Résumés//Abstracts.
Résumés/Abstracts

A. HENRY — Toward a Model of African Management.

A gigantic problem: how to modernize African firms? Experts’ recommendations, though reiterated, are hardly applied. Methods for managing industry serve not only to control technical facts but also to adjust the interplay of social forces. The validity of these methods depends, therefore, on their compatibility with customs and norms. The African firm described herein has succeeded because detailed written procedures sanctioned by an internal auditor are followed. These procedures, which owe much to modern organizational techniques, are adapted to the principles governing local society. In fact, they may be nothing other than a modern way of “reinterpreting” traditional values.

S. BREDELLOUP — Long-Distance Traders Stop in Dimbokro, Ivory Coast.

On the basis of biographies gathered in the field, the occupational, cultural, family and social mobility of individuals is shown to be tied to the history of Dimbokro, a history shaped by migrations. Achievement and then a fall for M’Ba, a Malinke teenager who came from his hometown of Sikasso to live with his uncle. Owing to its infrastructure, Dimbokro, a major trading center, grew until the Daoukro road was built. Then separated from major circuits of trade, the town declined; and business fell off for M’Ba. A new generation of long-distance traders has emerged, and two sorts are compared: the “solidarity” ones who create trading relationships out of kinship, and the “solitary” ones who choose such relationships on their own. Given the similar fates of both, mobility is still the way to social success, itself dependent on Dimbokro’s growth or decline.

A. LAMBERT — Guinean Businessmen.

Having emerged during Seku Ture’s government, Guinean businessmen have been able to react to the liberalization carried out since 1984. By using criteria such as trade networks, traders’ financial capacities and control over the Guinean market, an October 1990 study of rice importers has discerned three groups: “outside” Guinean businessmen, foreign businessmen and “inside” Guinean traders who have never left the country. These operators, who have kept the liberalization policy from bearing expected results (in particular, opening the country up to competition), have shared out zones of influence among themselves. Foreign businessmen have been eliminated from distribution within the country; and “outside” Guinean businessmen are involved therein only insofar as they are partners with “inside” traders, who control not only distribution but also re-exportation toward neighboring lands.

E. Gregoire — Smugglers’ Ways, a Study of Trading Networks in Hausa Land.

The permeability of borders in Africa has led to the creation of certain trading networks that involve big merchants as well as little traders. Some transactions are legal; but usually, the majority are not. States are unable, or do not want, to put an end to these practices, because its employees, at various levels in the hierarchy, are smugglers’ accomplices. The very active underground trade between Niger and northern Nigeria in Hausa land is studied so as to bring to light the networks underlying this trade. Given the dynamism of illegal trading patterns, questions can be raised about borders which may, far from being a hindrance, sometimes be an auxiliary to commerce.


A stratum of national businessmen has come into being in postcolonial African countries, but little is known about it. Bonds of submission and reciprocal dependence, through complex financial networks and systems of human relations, link this stratum to the state. African firms have the means of adapting a model of the firm, either imported or defined by market conditions, to actors’ conceptions of it. Once enacted, these conceptions recreate the firm at various levels. Entrepreneurs’ biographies and company monographs shed light on one of the principles that shape and enable the internal reproduction of this business stratum, made up of “recycled” civil servants and big merchants. Each of these poles acts on its own strategies wherein economics and human relations are inseparably combined.