

Thésards and Toxins : Pharmacy students on the streets of Dakar

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In Senegal, studies in pharmacy conclude with a thesis defense. Toxicology and analytical chemistry theses were once mainly bibliographic and many still are; but since the 1990s more and more *thésards* have left the library to collect samples and data for analysis. Most of them head for the streets of Dakar. This paper describes how these students navigate –through practices of movement, investigation and narration—this city as a place of work, discovery, contamination and risk management.

Thésards have turned to Dakar partly at the request of senior faculty interested in environmental toxicology and quality control; for this, the city appears as a richly contaminated and proximate field. Sometimes a bit of money or equipment guides students' urban sampling and surveying; they can be enrolled as cheap and accessible labour as part of or alongside larger Faculty projects. But the city's proximity and density also make it accessible to students armed only with a stack of surveys on which to record how hairdressers, pharmacists or urban farmers evaluate and manage toxic risks. Students enter the urban field as both subordinate technicians and scientific explorers; experiences shaped by the contours of their own familiarity with Dakar's socio-spatial geographies.

By attending to how students' experiences of collecting in the city oscillate between hard work, adventure, tourism and banality, my paper explores how knowledge about urban contamination is produced in the junctures between city life and the lives of scientists, both subordinate and senior. The spaces in which these junctures are formed were opened up, on one hand, by an absence of routine State controls over urban labour, pollution, commerce and consumption and, on the other, by academic pharmacists' quest for research with little or no public funding. Yet these pharmacists have recently begun trying reanimate structures and practices of routine control of food, pharmaceuticals and environmental quality that have been inactive for several decades. *Thésards'* past and present uses of Dakar, I argue, can illuminate these changing dynamics between analysis for revelation and for regulation; scientific labour and legibility; scientists and the State; and city as problem and opportunity for science.