International Journal of Social Science Research and Review

http://ijssrr.com
editor@ijssrr.com
Volume 8, Issue 11
December, 2025
Pages: 220-231

From Mistrust to Trust: Reciprocity in the Sensitive Area of Money at the Gouro Market in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

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http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v8i12.3064

Abstract

Social sciences base their analysis on empirical data collected in the field. The field is a space for interaction defined by an object, resources, and people surveyed, structured by a specific methodological protocol. The purpose of this article is to outline the steps involved in building trust when conducting field research. This research was conducted among women entrepreneurs at the Gouro market in Abidjan with the aim of analyzing the social uses of money. More specifically, the results of this methodological reflection describe, on the one hand, the difficulties and resistance encountered when collecting this sensitive data. On the other hand, they reveal that the establishment of a framework of symbolic reciprocity, particularly through the mechanisms of gift-giving and counter-gift-giving, is a fundamental lever for establishing social trust between the researcher and their respondents. This dynamic proved essential for gaining in-depth knowledge of financial practices. Building social trust in the sensitive area of money in the Gouro market requires overcoming status inequalities. Faced with initial mistrust, the method relied on active involvement and the establishment of symbolic reciprocity through immaterial gift-giving and counter-gift-giving (services rendered), transforming the relationship into an emotional bond to guarantee access to data.

Keywords: *Sensitive Terrain; Social Uses of Money; Gift and Counter-Gift; Social Trust; Côte d'Ivoire*

Introduction

Many social science methodology textbooks focus on describing the technical aspects of research and survey methodologies in the social sciences and humanities (Grawitz, 2001) or on providing guidance, tips, tricks, approaches to adopt, and practical advice on how to successfully complete the data collection phase (Beaud & Weber, 2010; Copans, 2002; Fife, 2005; Meier, 2020; Niang et al., 2017). Unfortunately, it must be noted that this theoretical framework and these ethical provisions often prove insufficient to help researchers effectively address the ethical dilemmas and challenges that arise in the field (King, 2009). More specifically, the question of the relationship with the field in the context of research conducted in sensitive areas can expose researchers to more crucial challenges. Conducting research in sensitive areas requires the implementation of adaptation strategies and their constant renewal.

The management of sensitive areas is a field that has developed significantly in recent years in the social sciences. Much of the literature tends to define the concept of "sensitivity" as research that could potentially pose a threat or risk to stakeholders, whether they are participants or knowledge producers (Grima and Meier, 2022). Other studies define the sensitivity of a subject as being determined by the vulnerability of the people interviewed (Peternelj-Taylor, 2005; Béji-Bécheur et al., 2011). The sensitive nature of a field may stem primarily from the configuration of the research environment itself, particularly the formal and ritualized accessibility procedures that make these "tense environments" difficult to penetrate. This structural complexity has a direct impact on the researcher's position and status among respondents (Delage and Troël-Sauton, 2014). On the other hand, the field is sometimes considered sensitive from a data collection perspective, due to the emotional risks that weigh on scientific practice and can affect the individual behind the researcher (Bourdeloie, 2019). Finally, for Condomines and Hennequin (2013), the sensitive nature of research lies less in the topic being addressed than in the relationship between that topic and the social context in which the study is conducted. It is this approach that guides our understanding of sensitive topics.

Research ethics generally require researchers to uphold fundamental values such as honesty, objectivity, impartiality, and, above all, trust. In the context of an economic sociology study on a sensitive subject such as money, building this trust is crucial to obtaining reliable and relevant data. Money is often associated with privacy, a taboo subject that can lead to reluctance or biased responses. A rigorous ethical and methodological approach is therefore essential. However, research in sensitive areas requires methodological adjustments that are based on the sensitivity of the research subject, as discussed by Rosalie Wax (1986) and Harry Wolcott (1995). The authors consider that a researcher's strict adherence to a method, technique, or doctrinal position can lead to confinement within a cage. The adjustments required by the nature of the field and the context of the researcher's entry into it often, if not always, require a departure from standard methodology. The challenge therefore lies in the researcher's ability and skill in juggling methodological imperatives and the realities of the field.

Initial contact with women entrepreneurs at the Gouro market in Adjamé quickly revealed that gaining access to this world of female traders would not be easy. This difficulty is intrinsically linked to the "secretive and taboo" nature of this entrepreneurial space, where individuals are reluctant to discuss their financial management with outsiders. This attitude reflects societal taboos surrounding money matters and the mistrust that generally characterizes financial relationships.

Furthermore, these entrepreneurs operate in a highly competitive social environment, where the ideology of discretion regarding money is very prevalent. Keeping financial information secret is a strategy aimed at avoiding attracting the attention and envy of competitors. As such, discretion has become a social norm and a benchmark value. In this spirit, the principle of discretion takes on the appearance of symbolic protection against possible attacks emanating from the popular imagination (e.g., witchcraft or malice). A second reason why this area is sensitive is the vulnerability of this social group: it is mainly composed of illiterate women who carry out their economic activities in a context of constant insecurity (theft and assault), fostering fear and mistrust of any stranger who is not a customer.

Given the sensitivity of the subject and these structural difficulties, a qualitative approach based on direct observation and qualitative interviews proved to be the most appropriate. The aim of this approach is to highlight the concrete strategies developed by researchers to build trust in this field, which is not easily accessible. More specifically, this article aims to: i) Highlight the unforeseen events and initial difficulties encountered during data collection; ii) Outline the methodological precautions taken to gain acceptance from the people surveyed.

The main difficulties encountered in the field were the hostility and mistrust of the respondents towards the researcher, which manifested itself in their reluctance or refusal to participate in the interviews. In addition, the researcher's social status often contributed to suspicion, due to the prejudices of the shopkeepers. In order to make data collection effective, it was imperative to create specific conditions for the survey in the face of these hostile attitudes. Without these precautions, it would not have been possible to collect information, as the success of the data collection (direct observations and interviews) depended essentially on the quality of the relationship, i.e., on establishing trust. To this end, the “improvised” approach (Gilliard, 1998) was used. This approach enabled us to integrate into this sensitive social space and gain the acceptance of the study participants.

Methodology

This work was produced based on the analysis of data and results from an ethnographic survey conducted as part of a thesis on the Gouro market in Adjamé Roxy in the city of Abidjan. One of the unique features of Abidjan is that it has at least ten (10) Gouro markets. The Adjamé market was chosen because of its central location and, above all, because it is the oldest and first Gouro market to be established in Abidjan.

The late Nanti Lou Rosalie was a pioneer of the Gouro markets in Abidjan. She started this business with her friends in a space at the Adjamé train station, as there was no room at the Adjamé market. They charged a tax of 10 francs on each item sold. This money enabled them to set up shop in the Roxy area, thanks to the intervention of President Houphouët-Boigny. In 1972, Nanti Lou Rosalie decided to bring her sisters together in a cooperative: the Adjamé Roxy Gouro Markets Cooperative (COMAGOA-Roxy). Since then, this cooperative has managed the space.

Negotiations for access to the field were conducted with the managers of this cooperative. A letter of authorization was sent to them. The agreement obtained then made it possible to approach the study targets. The population studied consists mainly of women traders of food products who are members of this cooperative. Once this stage was completed, appointments were made with each of them to explain the objectives of the study and obtain their informed consent. The main means used to establish contact and obtain the consent of the women entrepreneurs were informal exchanges and direct observations. Most of these informal interviews took place in their workspace. On several occasions, we spent entire days there without being able to conduct any interviews. We used this waiting time to observe their professional activities (the sequence of tasks, collaboration with colleagues, etc.).

When requesting a meeting with the managers, the subject of how the money was used was explicitly mentioned, as was the intention to gather their perceptions, practices, and how they used the income from their activities. It was then possible to see concern and mistrust on the faces of the interviewees. The data corpus includes a significant (unquantifiable) number of informal discussions conducted over several months, whether exchanges that took place during days spent at the workplace or exchanges conducted at their homes. Observations were also made in their workspaces, at their homes, during their community activities, and in the social spaces they frequent. Data collection was therefore based on a combination of direct observation and interviews. To this end, data collection required us to immerse ourselves for an extended period in the living and working environments of these food vendors. It should be noted that, in all interviews conducted with the categories of respondents, we carried out contextual interviews during which we used various strategies to overcome the respondents' reluctance to participate in the interviews.

In addition, we conducted a literature review, which consisted of reviewing scientific works based on keywords more or less related to our subject of study, namely trust. To do this, we drew on conceptualizations of trust from scientific writings in several disciplines, including social psychology, sociology, and management sciences.

Regarding the theoretical frameworks used for the analysis, two main approaches were selected. Max Weber's Comprehensive Approach: This theory provided essential insight into understanding the rationality and motivations (subjective meaning) underlying the respondents' reluctance and mistrust of the researcher. The application of this approach shows that building trust beforehand is imperative before any attempt to gather information.

Social Constructivism by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966): Social constructivism posits that reality and social structures are developed and maintained through interactions between individuals. To assert that a reality (such as the taboo surrounding money or the norm of discretion among female entrepreneurs) is socially constructed means that it is the product of a continuous process of human interaction. This theme, common to cognitive studies in sociology and psychology, has made it possible to analyze how the cognitive structures of female traders (fear, mistrust) and the social structures of the Gouro market (competition, insecurity) interact and manifest themselves in the researcher-respondent relationship.

The results of this study provide an opportunity to share the strategies that were used to build social trust in the investigative relationship.

Results

I. The characteristics of trust as a concept

Trust can be considered an ethical principle and a fundamental pillar of all exchanges (economic, social, cultural, etc.), as well as an essential element of interpersonal collaboration. However, this concept is a multidimensional variable that only makes sense in reference to the context in which it is applied (Skander & Préfontaine, 2016). The vast existing literature confirms the complexity of the concept of trust. Addressed by various social science disciplines, this notion is the subject of a plurality of approaches and definitions specific to each field of study.

I.1. The various definitions of trust

Despite broad consensus among social scientists on the importance of trust in human relationships and its positive impact on them, there is still no unanimous definition. This lack of consensus can be explained by the complex and multidimensional nature of the concept, as we pointed out earlier. This is why some authors have proposed different typologies of this concept, developed according to their disciplinary perspective, whether institutional economics or economic sociology.

- **Trust viewed from the perspective of individual expectations**

This initial approach to trust refers mainly to the work of Deutsch (1958) and Zand (1972). It posits that a context of uncertainty, a source of vulnerability, is essential for trust to emerge in exchange. In this analysis, which was taken up and refined by Zand, the relationship of trust is stimulated by the search for a potentially profitable outcome for those who decide to commit. However, this approach is open to criticism in that it tends to reduce trust to a simple risk calculation. According to Deutsch, “trust is an irrational choice made by a person faced with an uncertain event for which the expected loss is greater than the estimated gain.” He also adds that “trust is the action that increases an individual's vulnerability to another individual.”

For his part, Zand (1972) refines this analysis by distinguishing between two dimensions: personal behavior and individual expectations. According to Zand, trust is based on calculation. It represents “an individual's willingness to increase their vulnerability to the actions of another individual whose behavior cannot be controlled.” In short, from this perspective, trusting someone is seen as a risky decision, because the possibility of loss is often considered greater than the estimated gain. (Bornarel, 2004).

Taking a critical look at previous definitions of trust, based on the work of Deutsch and Zand, we can summarize the following points: Trust is primarily interpreted as a risky decision that increases an individual's vulnerability to the uncontrollable actions of another individual. It is perceived as a mutual relationship based on reciprocal interests in exchange (economic, social, etc.). However, this mutual relationship is inherently precarious: it is likely to disappear as soon as the reciprocal interest that underpins it fades or disappears. As a result, trust is a transactional dynamic that appears and disappears depending on circumstances and the calculation of the risks involved in the exchange.

- **Trust from the perspective of interpersonal relationships**

This approach, which takes a more relational perspective, draws mainly on the work of Diego Gambetta (1988), Meeker (1983), and John K. Butler (1991). As with Deutsch and Zand, situations of vulnerability and dependence are considered prerequisites for trust. However, the emphasis here is on the cooperative outcome. According to Gambetta (1988), trust is: “the probability that an individual will take action that is sufficiently beneficial, or at least not harmful, to engage in some form of cooperation with that individual.” Similarly, Meeker (1983) defines trust as: “an expectation of cooperative behavior on the part of the other.”

For our study, the analysis is no longer focused solely on establishing trust and its corollary (risk assessment). The focus is now on justifying investment in a relationship of trust in relation to the objective of the investigation. The emphasis is therefore on building and maintaining this relationship, which is essential for gaining access to sensitive areas.

I.2. Components of trust

Recent research supports a view of trust based on three main components (Mayer et al, 1995).

- **Credibility**

The first is credibility. This refers to the other party's ability to fulfill its obligations in a stable and effective manner. It encompasses competence, honesty, keeping promises, and skill. Gurviez (1999) and Gurviez and Korchia (2002) define credibility more specifically as: "The assessment of the other party's ability to fulfill the terms of the exchange in terms of expected performance, i.e., to meet the customer's ‘technical’ expectations. It results from attributing to the other party a degree of expertise in terms of their functional expectations regarding the satisfaction of their needs. " Benevolence is the second component of this three-part approach. It is based on the partner's willingness to behave honestly and corresponds to the attribution of good intentions. Gurviez (1998) and Gurviez and Korchia (2002) define trust as: "The attribution to the other party of a lasting orientation towards taking into account the interests of the customer [or the respondent, in our context], even before their own. " In the same vein, Karsenty (2013) believes that trust involves entrusting some of one's own interests or collective interests to an actor whose characteristics give reason to hope that they will take good care of them.

Trust, thus defined, implies a state of dependence on others, established voluntarily on the basis that these others are bearers of hope. A climate of trust is a form of social climate that allows each member of a group to agree to entrust some of their interests to another member or another group without knowing them directly (Karsenty, 2015).

In the context of sociological research, this dimension is crucial: the researcher's benevolence is perceived when respondents believe that the researcher is acting in their best interests (respect, non-judgment, confidentiality), going beyond their own objective of collecting data.

• Distrust as a strategy and cost

Distrust is defined as not trusting someone (Servet, 1994). In the context of decision-making, distrust can, on the one hand, lead to inaction, but on the other hand, it can also motivate positive actions aimed at resolving potential problems. However, mistrust undoubtedly generates transaction costs and generally leads to situations of non-cooperation that can affect social relationships. It can be justified in a society where the majority of people are untrustworthy; in this case, it protects an actor from losses associated with the risk of cooperation. (Schuller, 2004)

• Sympathy and its methodological function.

Sympathy is seen here in the sense of sharing feelings and establishing an emotional bond between the various participants in the study. In the field, sympathy facilitates rapport by creating emotional resonance, which is essential for breaking down initial barriers. Among the components of trust examined, three dimensions proved fundamental to building social trust between the researcher and the respondents at the Gouro market: benevolence, sympathy, and mistrust (used as a starting point). The first two (benevolence and sympathy) were the direct result of the third. Indeed, it was the initial mistrust of the traders towards us as strangers that required the strategic mobilization of benevolence and sympathy to initiate and build social trust. In conclusion, just like its definition, trust is a social construct whose conceptualization has raised and continues to raise questions, justifying a flexible and contextual methodological approach.

I.3. The different types of trust according to Simmel

To address the different types of trust, we will proceed in two stages. First, we will distinguish between primordial trust and social trust. Next, we will define the scope of analysis of social trust by specifically drawing on the theoretical contributions of sociologist Georg Simmel.

I.3.1. Primordial trust or horizontal trust

According to Georg Simmel (1991), primordial trust belongs to the realm of the religious or sacred and refers to the fields of theology or psychoanalysis. This trust is fundamental: it establishes an essential relationship between the individual and the world, a relationship from which the individual can develop their own subjectivity. At the level of primordial trust, there is no possible compensation, only the recognition of a debt. This trust is expressed in all societies in the form of debt rather than fault. Primordial trust is radically different from social trust: it can neither be refused nor earned, whereas social trust implies, even if only in a very limited way, the agreement of wills and the exercise of individual freedom.

I.3.2. Social trust or vertical trust

The social trust referred to here stems from individual interactions and is therefore not transcendent in nature. It is behavioral in nature, aiming to involve and promote the integrity of individuals in a given space. This type of trust increases acceptance of procedures and outcomes in situations of interpersonal conflict. Social trust is the bond that allows individuals to engage in relational action. It is therefore the support and manifestation of social bonds within a community. Terms such as “specific attachment,” “altruism,” and “loyalty” are associated with this type of trust. Furthermore, the climate of trust can be explained by the interplay of mutual sympathy.

In conclusion, it follows from the above that trust is a phenomenon that reduces uncertainty, although it is marred by the vulnerability of the trusting individual. It is also a continuous and dynamic variable that changes over time and space, through continuous adjustments based on information collected by the parties involved in the relationship, namely the researcher and the respondents.

II. Prerequisites for integration into a predominantly illiterate community: Avoiding semantic biases and initial mistrust

In order to defuse initial mistrust and ensure a climate conducive to discussion, the research team deemed it necessary to avoid using certain concepts when preparing interview guides and making preliminary contacts. In particular, we avoided terms that were considered to have too strong a legal or administrative connotation, such as "investigation," "investigator," and "respondent." These concepts refer to the potential presence of authorities (law enforcement, tax officials), which is particularly sensitive in a commercial exchange environment where informality is central.

• The impact of gender interaction

In general, exchange is first and foremost an encounter between two socially situated individuals. This means questioning not only the observer's position, but also their impact as a person on those being observed (and vice versa). The group of food vendors at the Gouro market in Adjamé is predominantly female. As we ourselves are a team of two young researchers (one man and one woman), we were able to test Deschaux-Beaume's (2011) theory that "gender social interaction" (idem, p. 10) can be a positive bias for overcoming the silence of those being observed. The mixed nature of the research team was therefore an asset in facilitating exchanges.

• Neutralizing class relations by reversing roles

In the budding relationship, it wasn't just the observer-observed relationship that needed to be refined. Class relations were also very prominent in those early days. In order to reduce the class distance that threatened to be an obstacle—and to neutralize this difference that risked creating a hierarchy between us—we sought to minimize the asymmetry, or even eliminate it, by attempting a reversal of roles through the following words: "We have come to understand how you manage to be so dynamic."

This role reversal strategy is based on the following premise: the observers (researchers) are those in search of knowledge, while the merchants (the observed) are those who possess this valuable knowledge about the social uses of money. This stance made it possible to change the hierarchical relationship: the researcher positioned himself as a humble seeker of knowledge from an expert in her own entrepreneurial world, thus shifting the value from academic status to empirical knowledge gained in the field.

III. The formal construction of social trust

Trust is strengthened when others' behavior is consistent over time and meets initial expectations. Furthermore, trust is reinforced when a personal connection is established, providing access to additional information about the other individual.

III.1. Link customization: Initial phase and informal immersion

The investigative relationship, in its early stages, immediately took on a very informal tone. In this exploratory phase, we did not impose any theme, question, content, or form of relationship. Not only did the subject of the investigation (the uses of money) remain distant from our conversations, but the social status of each of the partners in the exchange was also largely ignored or set aside. We would sometimes discuss topics that had nothing to do with the market, such as the news of the day or comments on a newspaper headline (especially political ones). We talked about everything and nothing, with politics being the topic of the moment. The relationship, still in its infancy, remained open, enlivened by jokes and the sharing of general information.

• Personalization and relational depth

To mitigate the discomfort caused by the social position of the researcher vis-à-vis the respondents, we sought, more or less consciously, to reinforce the informal nature of our relationship by personalizing it. It is common in many ethnographic research relationships for the relationship to remain open and gradually become more personal. In the field, the researcher is never just a technician: they arrive with their own social history and personality, and the same is true for the respondents. With the long time frame often required in ethnography since the work of Malinowski (2000), it is these personal layers that gradually build the relationship, making it always susceptible to going beyond the formal framework of the investigation.

• Personalizing relationships and overcoming fixed identities

This stage of personalizing relationships is fundamental to building trust in a sensitive field. In an investigative relationship, observers are initially confronted with a multiplicity of personal identities among the actors, identities that can often be reduced to simple class affiliations and the positions of "investigator" and "investigated." These fixed identities were so strong in our field that it was imperative to move beyond them. For this effort to bear fruit, it took a long time and shared emotional bonds. It was from these shared emotional bonds, built up over time spent working alongside them, that the "investigator-investigated" relationship really began to personalize.

• Active involvement and building emotional bonds

It is important to note that we were actively involved, alongside the traders, in certain activities related to the trade of food products at the Gouro market in Adjamé. This involvement included tasks such as: Carrying baskets of tomatoes or bags of eggplants. Accompanying the traders to the fields to purchase food products. This mutual involvement gave the relationship a special form and, consequently, a unique content. Thus, the "investigator-respondent" relationship was transformed into a very emotional one, which helped to consolidate trust.

Faced with the pressure to convince and the need to resolve the problem of social inequality inherent in the research relationship, we hoped that by transforming our relationship into an emotional one, our respective positions as researcher and respondent could be gradually neutralized. As a result, the initial perception of our relationship could be eroded. To achieve this, we actively sought to show them our sympathy and kindness.

III.2. The role of gift-giving and counter-gift giving

The logic of gift-giving and counter-gift-giving is therefore decisive in building trust in this sensitive area. It is an extension of Mauss's theory of gift exchange (1924), which sets out three obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to return. Furthermore, this sociological approach emphasizes that, by its very nature, giving is never entirely gratuitous, as it creates a social debt and establishes a bond of reciprocity.

III.2.1. Gift-giving and its dual relationship: The practice of gift-giving and counter-gift-giving as a balancing mechanism

This effort to counter social inequality took the form of verbal exchanges, greetings, but above all the practice of gift-giving and counter-gift-giving. This exchange took the form of systematic gifts of food products taken from their stalls (eggplants, okra, peppers, etc.). It was surprisingly regular: it was always in this way, with a gift from them, that the interaction ended. These gifts included: basic foodstuffs (eggplants, peppers, okra), fruit brought back from the edges of fields (oranges, avocados, etc.), dishes for dinner (garba), and smoked fish for the home. Through these gifts, the merchants signaled their agreement to allow the relationship to evolve from its nascent and distrustful state to one of brotherhood and trust.

This mechanism of reciprocity thus created a double relationship: a relationship of dependence (the researcher was indebted for the gift) and a relationship of trust and fraternity (the gift symbolized the acceptance of the person and access to the status of friend, and no longer of stranger).

• Gifts as mechanisms for status reversal

With these gifts, the merchants not only initiated an exchange, but they also sought to establish or reverse the order of social statuses. Indeed, the act of "giving" is likely to establish a social inequality between the giver and the recipient (Mauss, 1924). Thru the "gift," these shopkeepers were telling us that, despite their lower social rank in the academic hierarchy, they were capable of dominating the relationship from a symbolic point of view. For the construction of this social trust, the gift was for them a guaranty of value and symbolic superiority. By accepting the gift (according to the obligation to receive), we were acknowledging their momentary superior value. The obligation to receive (or take) is fundamental in the gift/counter-gift cycle; its refusal ends the nascent relationship.

III.2.2. The counter-gift, the dynamic element of social trust

The gifts given to us by the female traders acquired a particular significance because they were made within the framework of the unequal class relationship that existed between us. Thru their gifts, the Gouro market traders refused to obey the logic that would have the donors be those who possess the most socially. Not giving them an equivalent counter-gift in return was like letting them symbolically gain the upper hand over us, whereas our social status suggested that we, a priori, had the upper hand. Against the current of our class inequality, the gifts received thus became the paradoxical expression of our equality thru the creation of a mutual debt.

• The immaterial nature of the Counter-gift

It is important to emphasize that the merchants did not expect any immediate material return from us. Moreover, a material response from us would have jeopardized the developing relationship, as it would have transformed the symbolic gift into a mere economic transaction. However, if this was true for material gifts, it was far from the case for the intangible gifts that constituted our counter-gift. The latter consisted of acts of service and concrete help: administrative assistance (drafting administrative letters for an aid request), logistical support (assistance during the rain), note-taking (writing down the bunches of bananas taken by a buyer), recipe calculations. The goal of equality that drove us thus took the form of reciprocity thru this immaterial counter-gift.

As we provided these services, we got to know each other: they introduced themselves, told us about themselves, thus creating a bond of confidentiality that made us indispensable in their daily lives. Trust was now established, as well as the legitimacy for the researcher to investigate. This reciprocity helps to erase his "outsider" status. The researcher is thus, consciously or not, compelled to comply with these various initiatory rites materialized here by immaterial gifts as a form of counter-gift, whether imposed or not. From these first moments depends his relationship with the respondents. These relationships established with the members of the studied group can help minimize risks (Kovats-Bernat (2002).

Conclusion

The researcher operating in a field such as the Gouro market in Adjamé faces a polymorphic perception of their role, fluctuating according to the social position and interests of the actors: they can be both respected for their education, feared as a foreigner, despised by their social peers, or envied by the middle classes. Similarly, he is sometimes a confidant, sometimes a reserved friend, or an audacious individual. Generally speaking, it is illusory to believe that a socio-economic actor will be candid to the point of opening up to the first person they meet without any ulterior motives or reservations. There are hardly any groups that have nothing to hide or nothing to fear, especially in informal food markets where law and legality are not always the norm. Every person, every group or faction of a group, concerned about their economic affairs and social reputation, has enough reasons to be wary of a researcher, who is perceived as a stranger or a newcomer. More generally, each actor strives to adapt their discourse, correct their behavior, and control their information output according to their idea of the actual intentions or possible reactions of their interlocutor. The ethnographic method allows for accommodating the difficulties of the field and indeed creates the conditions of informality that, ultimately, will enable data collection.

In conclusion, this research has allowed us to identify a set of key variables essential for understanding the steps toward a better construction of the concept of social trust. This trust is analyzed here as a survey relationship or a social relationship, articulated around the surveyor-surveyed dyad. The establishment of such a relationship, particularly in a sensitive field such as the analysis of the social uses of money, requires the neutralization of class and status biases, the active involvement of the researcher, and the establishment of symbolic reciprocity based on the gift and immaterial counter-gift (services rendered) to transform initial distrust into sympathy and benevolence.

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