own businesses — are migrants from rural parts of or smaller cities in Senegal who initially failed to enter the formal job market, which offers limited opportunities. In this sense, this category of Senegalese, who do not benefit from a well-connected network and cannot afford to go to China to get their supplies, have access to this economic sector by buying affordable goods in large quantities from the Chinese in Senegal.

This rapid transformation of the area around the boulevard, as well as the transformation of established economic realities, has had significant consequences for and effects on the Chinese community, as well as on the other actors involved.

FACING LOCAL REALITIES AND DIFFICULTIES

Given the importance of religion in Senegal, the Chinese retailers fairly quickly adapted their products to this local demand. Thus, apart from providing low-cost staples for day-to-day use, they started selling prayer beads, framed pictures of marabouts and other items linked to Muslim beliefs. The Chinese focused on specific religious festivities such as Korité (Eid ul-Fitr; i.e. the end of Ramadan), the Magal of Touba (celebrating the return from exile of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the founder of Mouridism) or other non-religious events like the beginning of school, etc. These important dates for Senegalese usually mean increased expenses, but with the Chinese retail presence, a large percentage of the population that had once been excluded from the market managed to enhance their purchasing power. Also, a large number of the shops along this street offer a wide array of women’s clothing, responding to the desire of Senegalese women to be fashionable, many of whom are now able to afford more clothes. As a consequence, the Chinese were able to increase their profit margins and put many of their Senegalese counterparts out of business.

The group of well-connected Senegalese retailers who had dominated this economic sector until the Chinese arrived lost most of their profit margin and were no longer able to keep up with this new rivalry. Pushed into a corner, they turned to a powerful trade union defending the interests of Senegalese retailers and industrialists. Gradually, tensions rose and protests against Chinese products dumping strategies and disloyal competition increased over the years, culminating in a major strike in 2004 launched by UNACOIS (National Union of Senegalese Retailers and Industrialists). Using the idea of a ‘dead

city', i.e. a situation where all the Senegalese-run shops had closed, the strikers' main goal was to protest against the Chinese retailers and their products, and send a message to the government to deal with the Chinese 'problem'. In other words, the trade union and, by extension, the Senegalese retailers attempted to have the Chinese expelled so as to re-establish the former economic order. Considering the fact that originally the Senegalese retailers directly purchased their stock in China, the protest was directed against the Chinese retailers themselves and not against the products. When asked, the secretary general of UNACOIS did not deny that previously Senegalese retailers with resources had got their supplies from China, but said that they imported high-quality goods, which would explain the price difference.¹⁰

The quality of the products sold by the Chinese retailers is indeed often criticised, and most people, even those who buy their goods from the Chinese, agree on this. Furthermore, the Senegalese say that these commodities are not only of low quality, but sometimes can even be harmful to human health (plastic toys for children, for example), and that the Chinese consider Africa as being an outlet for 'rubbish' goods. On the other hand Ms Yin, a well-established Chinese businesswoman selling African wax in Dakar and owning a rather expensive restaurant with her husband, argues that the reality of the situation is more complex. She said that she often suggested to some of her customers that for a slightly higher price she could immediately provide better quality. Nevertheless, they preferred to purchase the cheaper versions, even though they knew that the quality was lower and that the products would not last very long. Not really understanding this illogical behaviour, Yin said that Chinese retailers could immediately raise the quality of the goods if the local population would agree to pay more.¹¹ In this sense, and taking into account the overall low purchasing power of the local population, the Chinese adapted the price and therefore the quality of the products to the local context.

Under a lot of pressure during the period of the strike, and having to endure high levels of hostility from the well-established local retailers, the Chinese community turned to their embassy, hoping that it might help resolve this difficult situation. However, the Chinese embassy, staffed essentially by people from Beijing, did very little. According to the Chinese retailers, these 'technocrats from the north' (i.e. Beijing) despised them and did not consider their problems to be important. An interview conducted with an official at the Chinese economic mission, who said that the presence of the Chinese retailers would tarnish the PRC's image in Senegal, tends to confirm this view.¹²

Even later, when the situation improved, the tension and suspicion between the Chinese retailers and the embassy was still perceptible. In the aftermath of the anti-Chinese protests in 2004, the Chinese authorities in Dakar finally realised that the embassy's lack of ties with the Chinese migrants was damaging and consequently tried on several occasions to form an association representing the Chinese diaspora in Senegal. Eventually, in order to deal with the concerns of the Chinese in Senegal, the Association of the Chinese Residents in Senegal was created. Li Jicai — a businessman with very close connections to the Chinese embassy and therefore seen by the Chinese retailers as a 'pawn' of the embassy — was chosen as president, but only a small percentage of the community joined, which indicates the enduring distance between the two sides.

Another concern indirectly involving the Chinese retailers shows once again the complexity and often paradoxical nature of this phenomenon. Shortly after the arrival of the Chinese, a complementary informal market grew up and settled along the pavement

directly in front of the retail shops, spreading into the secondary roads leading off the main boulevard. Since the Chinese shops were open from Monday to Saturday and the ‘table retailers’ worked from early in the morning until six or seven in the evening, the initially peaceful area progressively turned into a noisy and hectic place.¹³ Families, especially those with children, complained that since this related market had been active, they could not use the public space in front of their properties anymore; that they had to deal with a great deal of noise all day, as well as the dirt and rubbish left in the evening; and that the area was losing its prestige value. Also, the common knowledge that Chinese retailers tended to keep all their funds at home brought a potential risk of crime to the area.

The continuous decline of the area (in the view of the residents of Le Centenaire) and the protests against living next to such a chaotic and disorganised market gave birth to a collective, ongoing campaign for the preservation of Boulevard Général de Gaulle in its former state. Residents are attempting to convince the authorities — the municipality of Medina, the city of Dakar and the government — of the nuisance caused by the informal market and are trying to force its traders to leave. Even though the Chinese retailers do not seem directly concerned by this issue, the municipality blames the residents for renting out their homes and attracting this parallel presence; by extension, the Chinese are being presented as scapegoats. Regardless of what it would ideally like to do, the nearly impossible task of integrating these informal Senegalese retailers into the formal economy makes the government unlikely to accede to these demands. Also, it does not want to risk further riots like the ones that broke out in 2007, when, prior to the holding of the Islamic Conference in Dakar, which brought together most of the leaders of the Arabic world, the Senegalese authorities decided to remove all informal commercial activity from the streets with the objective of ‘cleaning up’ the city in order to make a better impression on visiting dignitaries attending the conference. The riots were the result. Not expecting such a drastic response at the time, since then the government has become much more careful in dealing with the matter of the informal street market.¹⁴

REACTIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND READJUSTMENT: ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH A LONG-TERM PRESENCE

Despite UNACOIS’s hostility, local Senegalese customers were actually quite happy with the arrival of the Chinese, as the cheap goods on offer allowed them to increase their purchasing power, and neither the street hawkers nor the table retailers agreed with attempts to get rid of the Chinese. As a consequence, the Association of Senegalese Customers (ASCOSEN), the largest customers’ union, organised a large counter-protest march, defending and advocating for the Chinese and their products. Moreover, ASCOSEN criticised the xenophobic nature of UNACOIS’s request and stated that prior to the Chinese arrival the Senegalese retailers used their almost exclusive control of this economic branch to exploit their customers.

Customers generally agreed on the perception of the Chinese products as being of a fairly low quality, but felt that they were once more part of the society by having access to a certain variety of products. By selling affordable goods and directly and indirectly providing work for a large number of Senegalese, in a small way the Chinese managed to offer a solution where the government could not. This could therefore also be one of

the major reasons why the authorities reacted to any of UNACOIS's requests, since if the government were actually to take measures to remove the Chinese commercial presence and the activities linked to it, it would not be able to offer an alternative.

Nevertheless, even with the counter-action from the local customer union (ASCOSEN) in favour of Chinese goods, the Chinese retailer community has had to readapt itself to these specific local realities and readjust its strategies. Referring to this area as Dakar's Chinatown seems exaggerated — especially during the first years of settlement — since a large number of shops and major signs of community life were missing. However, over the years the situation has become more complex, and more and more Chinese tend to live in Gibraltar, a residential neighbourhood situated just behind the Boulevard Général de Gaulle, and in response to the steep prices for renting a small shop, Chinese sometimes even prefer to buy the property outright. If they stay long enough, they find that they get a better deal by first buying and then selling when they leave. In terms of housing, the situation has therefore become more diversified, depending on the status of the migrant: those who can afford to either rent or buy along the boulevard (where prices are highest); others rent a shop along the boulevard and rent or buy in Gibraltar; and some rent a shop along the boulevard, but live further away. Thus, it is very difficult to measure the percentage of Chinese living in the area. Residents argue, however, that they have become more numerous, in particular in Gibraltar III, the most remote and somewhat isolated part of this residential zone. Aside from the accommodation function, the Chinese mostly use their houses for storage and only live in one or two rooms. It is commonly said that the Chinese live inside their own 'bubble', creating an enclave within the wider residential area.¹⁵

In terms of the recent increase of Chinese commercial activities in Senegal, there is still a considerable difference between the reality of the Chinese presence in Senegal and how it is perceived by locals. The idea of being invaded or surrounded by Chinese is quite widespread among Senegalese society. If we compare the approximate number of more or less 2 000 Chinese (including both retailers and contract workers) in Senegal to a total national population of 11.5 million, this reaction seems highly exaggerated. Again, the central location of the Chinese presence and therefore its degree of visibility play a very important part in how perceptions are generated. A large number of Senegalese use the Boulevard Général de Gaulle to access the city centre, and this frequent — whether direct or indirect — contact with the Chinese there reinforces this mistaken belief and makes them appear more numerous than they actually are.

Even though most retailers plan on returning to China once they have earned enough money, or moving to another country if business becomes difficult, the settlement of the Chinese retailer community as a whole seems to have become more established and permanent. As mentioned earlier, the rising number of Chinese living in the area and the opening of restaurants and bars could be the first signs of the early stages of a nascent Chinatown. In the immediate surroundings of the boulevard, a renowned Chinese restaurant recently opened and brings together all of Dakar's Chinese diaspora during the weekend for dinner and karaoke.

It is also one of the few places where contract workers (e.g. from Huawei or the Kawsara construction project) and independent migrants such as retailers mix. Compared to these project operators, who only stay in Senegal for the duration of the project or their individual contract, the independent migrants seem much more integrated into local

society. As a result, firstly, they have a more accurate picture of life in Dakar and, secondly, by being confronted on a day-to-day basis with local Senegalese, some of them are able to express themselves in Wolof, the local language. Even though their vocabulary is often limited to bargaining and economic issues, and the language barrier between Chinese and Senegalese still exists, knowing the local language offers the possibility of Chinese–Senegalese interactions strengthening with time. By contrast, the Chinese company employees, who seem to get along thanks to a basic knowledge of French or English and their business connections, are actually the ones who live completely apart from Senegalese society. Besides commuting between their homes and their office, canteen or sports complex, they have a very limited view of the society they are living in.

Beyond the idea that the Chinese retailers are adapting to the local economic context, they still have to rethink the way in which they organise themselves in order to be able to establish themselves over the longer term. And, since the Chinese embassy did not seem to be very concerned about the difficulties they experienced from anti-Chinese attitudes, the retailers eventually realised that they would have to resolve the issues affecting them on their own. In disappointment at the embassy's attitude, they turned to a Chinese businessman with American citizenship to create a Chinese chamber of commerce (the Senegal Chinese Business Association), represent the Chinese community, and deal with economic questions and potential difficulties. They deliberately chose Qian George — a complete stranger to the Chinese authorities with no links to the embassy — as president of the chamber of commerce, showing that they still wish to distance themselves from the embassy. However, economically, Qian has a very wide network in Senegal, as well as in other African countries (such as Nigeria and Ghana), which helps him to understand and easily adapt to changing political and economic circumstances. Little by little he is working towards lowering the Chinese retailers' costs, e.g. by trying to put a Chinese company (GMT Shipping) instead of Maersk in charge of shipping their products, unifying the handling of all supplies and fighting for more acceptable rents. To show his determination and willingness to work for the interests of the community and to be more accessible, he recently moved to Gibraltar.

CONCLUSION

The continuous settlement of Chinese retailers starting from the late 1990s along the Boulevard Général de Gaulle and in the areas around it has gradually changed the appearance of the area and added a commercial function to a formerly purely residential zone. In a way, it is the result of mutual benefits or constraints: on the one side, the financial difficulties of the residents and, on the other, the search for economic opportunities and a central localisation on the part of the Chinese.

In the course of this process, the Chinese swiftly put Senegalese retailers out of business by selling affordable and locally adapted products. This, together with the generally bad reputation of their products, heavily criticised by UNACOIS, put the retailers in a difficult position. Over the years, they have had to deal with a number of difficulties, but on the positive side, the poorest categories of Senegalese were able to access goods that were previously unaffordable to them. In addition, those low-cost products helped people with limited capital to start their own businesses. The opposition between these different

actors seems to display the positive and negative aspects as well as local perceptions of the Chinese in Senegal. Eventually, in order to guarantee their future interests and deal with both their economic and social issues, the Chinese created a chamber of commerce deliberately independent from the Chinese embassy.

Although, generally the Chinese presence in Senegal appears to be spatially and numerically very limited, its implications for a vast number of actors directly or indirectly affected by it, even on a very local scale, turn it into a complex reality.

ENDNOTES

- 1 In August 2009 we counted around 195 shops in Dakar, concentrated along the Boulevard Général de Gaulle, Peterson Avenue and the so-called 'Chinese avenue' situated within the Big Mosque shopping complex.
- 2 According to Qian George (president of the Senegal Chinese Business Association), there are 212 Chinese-run shops in Dakar and altogether (private and public sector combined) there would be approximately 2 000 Chinese people operating in Senegal. If we assume that on average each Chinese shop is staffed by between three and five people more or less directly involved in retail activity, the retail community can be estimated to have between 700 and 1 100 members. This brings an estimate of a total of 2 000 Chinese currently residing in Senegal, although it is difficult to establish a precise number because estimates vary according to source. For instance, the Chinese embassy in Senegal estimates the number of Chinese people living in the country to be 1 000 (not counting the contractual workers, or deliberately underestimating actual figures), whereas UNACOIS (National Union of Senegalese Retailers and Industrialists) suggests that this figure is closer to 5 000 or more (these overestimations are essentially connected to economic and political issues and competition with the Chinese retailers, discussed further on in the paper).
- 3 Several research studies have already been conducted on the Chinese retailer community in Senegal, although concentrating more on economic and social points and the itineraries and origins of the Chinese than the functional transformation of the area, e.g. Bertoncetto B & S Bredeloup, 'La migration chinoise en Afrique: accélérateur du développement ou sanglot de l'homme noir?', *Afrique Contemporaine*, 218. Paris, Agence Française de développement, 2006, pp. 199–224; Bertoncetto B & S Bredeloup, 'Chine-Afrique ou la valse des entrepreneurs-migrants', *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 25, 1. Poitiers: AEMI, 2009, pp. 45–70; Gaborit M, 'Les stratégies des acteurs de la Chinafrique sur les territoires africains et chinois: les cas du Sénégal et de la Mauritanie', master's dissertation, Paris: IFG, 2007; Kernén A, 2007, 'Les stratégies chinoises en Afrique: du pétrole aux bassines en plastique', in *Politique Africaine*. Paris: Karthala, 2007, pp. 163–80; Kernén A & B Vulliet, 'Petits commerçants et entrepreneurs chinois au Mali et au Sénégal', in *Afrique Contemporaine*. Paris: De Boek Université, 2008, pp. 69–94.
- 4 Kernén A & B Vulliet, *op. cit.*
- 5 Kernén A, 'La Chine-Afrique par le bas: les commerçants chinois en Afrique de l'Ouest', presentation to an international colloquium on 'La Chine et l'Afrique: regards historiques, dynamiques spatiales et mobilités croisées', Paris: INALCO, 12 June 2009.
- 6 If initially there was no garage or stall in the front yard, either the Chinese or the residents would build the structure necessary for starting a business. Given the rapid evolution of this phenomenon in general, local residents would carry out the construction, knowing that their

investment would pay off and would continuously attract tenants. Often, the Chinese retailers would offer to construct the stall themselves to accelerate the construction process and allow them to launch their business quicker, but would then expect the costs of building the stall to cover the rent for several months.

- 7 Dia H, '*Occupation et utilisation de l'espace dans le secteur du Boulevard Général de Gaulle: de la place SFAX à la place de la nation*', master's dissertation, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 1991.
- 8 Given the fact that the area around Le Centenaire is still officially a residential zone, the establishment of a large market venue within this area is not legally permitted.
- 9 In Senegal, the term 'table retailers' (*tabliers* in French) refers to someone running his/her business and informal activity in a public place and using a table to display the goods.
- 10 Interview with Bou Diop, secretary general of UNACOIS, July 2008.
- 11 Interview, Dakar, August 2008.
- 12 Several Chinese retailers and Chinese government officials were interviewed.
- 13 Most of the Chinese do not open on Sundays, but some of the informal retailers work seven days a week and display their goods in front of the closed shops.
- 14 If this example is not really linked to the Chinese retailer community, it reflects the government's hesitation — even refusal — to take any action against the African retailers around Boulevard Général de Gaulle after the events of 2007.
- 15 Local residents say that the Chinese who live in Gibraltar are very discreet, keeping their folding shutters and houses closed at all time, which creates an impression of the properties not being occupied. This is also linked to the fact that almost all of them work in their shops during the day and only return to their properties in the evening.

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