

Slaves without shackles: an archaeology of everyday life on Gorée Island (Senegal)

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Introduction

Over the past four decades, Gorée island has been central to the debate on the nature, impact, and consequences of the Atlantic slave trade in western Africa. The debate was ignited by the publication of Curtin's (1969) census on the Atlantic slave trade. He concluded that, like the rest of the Senegambia, only small numbers of slaves transited on Gorée and therefore it played only a minor role in the infamous Atlantic slave trade.

The strongest reaction to Curtin's census developed out of the famous museum of the Maison des Esclaves or slave warehouse, which became, over time, the major commemorative site on the island, producing a narrative that capitalized both on African and African Diasporic memories. Over the past few decades, this narrative has been appropriated by popular culture and official milieus and has grown considerably on the island by feeding on local and international tourism.

Until the development of our research program on the island in 2001, archaeology contributed little to the Gorée debate. As one of the earliest Afro-European settlements in western Africa, Gorée island offers a unique potential for a long-term view on Euro-African contact and the experience of slavery as "traditional" African societies were being incorporated into the global economic networks of the Atlantic World. Unlike most initial work on Gorée that focuses either on the Europeans, transit slaves, or Afro-Europeans, the Gorée Archaeological Project has been inclusive and designed to recover critical information on all identities historically documented on the island, including indigenous slaves owned and employed locally.

Indigenous slaves included slaves that were generally born in the house of the master and are referred to in the French literature as “esclaves de case” or “house slaves” (Barry 1998, Klein 1998).

Socio-economic, technological and political innovations geared by the expansion of the Atlantic commerce profoundly affected the historical trajectory of Gorée. In the light of documentary sources, new identities (e.g. Afro-Europeans) and new economic and political systems (e.g. capitalism) emerged, completely altering and/or absorbing “traditional” African systems into European ways (Barry 1979, Boilat 1984). While this view of contact experience has been re-evaluated over the past decades, there remain profound differences of opinions over its impact and consequences on African societies (Barry 1998, Bathily 1989, Curtin 1969, 1975, Rodney 1982). Recent archaeological appraisal of contact experiences among African societies have demonstrated the variability of African responses, suggesting that its consequences must be contextualized historically and culturally (Decorse 2001, 1998, Kelly 1997, Thiaw in press.) To avoid overgeneralization, an archaeological approach that focuses on everyday life can yield new insights on patterns of cultural interaction as archaeological material evidence offers a local view on global processes (Stahl 2001).

This paper examines how slavery was imprinted on material culture and settlement at Gorée. It evaluates the changing patterns of settlement, access to materials, and emerging novel tastes to gain insights about everyday life and culture interaction on the island. By the eighteenth century, Gorée grew rapidly as an urban settlement with a heterogeneous population including free and enslaved Africans as well as different European identities. Interaction between these different identities was punctuated with intense negotiations resulting in the emergence of a truly transnational community. While these significant changes were noted in the settlement pattern and material culture recovered, the slavery that is critical to most oral and documentary

narratives about the island remains relatively opaque in the archaeological record. This paper will attempt to tease out from available documentary and archaeological evidence some illumination on interaction between the different communities on the island, including indigenous slaves.

A cake, a mirror and a cross on a piece of paper

In 1445, Major Captain Lançarote and his Portuguese crew, from the outpost of Arguin, cast anchor near Gorée. When they sighted this small island of just 17ha, located about 3km off the coast of Berzeguiche (at the current location of Dakar, capital of Senegal), they noted several warriors on it preventing them from landing there. Lançarote then commanded one of his officers, Captain Gomez Piriz, to sail on a canoe with goods to deposit on the shore and to re-embark immediately to avoid coming to harm. The items they left included a cake, a mirror and a piece of paper upon which was drawn a cross (Cariou n.d.). This was intended to show the Portuguese's good will for trade and friendship. However, the Africans broke the cake and the mirror and tore the sheet of paper (ibid). There followed an exchange of fire against poisoned arrowheads that inaugurated the first Afro-European encounter on this small island which would later become a major European safe heaven on the coast of the Senegambia.

This initial expedition mentioned no attempt to enslave Africans but instead emphasized Portuguese commercial intentions, although this could have well included slaves. According to Cariou (n.d.), Gorée was then a refuge site for coastal populations on the Cap Vert peninsula who were at war with inland polities. In contrast, the nearby Madeleine island where the Portuguese ultimately landed, naming it Palma, was a safe refuge ground for cattle (ibid). Gorée would later play a much bigger role than Madeleine island thanks to its excellent harbour and the

various services it provided to European oceangoingships, including maintenance, food and water supplies, etc.

Cariou's (n.d.) account seems sugared, but the occupants of Gorée refusing trade and their contempt for the trinkets proposed by the Portuguese may well have characterized the initial Afro-European encounter on the island. Other accounts indicate that upon their arrival on the island, the Portuguese found no one but wild goats with long ears (Zurara 1960). In any case, it seems that the Portuguese made no permanent establishment on the island beyond a chapel where they buried some of their companions who died on the Senegambia coast (Mauny 1954). The Dutch are credited for erecting the first European fort on the island at a much later time in 1627/8. It is believed that they purchased the island peacefully from a local fisherman who only visited the site seasonally from the Cap Vert peninsula, and who exchanged it against a handful of nails and trinkets (Boilat 1984).

There are almost two hundred years separating Portuguese and Dutch's occupations of the island. What can be learned from these stories is that African appetite for European imports grew considerably to the point that they gave up the island for cheap European merchandise. Later accounts of Afro-European encounters in Gorée show Afro-Europeans and Africans as rather well informed consumers with fine tastes (Metcalf 1987).

The French naturalist Michel Adanson who lived on the island between 1749 and 1753 described a Gorean population keen for European goods (Becker and Martin 1980). As a result of their long-term association with the Europeans they intermarried with, the *signares* (free African and Afro-European women), their families and slaves, cornered the market for wheat bread, wine, brandy, and local quality supplies including meat, fish, wood, etc. Adanson added that they even received supplies of meat and millet for their slaves, too often at the expense of ordinary Europeans. With the complicity of their European partners, they purchased expensive

and fine merchandises that many ordinary Europeans could not afford (ibid). In 1837 the probate inventory of Anne Pépin for instance, displays a considerable amount of wealth that offers a glimpse into the *signares'* fortunes (Hinchman 2000). In addition to the fine imports, by the eighteenth century, the *signares* owned most of the land and houses on the island (Knight-Baylac 1970, 1977).

Archaeological excavations on Gorée permit us to evaluate the intensity of trade and its impacts on everyday life. Large amounts of European trade goods were recovered and it is likely that many more imports, such as textiles, reached the island but were perishable and did not leave traces in the archaeological record. The material evidence shows, however, that it was not until the eighteenth that European imports began to flow quantitatively on the island. This coincides with the peak of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and a period of affluence for Afro-European trade and influence in coastal Senegambia (Brooks 1976, Mark 2002). Yet it also raises new concerns about the true extent and magnitude prior to that time. Similarly, material remains pertaining to the Portuguese and Dutch colonists are extremely rare in the Gorée assemblages so far excavated. Most cultural remains recovered were manufactured from the eighteenth century onward, when Gorée was under the shifting rule of French and British colonial powers (Richard n.d., Thiaw 2003).

Archaeologically documented European imports included bricks, tiles, nails and various kinds of metal artefacts, alcoholic beverages (wine, liquor, and beer bottle glass), beads, gunflints, ceramics, etc (ibid). Gorée remained a barren island relying on African foodstuffs and water supplies to feed both its African and European populations (Brau 1928). Material deposits excavated displays patterns that can throw light on access, processes of consumption and discard and tentatively on group identity. Four kinds of deposits can be distinguished on the basis of sites sampled for excavations and testing throughout the island.

The first group includes sites with deposits generally over three meters deep with amounts of domestic debris that overlaid earlier deposits of shell middens that were dated to the late first and early second millennium AD (Thiaw 2003). This concerns sites in the northwestern and western parts of the island that encompassed the area in and around former Fort Nassau (G1, G5, G6, G7, G8, G21) (**Figure 1**). Although house foundations and building material debris were excavated here, the settlement seemed relatively stable. Interestingly, sites in this group contained within the precinct of the Fort (G5 and G6), yielded fewer European trade imports while those on the outskirts along coastline (G1, G7, G21) produced much larger quantities.

The second group concerns mainly sites located in the southcentral part of the island that encompassed the old Bambara quarter (G4, G22, G11, G14) (**Figure 1**). Material remains from these sites were overall relatively sparser than deposits of the first group of sites described above. The sediment in these sites is generally made of loamy sand with fewer shell inclusions than in the first group. Deposits displayed layers of construction debris often made of stones, red bricks and limestone flecks or chunks. Although deposits are deep (between two and three meters), they rarely predate the eighteenth century which suggests rapid processes of accumulation and constructions followed by demolition episodes. Urban growth beginning in the eighteenth century was marked by the extension of the settlement in this area that was previously sparsely occupied perhaps by indigenous slaves forming the Bambara quarter.

Only one site was excavated in the third group (G18) that includes sites located at the foot of the Castel, the hill that flanks the island in the south (**Figure 1**). Cultural deposits for this group are very shallow and rest on limestone bedrock. G18, the only site excavated in this area was a group of three burials dug into bedrock.

The fourth group concerned only G13, a site that encompassed a large refuse pit excavated in the eastern part of the island (**Figure 1**). Tests and excavations also suggest that

deposits on the side of the island do not predate the eighteenth century. One trash pit excavated at unit G13A yielded large amounts of cultural debris including European ceramic, sardine cans, window glass, nails and various metal artefacts. Cultural debris at G13 were 95cm deep but were recovered from a refuse pit that appeared to be a single component unit. European ceramic excavated from this feature included a number of large pieces of very late pearlware/early whiteware, and typical whiteware plates with roughly similar patterns dated 1810 to 1849. Contextual and material analysis revealed that most of these were possible replacements, which is consistent with a military occupation (MacCourt n.d.). According to Cariou (n.d.), the barracks for the marines was located just at a short distance from G13 at least in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which prompted our excavations there. Similar trash disposal strategies were rare throughout the island.

Although it is hard to evaluate the rôle of ancient and contemporary activities on site formation processes and artefacts' distribution, it is likely that they affected patterns observed archaeologically. With the imposition of European government on the island, the use of space was managed and strictly controlled (Thiaw 2008). Urban development and the growth of the island's population beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century as well as past and present processes of sweeping and cleaning have had a major impact on the archaeological deposits. Rapid processes of constructions, levelling and reconstructions, sometimes in relation with changing European rule (e.g. French to British), and management of space, profoundly affected the deposits which showed, too often, signs of disturbance. The rapid transfer of land via various and complex processes makes it particularly difficult to link sites and material culture recovered with specific social groups or identities (Knight-Baylac 1977). In these particular contexts, it is virtually impossible to distinguish slave versus free, and African versus Afro-European or European contexts. Compared to pre-contact levels, where the assemblage mainly

consists of local African pottery, it is clear that the Atlantic commerce had a significant impact on the lives of the Goreans. The evidence suggests wide and generalized access to European trade goods by the different identities that cohabited on the island, including indigenous slaves (Thiaw 2008). The growth of European imports throughout the island, beginning in the eighteenth century, was also paralleled with rapid changes in settlement structure.

Slavery and settlement

In Gorée, Europeans were involved in African affairs but their control over local populations was far from absolute. They introduced new technologies, luxuries, new domesticated animals and plants and, intervened in the lives of the local population (Becker 1980, Deamanet 1767:102, Froger 1699: 7, Lamiral 1791: 45/46, Searing 1993). In addition to their forts, they inspired a new architectural style with “hard materials” (with bricks, stones and tiles) as opposed to “soft material” that characterized “traditional” African constructions (with clay, straw and wood) (Hinchman 2000: 70/71).

In the early eighteenth century, Gorée was divided into a village of “Bambaras” or slaves, a village of “Gourmettes” (Christianized Africans), a village of *Habitants* (residents mainly mulattos but also free Africans), and Europeans employees and traders. The contemporary debate about slavery on Gorée is primarily concerned with export slaves and the role and significance of the Maison des Esclaves. Elsewhere, I have argued that archival and documentary sources, despite their inherent limits, are better suited than archaeology for a statistical evaluation of the number of slaves transiting on the island (Thiaw 2003). However, evaluation of the Atlantic impact cannot be a mere statistical equation consisting of tabulating numbers of slaves deported or enslaved locally. While this approach has its merits, the socio-cultural, economic,

psychological and political dynamics that accompanied processes of enslavement and slave holding are no less interesting.

Censuses on the Atlantic slave trade are too often controversial as their evidence is generally scant and dispersed. However, censuses on populations residing on Gorée at a specific point in time offer reliable estimates thanks to the small size of the island. Many were house-to-house surveys, yielding critical information about the residents, their status and their occupations. A series of censuses are available on Gorée from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and colonial authorities probably commanded these for administrative purposes. Many emphasize the importance of indigenous slavery and suggest that the fortunes of free Goreans rested primarily on coastal trade, labour and slavery. Slaves were skilled artisans employed by their masters or rented to the Europeans as carpenters, masons, sailors, domestics, etc. (Becker and Martin 1980, Boilat 1984, Searing 1993).

There are indications that by the eighteenth century, the majority of the island's population was indigenous slaves (ibid). Thus, there are possibilities for archaeology to contribute to the debate on the impact and consequences of slavery at the local level. Kenneth Kelly (2002: 99) warns us that the impact of the slave trade on African societies cannot be evaluated through “baubles and tallies of trinkets”. Furthermore, he suggested that instead of “piles of shackles and structures of confinement”, the impact of the slave trade “must be teased out from changes in settlement pattern, the rise of politically centralized complex societies, and the establishment of new trade routes” (ibid).

Our archaeological survey and excavations in Gorée were designed in the light of historical maps permitting us to target, specific, historically known quarters and the identities of the persons that had inhabited them. The different maps and plans available show a rapidly changing settlement pattern from segregated (**Figure 2**) to desegregated as the island's

population grew (**Figure 3**). There are several detailed historical plans of Gorée, although it must be pointed out that some may have just been mere projections and were never proven on the ground. It is even likely that some indications were merely proposed improvements. For instance the vocabulary in a plan established by Aine in 1725, mentions “an area that would be convenient for the huts of free Negroes”. Although the huts are well represented in the drawing, this information casts doubts on their effective presence at the designated location. Adding to this confusion is the fact that many authors compiled their work, plagiarizing their predecessors.

Available plans depict clear changes in the island’s settlement structure during the eighteenth century. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, many Europeans who had initially lodged within the precincts of the fort were resettled in huts previously occupied by Africans after the destruction of their barracks in a fire (Knight-Baylac 1970, 1977). There follows a demilitarization of the European settlement, with a spatial move towards areas previously settled by Afro-Europeans, and free and enslaved Africans. Increased competition for control of the island between European nations in the eighteenth century, along with unprecedented population growth, raised security concerns. Many plans were produced at this time and were primarily preoccupied with the nature and position of fortifications in order to make the island more secure. In the second half of the eighteenth century, for instance, the British authorized the construction of private housing along the coastline to replace ditches and ramparts. The houses were to be built with stones or bricks (hard material), with walls facing the ocean to have holes in them for musketry in case of attack (Delcourt 1982: 56-58).

An African quarter may have persisted until the late eighteenth as indicated in the maps of Armeny de Paradis in 1766 and 1768 (Knight-Baylac 1970: 379). It was located at the foot of the hill flanking the island in its southern end and known as the *Castel*. Although Knight-Baylac (1970, 1977) distinguishes square and round huts, respectively occupied by the free and the

enslaved Africans, this may have, as well, been a quarter for the poorest inhabitants of the island. The growth of buildings with hard material by the mid-eighteenth century (Hinchman 2000) coincides with the development of European trade as attested in the archaeological record (Thiaw 2003, 2008). This also coincides with the rise of Afro-European elites including *signares* who owned most of the houses and land on the island at that time (Brooks 1976, Knight-Baylac 1970, 1977, Mark 2002). It is therefore likely that this new architectural style was a sign of status, wealth and prestige.

Although the spatial division in the settlement reduced over time, the island's population remained categorized in respect to status. However, this was probably accompanied by closer social and interracial interaction resulting in greater cultural and genetic admixture (Thiaw 2008). From the last quarter of the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the number of indigenous slaves among which women dominated was up to 70-75% of a total population that reached nearly 5000 individuals at its peak (Knight-Baylac 1970, Searing 1993). To understand the consequence of such dramatic development, one needs to examine the social and political management of the public and household spaces within the island in relation to the institution of slavery.

Gorée was a European colony where Europeans, Afro-Europeans and free and enslaved Africans lived side by side. It was also a commercial centre where slaves destined for deportation transited. This special status suggests various modes of slave holding. In his study of indigenous slavery in French West Africa, Martin Klein (1998: 4) distinguishes patterns of slave holding between what he calls "low-density", and "high-density systems". He suggested that in "low-density systems", masters and their slaves worked and 'ate from the same bowl' together. In contrast, in "high density-systems", slaves worked and masters supervised them. In this later instance, status differences were more likely imprinted in the use of space.

These two modes of slave-holding coexisted on Gorée. On the one hand, there were transit slaves treated like chattel, and on the other, there were indigenous slaves who were members of the family although with a lower status. The first were more likely confined within the European forts and other structures of confinement within the island, while the second resided in private Gorean households and had more visibility in everyday life. Indigenous slaves in Gorée included specialized artisans including masons, carpenters, soldiers, sailors, domestics, etc. Archival and documentary sources indicate that most of them were women who represented up to 75% of the indigenous slave population in the second half of the eighteenth century (Knight-Baylac 1970, 1977, Searing 1993). They were owned by the *signares* and their families who rented them to the Europeans for multiple domestic and sexual services (Thiaw 2008).

In light of this information, one sees the hands of indigenous slaves in the material culture recovered from the archaeological deposits. In his study of Gorean architecture, Hinchman (2006: 182) has pointed out the critical touch of workers and craftsmen, who were probably slaves, rather than that of European architects (ibid). Houses constructed prior to 1782 (perhaps much later as the earliest house plan in Senegal's archive dates to 1829), are characterized by irregular rooms and asymmetrical plans, which suggests that they were probably built from verbal instructions rather than at hands ready plans (ibid). As the main labour force on the island, slaves were involved in the production of material wealth and landscapes. As such, they imprinted their marks on Gorée's landscape.

Analysis of the settlement pattern suggests that, with time, masters and slaves increasingly lived side by side on the island. With the appropriation of land by the Afro-European elites, the expansion of constructions with hard materials, and urban development, the slave quarter disappeared from the maps and plans by the second half of the eighteenth century ((Knight-Baylac 1977). At the same time, the indigenous slave population grew considerably

(Searing 1993). House to house censuses from the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries reported slaves living with their masters in the same houses (ANS 1767, Becker and Martin 1980, Thiaw 2008).

Although they owned indigenous slaves, Goreans were repelled by chattel slavery against which they developed a profound contempt. In the nineteenth century, Abbé Boilat (1984: 34-35) witnessed Goreans' reactions to the arrival on the island's harbour of several transit slaves who were skinny, naked and could barely move. All the islanders were out to watch this horror, he wrote. On viewing this, the *signares* shed tears, unwrapped their own clothing to cover them and also provided food for the slaves. They even complained to the colonial authorities (ibid). Although this event took place in the late first half of the nineteenth when slavery was coming to an end, it is likely that slavery in Gorée was marked by intimate interactions between masters and their unshackled slaves which differed fundamentally from master/slave relations for slaves in transit.

Cases of violence against indigenous slaves are documented in the Senegambia (Manchuelle 1989a, 1989b, Searing 1988) but it is generally admitted that they were generally better treated than export slaves (Barry 1998). Some slaves were afforded privileges and exercised power in the name of their masters (Klein 1998). Hinchman (2000: 259/260) reported that a slave named Mercure in nineteenth century Gorée was a master carpenter who ran a workshop for the construction of dugout boats or *pirogues* but was also an expert witness in shipwreck investigations. As such, he occasionally assumed the same status as other European experts and could participate in decision making that could determine the fate of free Europeans and African alike (ibid).

Archaeological excavations yield new insights on the use of space and structure of the Gorean household. Textual and documentary sources generally emphasize the prominence of two

storey houses. It is generally assumed that the elite *signare* families occupied the upper floor with airy rooms and balconies, while the ground floor were allegedly the site for kitchens, pantries and cells for transit slaves (Brooks 1976: 38). The presence of pantries and storerooms is largely confirmed by archaeology; as such features were uncovered in a number of house foundations. However, their interpretation as cells for transit slaves in the discourse of the Maison des Esclaves and by some visitors that see in this, structures of confinement that applies to all forms of slave holding on the island can be misleading.

Although individuals could have held transit slaves in private houses, most were probably confined in the European forts. The dismantlement of the colonial forts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has placed the focus on private houses like the Maison des Esclaves, also known as slave warehouse. Elsewhere, I have argued that private houses including the Maison des Esclaves are better suited to illuminate indigenous slavery rather than the exportation of slaves (Thiaw 2006).

Although indigenous slaves interacted closely with their masters, many maintained a precarious existence that was reflected in their lodging within the Gorean household. Iconographic evidence showing house drawings indicates the persistence of thatched huts within the same courtyard as buildings with bricks or stones within a number of Gorean households until the nineteenth century or much later (Hinchman 2000: 354) (**Figure 4**). Ethnographically, similar structures correspond to the lodging of juniors, less wealthy kin, dependants or clients but could also correspond to structures such as kitchens. It is likely that some of the mud floors unearthed during fieldwork on the island were remains of such structures that may as well hosted indigenous slaves. This evidence suggests that indigenous slaves may not have been treated like chattel but they were not spoiled either.

Archaeology of Quotidian Life on Gorée

Over the past six years, a large body of archaeological data has been recovered from Gorée. Archaeological tests survey and excavations were carried out in several parts of the island including, the Bambara or slave quarter, the ruins of Fort Nassau erected by the Dutch in 1627/8, the alleged residence of the Dutch governor from 1617 to 1697, a putative eighteenth century residence of *signare* Ann Pépin, mistress of the French governor, the Chevalier De Boufflers, etc. Units were also opened in the Place du Gouvernement which housed colonial authorities, but also in the southwestern foot of the Castel, and in places allegedly associated with nineteenth century Sisters of the congregation of Saint Joseph de Cluny, military barracks, etc. (**Figure 1**).

Five burials were exhumed in the course of our work in Gorée island. This included two adult women, one male, and two infants found in contexts probably dating to the nineteenth century. All were excavated in the southern part of the island. While evidence of funerary and ritual practices remains slim, it is interesting to note that all five individuals were placed in wooden coffins, perhaps indicating European influence in burial practices. None of these individuals were associated with objects, as one would expect in African pre-Islamic or pre-European contact contexts. However, in a non-mortuary context, a metal can containing large pieces of charcoal, seven quartz nodules, and folded leaves of an old piece of paper were found buried in front of a house, suggesting some persistence of African ritual practices (Thiaw 2008).

Final analysis of the faunal remains is still to come. However, evidence from one of the localities excavated shows a higher presence of pelagic over shoreline and freshwater fishes in post eighteenth century contexts. Again this evidence is consistent with the appearance and rapid growth of European trade goods on the island. This may then be linked to technological

innovations such as the introduction of more efficient deep water fishing nets and boats introduced by the Europeans (Lien 2003).

While documentary textual sources situate the initial Afro-European encounter on the island in the mid-15th century, archaeological material evidence collected indicate that the consumption and trade of European imports were not significant prior to the early eighteenth century which coincided with a peak development in the Atlantic slave trade and the rise of Afro-European identity on the island and elsewhere on the West African Coast (Brooks 2003, Mark 2002).

While assemblage composition and density varied from one locality to another, it is clear that trade goods spread rapidly throughout the island suggesting increased and widespread access to European goods. This included construction material (bricks, local stones, tiles, nails, etc.), alcoholic beverages (wine, cognac, gin bottle glass, etc.), beads, gunflints, ceramics, various metal artefacts, etc. In Gorée in particular, *signares* or Afro-European women owned most of the houses and indigenous slaves that were rented to the Europeans for various domestic and sexual services (Brooks 1976, Knight-Baylac 1970, 1977). Yet, as noted above, by the second half of the eighteenth century, free and enslaved Africans, Afro-Europeans and Europeans were living side by side. The rapid spread and circulation of material goods combined with changes in the settlement within the island at this time make it particularly tricky to document these different identities archaeologically. Yet, the even spread of European artefacts and the structure of the Gorean household, suggests however that indigenous slaves had, to some degree, access to these European imports.

Although the enslaved accommodated certain aspects of European ways, it seems likely that the, *signare* worldview was fundamentally grounded in African culture (Thiaw 2006). They ate together with their slaves from a large bowl with spoons, wore non-European clothing

referred to as *mboubes* in Wolof, and had an association known as *mbotaye* (Boilat 1984). All of this is reminiscent of historic aspects of Senegalese urban culture. In addition to their slaves, the *signare* also lived with European expatriates, with whom they intermarried, including high colonial officials and traders.

The typical Gorean household may have included a European or Afro-European male, his *signare* wife, their children and one or more indigenous slaves, who were employed as skilled labourers and domestics. Unlike the *signares*, Afro-European males tended to exhibit a European identity (ibid). The Europeans generally stayed in Africa just for a few years to make fortune and return home leaving their families in the care of the *signares*, who in return, received part of their wealth. Export slaves transited on the island but archaeology is of little help to quantify or evaluate their impact on quotidian life. It is possible that some of them were employed for unskilled labour while in transit. Yet, narratives on slavery in Gorée island have generally been concerned essentially with this category of slaves while indigenous slaves, which predominated in the island's population from the eighteenth century onwards, have been largely silenced, whether in global and local narratives. Archaeological research on the island has permitted us to begin to fill that gap.

Conclusion

Archaeological data collected from Gorée over the past six years have allowed us to raise a number of issues that challenge aspects of old debates on the nature and impact of the Atlantic slave trade on the island. While the evidence gathered is limited for addressing the question of transit slaves destined for export, it offers new venues for understanding everyday interactions on the island. In doing so, it has begun to shift concerns toward traditionally marginalized groups, including indigenous slaves that predominated on the island beginning in the eighteenth century.

This period largely coincides with the occupation of the island by French and British colonial powers and the development of trade. European imports dominate assemblages at this time, suggesting greater access to such imports by the larger population, including indigenous slaves.

To understand how slaves acquired trade goods, one needs to link this pattern with systems of slave holding on the island. Export slaves and indigenous slaves had different statuses and did not share the same fate. Although some European merchants may have owned indigenous slaves to assist them with domestic tasks and the coastal and inland trade, they were primarily interested in transit slaves who were generally confined within the precincts of the forts waiting for the next shipment. Export slaves may have been employed locally while in transit on the island but like indigenous slaves, they were treated as chattel, and since they stayed only for a short time, their visibility on the archaeological record must have been limited.

The destruction, rather than restoration, of the major European forts on the island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may have been part of process of erasing this element of the islands past on the part of the colonial authorities. With the dismantlement of such structures, sites like the Maison des Esclaves, in reality more suited to understand indigenous slavery, were decontextualized and reinterpreted as commemorative sites for transit export slaves. In the same time, the unpleasant issue of indigenous slavery was silenced. The rise to international prominence of the Maison des Esclaves is linked to the emergence of new power relations both within Africa and its New World Diaspora. The irony is that both African and African Diaspora elites have developed commemorative narratives to heal from the trauma of separation and exile but in doing so, they both evacuated the dividing issue of indigenous slavery.

The strength of Gorée island in the Atlantic economy of the Senegambia was essentially based on the services it provided to European merchants. Strong archival evidence suggests that slaves holding and employment was a profitable economic activity on which many islanders invested beginning at least in the second half of the eighteenth century. Indigenous slaves were present in many Gorean's households as skilled labourers and domestics and as such, they have contributed to the operations and productions of an Atlantic economy and culture locally and globally.

However analysis of documentary and archaeological evidence indicate that the rôle of Gorée in the Atlantic economy and culture was changing rather static. Prior to the eighteenth century, European presence on the island, although mentioned in the texts, has very little archaeological visibility and is rather discrete or absent. Plans produced in the early eighteenth century show a segregated settlement which desegregated as it grew. As a result, the social distance between the islanders was reduced without regard to status, gender, identity or race. The development of a new architecture with stones and bricks by the mid-eighteenth century and the cornering of land by *signares* and Afro-European elites which accompanied these changes signal important transformations with profound social implications.

The large amounts of European imports suggest novel tastes. Yet Gorée continued to rely upon the mainland for food and water supplies. Similarly funerary practices show strong European influences but other evidence indicates the persistence of African belief systems and worldview. Thus, despite the introduction of luxuries, the arrival of new identities with different worldviews, technological innovations and the imposition of European government, Gorée appears like a transnational community in the making.

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List of Figures

Figure 1: Gorée island, survey and excavation map.

Figure 2 : Wallons, Carte de l'isle de Gorée, 1723. IFAN Library.

Figure 3 : Evrard Duparel, Plan de l'Isle de Gorée, 1778. IFAN Library.

Figure 4 : E. de Berard, Intérieur d'une Maison à Gorée d'après nature, nineteenth century. IFAN Library.