Résumé

R. Launay — Sphères de transactions et échanges entre sociétés en Côte d'Ivoire.

Dans l'introduction de Markets in Africa, Bohannan et Dalton utilisent la notion d’« économie multicentrique », formée de « sphères de transactions » différenciées à la fois par les produits et services échangés, les modes d'échange et les valeurs morales qui y sont associées. Les échanges de biens ressortissant à la même sphère sont baptisés « transferts » (conveyances), ceux de biens ressortissant à des sphères différentes, « conversions », ascendantes ou descendantes — ou bonnes ou mauvaises — suivant la hiérarchie des sphères reconnue par les échangeurs. Ce modèle pose la question de savoir comment le « gagnant » parviendrait à convaincre le « perdant » d'accepter un marché désavantageux. En fait, si les partenaires membres de sociétés différentes reconnaissent des systèmes de valeurs distincts, il peut n'y avoir point de perdant. Pour comprendre le système économique d'une société, il faut prendre en considération non seulement sa propre échelle de valeurs, mais encore celles de ses voisines, ce que démontre l'étude des échanges entre les Dyula d'une part, et les Guro et Senufo Kiembara d'autre part.

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In their ‘Introduction’ to Markets in Africa (1962: 3), though clearly with reference to ‘primitive’ societies in all parts of the world, Bohannan and Dalton elaborate the concept of a ‘multicentric economy’: ‘A multicentric economy is one in which there are several distinct transactional spheres. Each sphere is distinguished by different material items and services, and may be distinguished by different principles of exchange, and different moral values.’ They also introduce the critical distinction between types of transactions in such economies: transactions involving goods within any single sphere are called ‘conveyances’; transactions of items between different spheres are called ‘conversions’ (ibid.: 5). As Bohannan and Dalton posit that transactional spheres are hierarchically ranked, it also follows that upward conversions are ‘good’ and downward conversions are ‘bad’ from the actor’s point of view. In particular, individuals gain prestige by converting goods from a lower to a higher sphere.

To the extent that we adopt the perspective that each different system of distinct transactional spheres constitutes a separate and independent ‘economy’ (the implicit perspective of Bohannan and Dalton’s scheme), then it seems logical (to me) that the best way to describe conversions would be what mathematicians call a ‘two-person zero-sum game’: in other words, one player’s gains—in this case in prestige terms—are achieved only at the expense of his opposite number in the transaction. Phrased in these terms, the problem of ‘conversions’ in a ‘multicentric economy’ (to adopt the terminology of Bohannan and Dalton) reduces to this question: how does the successful player induce other players to lose? Why would anyone be so foolish as to willingly convert downwards? Bohannan and Dalton point out that conversions

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are common in emergency situations—wars, famines, or epidemics—when survival is more important than prestige. However, they also point out that conversions may be ‘institutionalized’ as normal features of social interaction outside emergency situations (ibid.: 6), but they evade the issue of how, in concrete ways, some individuals manage to gain and others—presumably—to lose.

I wish to suggest that this problem of conversions indeed arises because Bohannan and Dalton choose, as their units of study, individual ‘economies’, each of which they associate with a single and coherent system of values, and more generally with a single society—in other words, the notion of a distinct economy ‘embedded’ in society. As long as one sees every transaction in terms of one, and only one, system of values, then every conversion must have its winner and its loser. But this need not be the case if a transaction involves members of different societies with different value systems. In such transactions, both actors may consider themselves to be the winners, at least in their own terms. If it can be shown that, in some cases at least, external trade across societal frontiers is an important, if not the principal, means of effecting conversions, then we must also question the extent to which the values of any single society can adequately categorize economic processes within that society. In other words, the extent to which an individual is able to trade outside his own society may significantly affect his position within his society, by allowing him access to the signs of rank and/or the instruments of power. More generally, this would mean that it is not sufficient to know the value system of a given society in order to understand its economy; one must also take into account the value systems of its neighbours.

I shall illustrate my case with two examples, both involving Manding-speaking groups specialized in trade—the Dyula—in different parts of the Ivory Coast. In the first case, trade between the Dyula and the Guro, direct exchange between members of both societies was limited to the fringe which constituted their common border. But in the second case, trade between the Dyula and the Kiembara, a Senufo-speaking people living within the chiefdom of Korhogo, both groups lived as neighbours within a common political system, and often within the same villages.

My research in the field related extensively to only one of these groups: the Dyula of Korhogo chiefdom. However, Meillassoux (1964) gives a convincing and detailed account of the Guro-Dyula trade from the Guro point of view, on which I shall rely here. No comparable account exists in print concerning the Kiembara, and my own interpretations are based largely on statements from Dyula informants. As a result, conclusions about the relationship of external trade to the internal structures of these societies are bound to be tentative. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to demonstrate that societal boundaries were an instrumental feature, and not merely a limit, of economic systems.
The point is perhaps most obvious with respect to the Dyula. The very name ‘Dyula’ can itself be used to designate a professional trader, especially if he is a native Manding-speaker, though the word also has a long history of use as an ethnic label referring to Manding-speaking minority groups in northern Ivory Coast, Mali, and Upper Volta, and more recently to the Manding-speaking immigrants in the towns of these same countries (Person 1968: 97; Lewis 1972). ‘Profit’, reckoned strictly in terms of the exchange value of different goods and services, was a legitimate end in itself among the Dyula. The Dyula enclaves along the Guro frontier and in Korhogo chiefdom were part of a vast Manding-speaking network of traders linking the Niger bend (and ultimately the Sahara and the Maghreb) with the southern limits of the savanna (and ultimately the forest and the Atlantic coast). This network permitted Manding traders to control the exchange of goods across ethnic boundaries and over long distances. The Dyula provided an avenue for individual Guro and Senufo seeking to convert goods from a ‘lower’ to a ‘higher’ sphere. But the goods thus obtained by the Dyula could be, and often were, reinvested in trade through further exchanges.

In all of these three societies—Dyula, Guro, and Kiembara—individual control over the conversion of goods was a vital issue. However, the modalities of exchange between the Dyula and the Guro on the one hand, and the Dyula and the Kiembara on the other, were significantly different. These differences, in turn, affected the ways in which control over conversions benefitted individuals in each of the societies involved.

Let us first consider trade between the Guro and the Dyula. Until the colonial period, this trade was conducted exclusively in markets situated along the common frontier between the two groups. Direct access to these markets was limited to individuals located on either side of the frontier, and this monopoly was jealously guarded by both the Guro of the northernmost fringe and the Dyula of the southernmost fringe of their respective territories.

Monopolistic control over access to markets was all the more crucial to the parties involved in that neither the Guro nor the Dyula along the frontier produced in large quantities the two principal items of exchange: cola nuts and iron rods. Cola nuts grow wild in the forest (to the south of the frontier), where they can be collected. They are an item of luxury consumption in the West African savanna, and an indispensable feature of marriage ritual, at least among Manding-speaking peoples. They are also highly perishable, and it is pointless to accumulate them except for exchange on a relatively short-term basis. In return for the cola they received from the Guro, the Dyula exchanged iron rods. These iron rods were in fact produced west of the frontier, the centres of production being the towns of Touba and Seguela. Such rods were obtained in return for cloth (Richard 1972) and probably for salt, both of which the Dyula along the frontier procured from traders from the
North. This is a highly simplified account; both the Guro and the Dyula on the frontier produced cloth as well, and other items, particularly slaves and foodstuffs, were exchanged in both directions. According to Binger (1892: 142-143), only certain individual traders in the Dyula frontier towns had access to Guro markets, which they prohibited to other members of their own communities. Furthermore, Dyula towns slightly to the north of the frontier often tried to prevent caravans arriving from the North from trading directly with the frontier towns. In short, Guro markets—and these only on the northern fringe of Guro territory, in the savanna and north of the cola-producing zone—were only accessible to certain Dyula on the frontier. Dyula markets on the frontier were readily accessible mainly to Dyula from neighbouring communities slightly to the north; this extension of the monopoly was made possible by the fact that donkeys, the major beasts of burden in the caravan trade, did not survive well in the southern reaches of the savanna. Finally, most traders from the North obtained their cola in Dyula markets to the north of the frontier.

In any case, the Dyula along the frontier owed their prosperity to their location, which permitted them to control exchanges of different goods between different regions. Rates of exchange were calculated in terms of iron rods: the aim of exchange among the Dyula was not the accumulation of iron rods per se, but rather the accumulation of profit in terms of exchange value reckoned in iron rods. But profits were reinvested in goods for exchange rather than in production, and the system as a whole was limited by the fact that the Dyula along the frontier depended on production of goods by other groups.

Iron rods were also a unit of exchange among the Guro. This is not to say that they had no immediate practical value: the iron could be and was used for the production of agricultural implements (Meillasoux 1964: 269). But it is also clear that the Guro were obtaining more iron in return for cola than they needed for the production of hoes. The Guro along the frontier did not produce cola nuts, and so they also needed iron rods in order to procure cola for exchange among the Guro living in the forest (ibid.: 273-274). Significantly, the number of iron rods exchanged per unit of cola diminished as one went towards the South. One basket of cola could be exchanged against two to five packets of twenty iron rods apiece in the South; against five to ten packets in the Centre; and was ceded to the Dyula in return for twenty such packets (ibid.).

But the fundamental difference between the Guro and the Dyula conceptualization of the exchange of cola and iron rods was that, for the Guro, the two items belonged to separate economic spheres; obtaining iron rods in return for cola was definitely an upward conversion in Bohannan and Dalton’s terms. But it was also possible for the northern Guro to obtain cola from the South in return for locally produced goods such as cloths, sheep and goats, pottery, or iron utensils (ibid.: 274).
Thus the Guro along the northern frontier were able to accumulate iron rods in two different ways: either they could convert their own iron rods 'downwards' in the South for cola, assured of ultimately receiving an even greater quantity of iron rods in return; or they could exchange locally-produced goods for cola, which could then be converted into iron rods.

Among the Guro as among the Dyula, iron rods could be reinvested in trade. However, trade was not an end in itself for the Guro, as it was for the Dyula, and iron rods had other, more important functions. First of all, they could be stored as items of value, buried in granaries. The Guro acknowledged the rank of 'rich man' (fua or migone), and the number of iron rods in a man's possession was an important factor in determining his membership in the class of 'rich men'. Formerly, such a man might have between 1,000 and 5,000 iron rods stored away in his granaries (ibid.: 201).

But the value of iron rods among the Guro also rested in the fact that they were an important part of bridewealth payments. In this way, iron rods could be converted into rights over women. As the Guro are patrilineal, rights over women also included rights over descendants. Furthermore, affinal relations were also important for purposes of trade; women were the main agents of the trade with the South, and relationships of exchange between Guro communities were often expressed in the idiom of affinity (ibid.: 273). By exchanging iron rods for women with Guro in the forest, individual Guro along the frontier were in a more favourable position to obtain cola from the South which could subsequently be exchanged for more iron rods. Aside from direct descendants and affines, rich men were also able to attract clients within their own lineages. It was a man's responsibility to pay bridewealth for those working on his behalf (ibid.: 217). Thus a man's wealth in iron rods was an instrument in establishing his authority over dependants, either wives or younger men within the lineage, not to mention slaves, who could also be obtained in exchange for iron rods.

In short, a man's ability to convert goods from a lower to a higher sphere gave him more power over other individuals in Guro society, a power which in turn enabled him to accumulate more goods for conversion and ultimately to acquire even greater power. In the Guro case, control over the process of conversion was limited by possibilities of access to markets along the northern frontier. The Guro in the North were in a better position to convert goods from one sphere to another than those in the South. Such a situation may have two possible outcomes. Power may be increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals situated strategically along the frontier, and who control the flow of goods back and forth. On the other hand, if dependant groups and individuals also have a certain amount of access to frontier markets, the process of corporate group segmentation may actually be accelerated. According to Meillassoux (1964: 275-276), this is what happened to the
Guro in the North, where junior and even slave branches of lineages were able to achieve their independence. The power which individual Guro in the North could accumulate through their control of the frontier was limited by the abilities of others in their own communities, including their own dependants, to profit from the same process.

Trade between the Dyula and the Kiembara Senufo within the chiefdom of Korhogo was a rather different affair, precisely because there was no frontier. Frequently, both groups could be found living in separate quarters of the same village. Moreover, both groups acknowledged a common political authority, although the Dyula enjoyed a certain measure of independence to the extent that many of them did not participate in the activities of the poro, the initiation society which was a powerful instrument of control for Senufo chiefs; in either case, Dyula initiation society bushes, in the measure that they did exist, were kept strictly separate from, and largely independent of, Senufo bushes.

According to the first colonial estimate (in 1908) of the population of the chiefdom of Korhogo, the Dyula represented almost 15% of a population of 22,360 taxable adults (Ivory Coast National Archives). Subsistence agriculture as an activity was not valued among the Dyula, and individual Dyula attempted to free themselves as much as possible from cultivation in order to devote time to Islamic scholarship or to trade. Much of this trade consisted in the sale of cloth to their Senufo neighbours, Kiembara and others. Women were involved in the spinning of cotton, the collection of wild indigo, and the dyeing of cloth, which was woven into narrow bands and sewn into blankets by the men. Virtually every Dyula boy learned to weave, and it is still true that the Dyula quarter of any village in the chiefdom and in surrounding areas can instantly be recognized by its looms, set underneath shade trees around clearings. Aside from the production and sale of cotton cloth, the Dyula were engaged in a number of other trading activities: the collection and export of cocoons woven into a sort of silk in Upper Volta; the cultivation of tobacco and the processing of snuff for sale in local markets; and the export and possibly the production of shea butter and of condiments such as ginger and red peppers. Profits from these activities could be reinvested in larger-scale trading enterprises, particularly the exchange of cola and salt between Dyula markets to the north of the Guro frontier and the town of Sikasso, situated in modern Mali near the border with the Ivory Coast. But the production of cloth and its sale to the Senufo, who did not weave at all, was at the centre of the precolonial Dyula economy, and the predicament of the modern Dyula is due in large measure to the deterioration of the exchange value of hand-woven cloth because of the massive importation and commercialization of machine-produced textiles.

The individual Dyula was able to amass a trading capital to the extent that he could sell more cloth than was necessary to meet his own needs.
and those of his dependants. For the Dyula trader, there were three ways of resolving the problem of subsistence. He himself, or other free members of his household, could grow the food necessary to meet their own needs; the disadvantage of this solution was that it limited the production of cloth to a seasonal activity. A slave owner could, of course, depend on his slaves to produce food for his household. Although Park (1954: 216) and Binger (1892: 299) both observed slaves producing cloth among other Manding-speaking trading groups, I was told by my Dyula informants that this had not been the case in Korhogo chiefdom; this was undoubtedly because the cloths they produced were primarily for local consumption with an inelastic pattern of demand, whereas the demand for higher quality luxury cloths traded over long distances would have been more elastic. Be this as it may, the implications were that a slave involved in staple food production did not detract from the labour force normally available to the Dyula trader for the production of cloth; furthermore, the services of such a slave would also have been available to transport goods in trading ventures as the need arose. Finally, food was purchased from neighbouring Senufo cultivators in villages and in the local markets, operating in the region on a six-day cycle. Cultivation of foodstuffs by slaves was a solution available only to those already prosperous enough to own some; poorer members of the Dyula community had to limit cloth production to certain times of the year, or to use a part of the proceeds of the sale of cloth for the purchase of food, or both.

Before embarking on a trading venture, it was necessary to accumulate a sufficient number of cloths to make the journey worthwhile; I was told that one man could carry as many as fifty cloths on his head. It was to the trader's advantage to take a full load, as the cost of the journey in terms of food, tolls on ferries, etc., seriously reduced his margin of profit on any individual ventures. A weaver who did not have enough cloths to make an expedition worth his while, and who needed the wherewithal to purchase food for his household, could sell his cloths to other Dyula traders. The labour time required by the members of any household to produce their own food, or to produce cloths for sale to other traders to meet their needs in the market place, restricted the opportunity of individuals to engage in trading ventures.

It follows that a group of several weavers acting as a single budgetary unit enjoyed a clear competitive advantage. Such groups almost always consisted of a group of close kin under the authority of the senior member of the group. Because of Moslem laws of inheritance, the most stable such group consisted of a father and his sons, as the sons all stood to

1. Describing a hypothetical trading venture undertaken by a man and his wife between Kong, Kintampo, Bobo-Dioulasso, and back to Kong, BINGER (1892: 313) estimated that the expenses of travel between Bobo-Dioulasso and Kong alone accounted for a full fourth of the value of goods obtained in Bobo-Dioulasso for resale in Kong.
inherit an equal share of the profits on their father’s death. It was also common to find full-brothers working under the authority of the eldest brother, but in fact individuals enjoyed a certain measure of choice concerning the kinsman for whom they worked, especially after the father’s death. It was the responsibility of the senior kinsman of the group to provide a wife for those who worked on his behalf, and subsequently—except in the case of a father whose wealth would anyway be inherited—to provide them with a certain capital to permit them to trade on their own. Given the late age of marriage among the Dyula, males might remain in a state of dependence until the age of thirty or even later. Thus the wealth, and ultimately the power and prestige, of a precolonial Dyula trader in Korhogo depended on the extent to which he was able to control the productive labour of slaves and of junior kinsmen.

Looking at this same trade from the Senufo point of view, one can say that the Senufo were triply dependent on their Dyula neighbours: as a market for produce; as a source of cloth; and as agents of trade which permitted them to acquire items produced outside the region, such as horses, firearms, slaves, and luxury goods. The medium of exchange in this case was cowries; cowries were obtained from the Dyula in return for food or other goods, and could be surrendered to the Dyula in return for cloths or other valuables. Like iron rods among the Guro, they could also be accumulated as prestige goods in their own right, stashed away in granaries. But, in other respects, the function of cowries among the Senufo differed significantly from that of iron rods among the Guro. Most important, most marriages among the Kiembara did not involve bridewealth. The Kiembara are matrilineal, and bride service for the bride’s father is the usual way of obtaining a spouse (SEDES 1965: 40). However, there were two important exceptions. A slave woman might be purchased as a wife, in which case the children effectively belonged to the husband’s matrilineage. Furthermore, in some bridewealth marriages, called tye porogo, the bride’s family transferred rights in genetricem to the husband’s matrilineage. Such marriages were limited to persons in positions of powers or their heirs (SEDES 1965: 39-40). But it is significant that persons in positions of power might use their wealth to acquire additional rights over persons—specifically wives and descendants—and so augment their own power and that of their lineage.

Of course, the use of cowries to purchase firearms, slaves, or horses was another way in which they could be used to concentrate power in individual hands through the use of acquired wealth. However, the use of wealth to consolidate one’s position within the lineage system itself was more restricted than among the Guro; wealth was less frequently converted directly into rights over dependants.

But perhaps the most spectacular feature of the Senufo system was the conversion of cowries into cloths, which incidentally provided the
mainsprings of the Dyula economy. Cloths were uniquely a prestige item; the Senufo themselves went naked until quite recently, when public nakedness was made a crime in the Ivory Coast. But cloths were an essential feature of mortuary ritual. At the funeral, blankets were torn into strips and buried with the corpse. The number of cloths so buried varied with the rank of the deceased, or with the deceased's kin (Vendeix 1934: 625, cited in Holas 1966: 163; SEDES 1965: 76-77). Cloth might be bought in advance and stored for the occasion, but for obvious reasons, it was more usual that stored wealth in the form of cowries was converted into cloths at the time of the funeral. Cloth, then, was a sign of rank; unlike cowries or iron rods, it could not normally be converted into items of power or for that matter into anything else. Moreover, its effective use was only through its withdrawal from circuits of exchange and indeed through its destruction.

In a way, authority was legitimized post mortem; but this was only partly true. By assuring a lavish display of wealth at the funeral of a predecessor, the successor was indirectly legitimizing his own claim to authority. Contributions to funerals of other lineage kin, as well as to close extra-lineage kin, were also a means of legitimizing one's status through the conversion of one's wealth into cloth. But the Senufo system differed radically from the Guro system to the extent that wealth was used to legitimize one's pre-existing authority rather than necessarily converted into means of directly extending one's power over others.

If the Senufo differed from the Guro in the way they used wealth, they also differed in the way they obtained it. Unlike the Guro, they did not control a frontier; moreover, they relied largely on the Dyula for exchanges with other regions. It would appear that wealth among the Senufo depended on control over production in a very broad sense. Items produced by the Senufo and which could be exchanged were divided into four categories: slaves taken in war; subsistence foods; cotton; and cultivated luxuries such as tobacco and condiments. There is little reason to believe that the chieftdom of Korhogo or any of its immediate neighbours was very systematically involved in slave raiding. Warfare was always a potential source of slaves for sale, but slaves were also imported from outside the region. Most probably, the contribution of the sale of captives to the Senufo economy as a whole was marginal, except at the very end of the precolonial period when the chieftdom of Korhogo was allied with the conqueror Samory. The sale of staple crops and cotton was undoubtedly much more important; the neighbouring Dyula depended on the one for their subsistence needs, and on the other for the production of cloths for sale. It is certain that a high proportion of Dyula production was geared to obtaining these two necessities, so that much of the Senufo-Dyula trade amounted to the conversion of staple foods and cotton into cloth through the medium of cowries.

However, both Senufo and Dyula were importing a certain quantity
of goods from outside the region; luxuries such as cola nuts; weapons and other 'means of destruction' such as horses and firearms; slaves; and of course cowrie shells. In exchange, the region was exporting certain items, including produce cultivated by the Senufo, particularly condiments; under Samory, at least, the region was also exporting Senufo-grown staple foods (Person 1975: 1689) as remains the case today even though the technology of food production has remained relatively unchanged. Moreover, though most of the cotton cloth woven by the Dyula was traded to their Senufo neighbours, some was also traded outside, quite plausibly to towns near the Dyula frontier where, as we have seen, cotton cloth was exchanged for iron bars.

In any case, wealth among the Senufo was largely obtained through the conversion of agricultural produce, whether staple foods, condiments, or cotton. These were traded to the Dyula, who either consumed them directly, used them to produce goods for exchange back to the Senufo, or traded them outside the region. It is certainly significant that staple foods were an important item of exchange, much more so than among the Guro. Thus exchange among the Senufo was closely related to primary processes of food production. Persons who through their position in Senufo society, were entitled to receive prestations of uncooked food, or who could rely on the labour of others in their own fields, were clearly in a commanding position with respect to the conversion of food into wealth. Family heads could rely on the labour of sons, nephews, or given the system of bride-service, of sons-in-law. Chiefs were entitled to the labour of subjects on their fields, and may have also received prestations in kind. In addition, prestations of labour and of agricultural produce were definitely channeled through the Senufo initiation society, the *poro*; not only were the elders in control of the *poro* entitled to receive obligatory fees and services (primarily in the form of prestations of labour in their own fields) from all initiates, but they also received fines imposed on transgressors of secret society rules.

In other words, individuals in recognized positions of authority within Senufo society were also more easily able to accumulate goods from lower spheres for eventual conversion. To the extent that wealth so obtained was exchanged to procure wives, slaves, firearms, or horses, the system reinforced the real power of those already in positions of authority. But to the extent that such wealth was also converted into cloth, whose value as a sign of rank was also inextricably linked to its destruction, the means of accumulating power through the conversion of foodstuffs were limited. This may well have restricted the power of the chiefs among the Senufo, where individual chiefdoms were admittedly small. But it may also have limited the ability of individuals in junior positions to acquire power in their own right, impeding the rapid proliferation of independent segments which characterized Guro society along the Dyula frontier, for example.
There are a number of conclusions which we may be able to draw from this brief review of two exchange situations. The first and most obvious point, as already mentioned, is that it is inadequate to consider the process of conversion from the standpoint of one society alone. Possibilities of exchanges outside the group are bound to affect patterns of exchange within it. There are severe limits to the usefulness of treating the Guro, the Senufo, or the Dyula economy, for example, as if any of these were a self-contained entity.

This point is perhaps trivial. The crucial issue is: how does control over exchange between societies, or, from another point of view, control over the processes of conversion relative to any one society, affect relationships within any given society? This broad question raises two conceptually distinct problems. The first is how, within any one society, certain individuals are better able than others to effect conversion through access to external trade. The second problem is how individuals use the process of conversion to modify or to reinforce their position within their own society.

The frontier situation is one way in which individuals can maintain control over conversions. We have seen how this operated in the trade between the Guro and the Dyula, where groups along the frontier on both sides enjoyed a monopoly access to markets which privileged them with respect to other members of their societies residing further away from the frontier. In order to maintain itself as a working system, such a frontier situation usually requires the active collusion of members of both groups on either side of it, each willing to defend the other's monopoly in order to maintain its own. But a State on such a frontier may itself be able to maintain such a monopoly, provided it also controls the regional balance of power on both sides of the border; this was the case of Ashanti, for example (Wilks 1975). There are certain similarities between a frontier monopoly and a situation in which exchange between societies is limited to certain individuals on both sides who stand in a special relationship to one another. Trading friendships in Melanesia, and to a certain extent the system of landlord trade commonly found in West Africa (Hill 1966), are examples of this kind of control.

But the trade between the Dyula and the Senufo shows that, even where there are no theoretical restrictions on trade between any individuals in either society, certain individuals are in a better position than others to effect such exchanges. In such a situation, control over production is the crucial variable. Such control is not necessarily expressed in the idioms of control over land or over tools. It is sufficient that there be some form of control over the labour of subjects, of junior kinsmen, or of slaves. This may be exercised directly, where dependent individuals surrender all of their produce to persons in positions of authority. However, a similar situation exists where one individual is the recipient of prescribed prestations—a chief or a lineage head, for example. The difference is one of degree rather than one of kind. The idiom of
'redistribution' thus permits certain individuals in a society, by virtue of their position, to control the processes of conversion through exchange with the outside world.

However, there is a certain danger in focussing exclusively on the process of conversion, without considering what the implications of conversion are in different societies. These were very different for the Dyula, the Guro, and the Senufo. Indeed, for the Dyula, one might question the applicability of the very term 'conversion', except to the extent that labour (one's own or one's dependants) was converted into items of exchange value. The capacity to control exchange was a legitimate end in itself in Dyula society; though other avenues to authority and prestige were open—for example through Islamic scholarship—trade was undoubtedly the most important. Among the Guro, on the other hand, trade was largely a means of acquiring wives and dependants, and wives and dependants were a means of acquiring power. Such power in turn increased one's ability to control exchanges. But, within the communities along the frontier, there was no institutionalized monopoly either of power or of exchange. For any individual, access to power was limited by the ability of others to build up power in their own right. Finally, among the Senufo, conversion was used not only to acquire power but to legitimize rank within a pre-existing and relatively stable system of authority. To the extent that one's position within the society determined one's ability to convert goods between transactional spheres, and that such conversions were used to express that position symbolically, rather than to alter it substantively, as in the Guro case, exchange with the outside acted as a stabilizing and conservative force.

The existence of distinct transactional spheres in itself reveals only a limited amount of information about any society. Rather, such spheres served to express relationships between different forms of control—over goods, over markets, over persons. Each form of control was subject to its own, conceptually independent set of rules. But it was the act of exchange across societal frontiers which permitted one form to be translated into another. To the extent that different forms could be acquired independently, there resulted a certain measure of uncertainty which allowed groups and individuals to pursue alternative strategies. But, though individual means might differ within any society, the system of transactional spheres and the opportunities for exchange across societal frontiers permitted them to be applied towards common ends defined within each society: accumulation of power over dependants among the Guro; legitimization of one's position within the authority structure among the Senufo; and the accumulation of goods rated in terms of their exchange value among the Dyula. In the final analysis, transactional spheres were only an idiom for relating means to ends within any society, providing a system for regulating competition for wealth and power; they did not constitute an independent system in their own right.
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