
discussion article

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Recharting Atlantic encounters. Object trajectories and histories of value in the Siin (Senegal) and Senegambia

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Abstract

The Atlantic era marks a turbulent period in the history of Senegambia, defined by dramatic reconfigurations in local socio-economic conditions. These 'global encounters' have often been equated with the subjection of African societies to the whims of an expanding capitalist economy. While the long-term effects of the Atlantic economy cannot be denied, conventional histories have often prioritized macro-trends and generalized process, thus glossing the complex mosaic of experiences that constituted the African Atlantic. By contrast, a closer look at how different categories of objects were consumed and circulated over time may provide more nuanced assessments of the impact of global forces on coastal societies. This article examines how these material entanglements took place in the Siin (Senegal), by following the social trajectories of several classes of objects in space and time, and charting their enmeshment in regimes of value, patterns of action, forms of power and historical experience. Combining these empirical insights with a broader theoretical reflection, the paper attempts to draw out the implications of rethinking the historical space of the African Atlantic through a more intimate engagement with the historicities, contingencies and materialities that fashioned African historical experiences. While this shift in conceptual priorities inevitably creates new silences, I suggest that it also re-establishes Africans as cultural and historical subjects, firmly grounded in world history, and that this perspective can provide a point of departure for the production of alternative historical imaginations and subjectivities.

Keywords

African Atlantic; problem-space; materiality; historicity; value; Senegambia

Introduction: Africa's tragedy

In a controversial speech delivered to an audience of students and professors in Dakar on 26 July 2007, newly elected French president Nicolas Sarkozy offered a few meditations on Africa's relationship to the world, past, present,

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and future. After acknowledging the ills of the slave trade and colonialism, and the historical bonds they created between Africa and Europe, Sarkozy recuperated ‘history’ to make a very different point about the continental malaise.¹ “Africa’s tragedy,” he argues,

is that the African man has failed to enter far enough into history. The African peasant, who, for millennia, has lived with the seasons, whose living objective is to be in harmony with nature, knows only of the eternal repetition of time marked by an endless recurrence of the same gestures and same words.

In this *imaginaire*, where everything always repeats itself, there is room neither for human adventure, nor for the idea of progress.

... Africa’s problem is not to invent a more or less mythical past for herself in order to cope with the present, but to invent a future with means that are her own.

A disquieting blend of contradiction and historical fantasy, the French president’s escapade into ethnophilosophy (Mbembe 2007) provides a fitting overture to the questions of history tackled in this paper, in at least two ways. First, negatively, the speech paints the very image of Africa that I seek to question. It is ironic that, in denouncing the myth of an African eternal return, Sarkozy recuperates exactly the kind of *imaginaire* he so vehemently rejects. By resurrecting the old Hegelian fetish of timeless Africa written out of modernity, he becomes the charmed audience of an Africa that has existed but in the minds of foreign observers (Mudimbe 1994; Miller 1985)! This leads him to embrace the curious notion that ‘Africans’ have somehow been insufficiently ‘historical’ or entrepreneurial in their engagement with the world – a thesis with which this paper takes severe exception.

Chiding the Dakar allocution for its shortcomings is not entirely fair game, in that the speech owes more to post-Enlightenment myth-making than to serious historical analysis. The fact that ‘Africans have histories too’ is not exactly startling news; in fact, exorcizing Hegelian demons from representations of Africa’s past has been a central pivot of africanist scholarship since the time of independence. There is, however – and this is the second point – a more opaque level, on which Sarkozy’s views show uneasy resemblance to academic conventional wisdom. What this convergence reveals, as I show below, is that the tropes that animate Sarkozy’s narrative (the Atlantic world and colonialism, and Africa’s tragic relationship to them) also organize competing forms of writing about the African past. The salient question, then, is no longer whether Africans have history, but the kinds of histories of Africa that have been written, the kinds of historical imaginations they have permitted, and the kinds of alternatives that are possible.

The following article examines these questions in the context of northern Senegambia, the area lying between the Senegal and Gambia river valleys and covering the present country of Senegal, where I have been conducting archaeological and archival research since 2001 (figure 1). Senegal has been a fertile terrain of historical, and to a lesser extent archaeological,



Figure 1 Northern Senegambian states, ca mid-19th century.

engagement, producing research that speaks very keenly to the analysis of African experiences in the face of oceanic forces. The reflections that follow address this ‘historiography’ and the particular concerns that have driven it. In doing so, however, I also seek to make a broader theoretical point about understandings of Atlantic encounters in general.

My argument is that academic knowledge of the Atlantic past in Senegambia (and other parts of West Africa) has been governed by experiences of the slave trade and colonialism told and remembered in the present, which have recursively fashioned the terms of historical discourse in the region. In assuming, or reacting against, anticolonial readings of global encounters, analysis has narrowed the historical confines of Atlantic Senegambia to the slave trade and colonialism, and the nature of their impact on regional societies. These two moments have crystallized into ready-made abstractions that framed the African past around a given set of dynamics, while obscuring the historicities and experiences that may have exceeded these expectations. Following David Scott (2004), I propose that we extract ourselves from this historical project by redefining our relationship to the political and historical problems posed by the Atlantic era – in other words, by formulating new questions instead of supplying different answers to the quandaries of an earlier generation of historians.

One alternative, I suggest, is to reconceptualize the ‘problem-space’ of the African Atlantic around issues of materiality, temporality, entanglements, and the productivity of power.² Specifically, I seek to expand recent archaeological

advances in the study of Africa and its diasporas during the past five hundred years (e.g. DeCorse 2001b; Kelly 2004; Ogundiran and Falola 2007; Reid and Lane 2004b; Stahl 2001b), by exploring how artefacts and texts can be mobilized to produce narratives of the African Atlantic sensitive to different temporalities of action and rhythms of social experience. Drawing inspiration from important studies by Stahl (2002) and Ogundiran (2002), I propose that artefact trajectories, and the regimes of value that guided them, can shed promising light on these dimensions of Atlantic encounters, by offering a conduit into embodied experiences and the local negotiation of global forces. Turning to the Siin province in Senegal, I use recent archaeological and historical research to illustrate how object circulation and appropriation can complicate conventional readings of Atlantic dynamics in the region. Material from the Siin shows how Atlantic objects and forces unevenly rippled across the area, opening different strategies of action and forms of subjectivity as the region was gradually absorbed into a political economy increasingly configured by outside agencies. Finally, I reflect on the possibilities afforded by this analysis, and its potential for repositioning the Atlantic in relation to the past and future of Senegambia.

Atlantic perspectives on Senegambia

Pace Nicolas Sarkozy, Senegambia's immersion into worldwide circuits of political economy has been portrayed – often with reason – as nothing short of revolutionary. However, scholarship has generally been divided over how detrimental Atlantic forces were and how much agency Africans exerted over their own fate. On one side, an earlier generation of historians minimized the impact of enslavement, arguing that the balance of trade systematically favored Senegambia until the 19th century, and afforded new possibilities for economic development and political accumulation (Curtin 1969; 1975; Fage 1969). By contrast, a rival camp equated the Atlantic era with great socio-political turbulence marked by the rise of predatory states, rampant slave-raiding, crises of production, famines and generalized insecurity (Barry 1998; Becker 1988). Working through Atlantic commerce and colonial regimes, world capitalism, according to Barry (1979, 41), dealt a 'fatal blow to all fields of artisanal production and interregional trade', thus robbing local communities of their autonomy and binding them in relationships of dependency with exterior markets (Bathily 1989). Africans were forced into a broader process of peripheralization that relegated the continent to the margins of the world economy, and stalled its development relative to other parts of the globe (Rodney 1982; Wallerstein 1976).

While there is no question that the advent of Atlantic commerce transformed the course of African societies, one may wonder the extent to which broad-brushstroke portraits of development or devolution actually capture the complex nature of historical experiences in Senegambia. It seems paradoxical, for instance, that these momentous transformations should often be discussed as if they had taken place on a largely static canvas of endlessly reproducing social institutions and traditions (Barry 1998; Cissoko 1967; Curtin 1975; Péliissier 1966). The disjointed collage of political

turbulence onto a fixed cultural backdrop seems to replay old anthropological dualisms splitting state from society, agency from structure, history from stasis, production from reproduction, and so on. In doing so, historical tableaux have consigned the precolonial cultural past to a qualitatively separate sphere of history, one bypassed by the operation of time, and fading into the penumbra of collective memory. Note here the (metahistorical) rapprochement with Sarkozy's views.

More questionable still is that Atlantic dynamics should have had uniform social consequences, that evenly spilled across all realms of social experience; that a vast region, of tremendous cultural and political diversity, should be adequately captured by single historical movements; or that, indeed, cultural structures may not have been overly affected by these changes. Forcing Senegambia into sweeping stories of (in the last instance) African autonomy or powerlessness that already presume the form, direction, and dynamics of history and culture simply obscures the distinct shape and character of once-living communities.

While recent scholarship has attempted to sail a more balanced course, in part through greater attention to regional specificity (Klein 1968; Searing 1993), researchers have not always managed to escape cut-and-dried bifurcations: positing favorable terms of trade *or* negative balance sheets, agency *or* submission, autonomy *or* dependence and so on. Nor have they avoided the tendency to write regional history from the standpoint of the best-documented polities, which were also the most implicated in commercial slavery and most susceptible to its disruptions (Klein 1992; see critiques in Diouf 2001 and Thioub 2002). And when authors have examined – often astutely – political dynamics in smaller or more peripheral polities (Galvan 2004; Klein 2001; Searing 2002), ‘culture’ has by and large remained construed as a retro-projection of the colonial ethnographic present into precolonial contexts (but see Baum 1999; Shaw 2002).

The salient point, here, is that a certain structure of argument shaped in the anticolonial (nationalist, pan-Africanist, dependentist, Afro-Marxist) discourses of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s has also defined the terms of historical inquiry; the scope, direction and rhetoric of analysis; and the kinds of pasts that were possible. The twin ghosts of the triangular trade and colonial violence acquired particular significance in the political moment of post-independence national struggles. As particularly brutal forms of exploitation, yet ones that propelled the ‘forward march of global modernity’, these epochal moments are interlaced with a complex array of emotional, moral and political positions. The resulting dialectics of guilt and anger, of exoneration and accusation, of accountability and significance, considerably impacted the politics of the present in newly independent nations, and thus contributed significantly to shaping postcolonial academic discourse in Africa (Cooper 2005; Mbembe 2002). They offered a set of compelling causes to explain Africa's position in global political economy, and simultaneously outlined the obstacles that needed to be overcome to foster an alternative to the present situation. Reflected in the mirror of the present, this idea of history provided a moral and political compass delimiting particular species of historical imaginations and anticipated futures.

Reimagining the ‘problem-space’ of Atlantic pasts: historicities, materialities, trajectories

The crucial issue, as Scott (2004, esp. 23–57) aptly remarks, is the extent to which the interrogations and vistas of post-independence scholarship continue to be valid in the present, and how ‘old’ questions may continue to shape how we think about the past. The key, he argues, is not to pin ‘new’ answers to the old spectres of the past, but to redefine ‘problem-spaces’, by posing different questions, which can then mobilize the past to fashion new projects and expectations about the future. Thus, in the case of Senegambia, alternative histories lie perhaps less in demonstrating the impact of the Atlantic slave trade, or how much it actually stifled or lifted historical trajectories. Perhaps more important is the need to shift our lenses to different realms of historical inquiry targeting the temporal qualities, embodied experiences, and physics of power of Atlantic encounters. In this light, we should perhaps try to comprehend the Atlantic era as a configuration of discursive, material and practical relations, enmeshed in fields of power that both limited capacities for action and yet also afforded the ability to act – with varying degrees of awareness of the consequences – in the face of change (e.g. Foucault 1994, 298–325, 326–48; also Scott 2004, 127–28).

Important here is the study of Atlantic processes in their situated expressions, in a light attentive to the contexts and contingencies of continental history. Only then can we begin to retrieve what Bayart (1993) describes as the ‘true historicity of African societies’, where the past is no longer assimilated to scripted histories, but seen as a complex matrix of entanglements (*sensu* Mbembe 2001, 14–15) – that is, bundles of shifting temporalities, durations, deviations and spatialities that overlap, interlace or clash with each other just as they unevenly shape different actors in different fields of practice. From this vantage point, Atlantic experiences cannot be inferred from a bottomless ethnographic past that separates state and society, where local fates move at the behest of outside forces. The historicity of experience in Senegambia lay somewhere else, on a more ambiguous terrain where the political, the economic and the cultural were profoundly entwined, where the meeting of large-scale economies and local worlds was mediated by cultural logics, moral economies, political configurations, and conflicts. And, as will be shown below, the archaeological evidence accumulated so far seriously questions whether the introduction of European merchandise was as revolutionary in Senegambia as historian Abdoulaye Ly (1990, 251) once rhetorically surmised.

To explore the influence of political economic forces on local societies, we must tackle how local regimes of value and practices of social distinction shaped the African reception, consumption and desire for imported products (Stahl 2002). Drawing inspiration from a thriving anthropological literature on exchange and consumption (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Munn 1986; Myers 2001; Sahlins 1994; Thomas 1991), recent scholarship has usefully underscored the need to unravel how African modes of valuation, some of which pre-date the Atlantic trade, helped to recontextualize trade materials in ways that were locally meaningful, and how, in turn, these global contacts opened the way for new horizons of social practice (Ogundiran 2002; Piot

1996; 1999; Stahl 2001b; Weiss 1996). In other words, we must document the cultural translation of economic encounters before and during the Atlantic era, and the different forms of experience forged in these interactions.

Because they tend to conflate diverse levels of social response into generalized trends, familiar abstractions (regions, world system, the state, society, etc.) often gloss the minutiae of cultural entwinements. Thus, instead of packaging different domains of social practice and their material expressions, we might be better off unhooking them from one another, and examining their respective entanglements with outside systems of objects (Dietler 1998; Stahl 2001b; 2002). Here, objects – and their circulation in and out of spheres of production, exchange and consumption; between different political actors; along or across social boundaries – seem to provide a salient point of analytical entry (Appadurai 1986; cf. Van Binsbergen and Geschiere 2005). Retracing, to the best of our ability, the historical trajectories of different categories of object (Appadurai 1986, 13) can lend insights into how cultural choices guided the consumption of Atlantic commodities, and how, in turn, the circulation of trade imports introduced new resources and situations that in time could be converted into new material experiences, cultural logics and social relations (e.g. Lesure 1999). Because the relationships between objects and the people who use them are always (re)calibrated in given domains of social action, materiality, subjectivities and the webs of socio-semantic and historical relations binding them are enmeshed in a process of mutual constitution (Keane 2005; Meskell 2004; D. Miller 2005). In this respect, objects work to embody or produce social values in the context of cultural action, thus creating, reinforcing or diffusing the social orders that coordinate human exchanges: hierarchies of objects are linked to hierarchies of people; tastes for things translate into judgements of people; and object worlds and the ‘places’ they inhabit can effectively re-enshrine, transgress or abolish social difference, depending on the political projects that mobilized them (Keating 2000; Mills 2004). It is the nature of these links – their histories and qualities – and the contexts that shape them that must be determined.

The pasts materialized in objects can thus critically revisit portrayals of the African Atlantic as part of a worldwide process driven by a coherent (economic) logic, offering instead glimpses of a more constellated history of human transactions. Object trajectories thus privilege neither global sense nor local sensibilities, nor do they gloss the relations of power in between; rather, they open varied, if jagged, angles on these historical entanglements, looking at the production of global trends in localities and the fashioning of local worlds by forces well beyond them (Appadurai 1996). Interestingly, here the fragmented geography of exchange embodied in artefacts turns into a methodological vantage, as it lends us access to the ‘awkward scales’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003) on which social experiences of the Atlantic were fashioned and played out. Cultivating this ‘awkwardness’ in our own scales of analysis permits us to illuminate the tensions and (dis)articulations between these different realms of social, spatial and temporal extensions – a move absolutely crucial to capturing the ‘incompleteness’, uneven intensities, and frictions constitutive of different moments of globality, colonialism, and

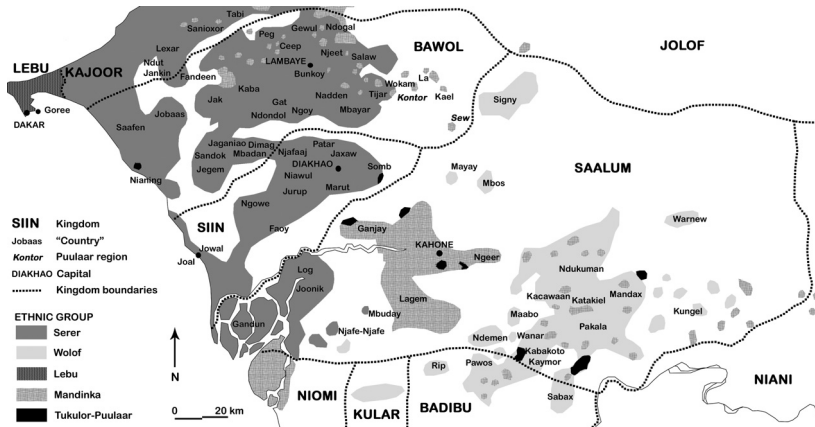


Figure 2 West-central Senegal: kingdoms and ethnic groups in the mid-19th century.

capital expansion (Cooper and Stoler 1997; Ferguson 2006; Hall 2000; Tsing 2005; Trouillot 2003).

The Siin: historical and archaeological contexts

Having delineated these few perspectives, let us now see how cultural transactions may have played out in Siin, a small coastal kingdom located in west-central Senegal (figures 1 and 2). Mirroring other regional polities, the Siin became entangled in the Atlantic world in the 15th century, as a supplier of slaves, salt, ivory, hides, textiles, grain and other natural products (Boulègue 1987; Brooks 1993; Curtin 1975). The Siin, however, provides an atypical *entrée* into regional dynamics, in that it remained a modest participant in the Atlantic system, secondary to the larger Wolof, Halpulaar or Mandinka polities surrounding it on all sides. The Siin is also interesting in light of its homogeneity and political organization. Many authors have inferred from oral traditions that the Siin was predominantly Serer in ethnic composition and highly centralized politically (Klein 1968; Mbodj 1978). In turn, they have proposed that these two characteristics may have combined with Siin's geographic compactness to shelter the region from the bulk of the disruptions generated by the Atlantic commerce. The documentary and archaeological records, however, provide a more nuanced assessment of Siin's political landscapes and their historical sensitivity to economic realities.³

Less contested, however, is that while Siin remained active in coastal activities during the 17th century, it gradually distanced itself from Atlantic exchanges after that, probably as a result of the ascendancy of the Franco-British commercial hegemony which triggered a shift from hide- and textile-centred trade to one focused on slaves. As practices of enslavement intensified during the 18th century, fuelling a lucrative commerce in captives and the rise of internal slavery, the Siin may have been demoted to the rank of second players, in so far as the kingdom was never a major supplier of captives. Commercial activity, however, was not uniform, and the trade in captives and other supplies at Joal, Siin's coastal outlet, fluctuated wildly depending

on political contingencies, regional conflicts and diplomacy, famines and so forth, with occasional surges in slave sales in times of war (Mbodj and Becker 1999). In times of peace, however, the Siin more readily supplied grain, cattle and other basic necessities to the French entrepôts of Gorée and Saint-Louis (Golberry 1802, 110–12; Le Brasseur 1977, 101, 121–22).

Against this background of relative disengagement, the Siin was gradually drawn into a codependent relationship with French coastal stations. And indeed, by the end of the 18th century, it had become locked with other kingdoms into a political economy of violence, where the cycle of debt and credit chained the fate of statecraft to foreign imports: horses, firearms, textiles and luxury items obtained from European merchants in return for slaves, food and other materials (Klein 1992, 32).

The passage into the 19th century ushered in profound reconfigurations in the economies of Senegambia, inspired by the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and gradual transition to ‘legitimate commerce’ (Law 1995). Existing merchant networks quickly compensated for the abandonment of human commodities, offering new economic options (gum arabic, incipient cash crops) that consolidated local kingdoms’ dependence on trade goods (Curtin 1981). Due to the lack of documents, little is known about the Siin during the first part of the 1800s, and we can conjecture that the region probably had limited interactions with French agents and authorities during that period. Following a change in metropolitan policies, it was absorbed into the sphere of French political influence in the 1860s, as part of a nascent colonial empire designed to satisfy the capital’s need for new geographic frontiers and safe overseas markets for investments and economic surpluses (Klein 1968). Under these shifts in geopolitical gravity, African regions were given a new part in the rapidly expanding world economy: that of suppliers of raw materials and agricultural goods in return for goods processed or manufactured in metropolitan areas (Austen 1987, 42–46; Cooper 1993). Home to one of the most sophisticated agrarian systems in West Africa, the Siin became a centrepiece in the commercial apparatus of the Senegal colony, as one of the largest producers of peanuts in the French African empire (Klein 1979; Mbodj 1980).

Because of its peculiar engagement in Senegambian political economy, the Siin offers a welcome counterpart to those histories focused on major slave-trading states disproportionately represented in archival correspondence. More specifically, the region can help to redirect historical attention towards the manifold experiences and trajectories that comprised the Senegambian Atlantic as a historical space (Diouf 2001). While shedding initial light into these dynamics, the documentary record for the region is very uneven, and best exploited in juxtaposition with archaeological material.

Of the more than 180 sites (including loci subsequently marked out as sites) identified during the first regional survey in Siin (covering slightly more than 6 per cent of the province), over 110 could be definitively ascribed to the Atlantic period. Of these, over 40 habitation sites fell into Phase Va of the regional ceramic chronology (*ca* 1400s–1700s), while more than 90 belonged to phases Vb and Vc (18th–early 20th century), denoting the multicomponent nature of many of these occupations, and considerable overlap over time.⁴

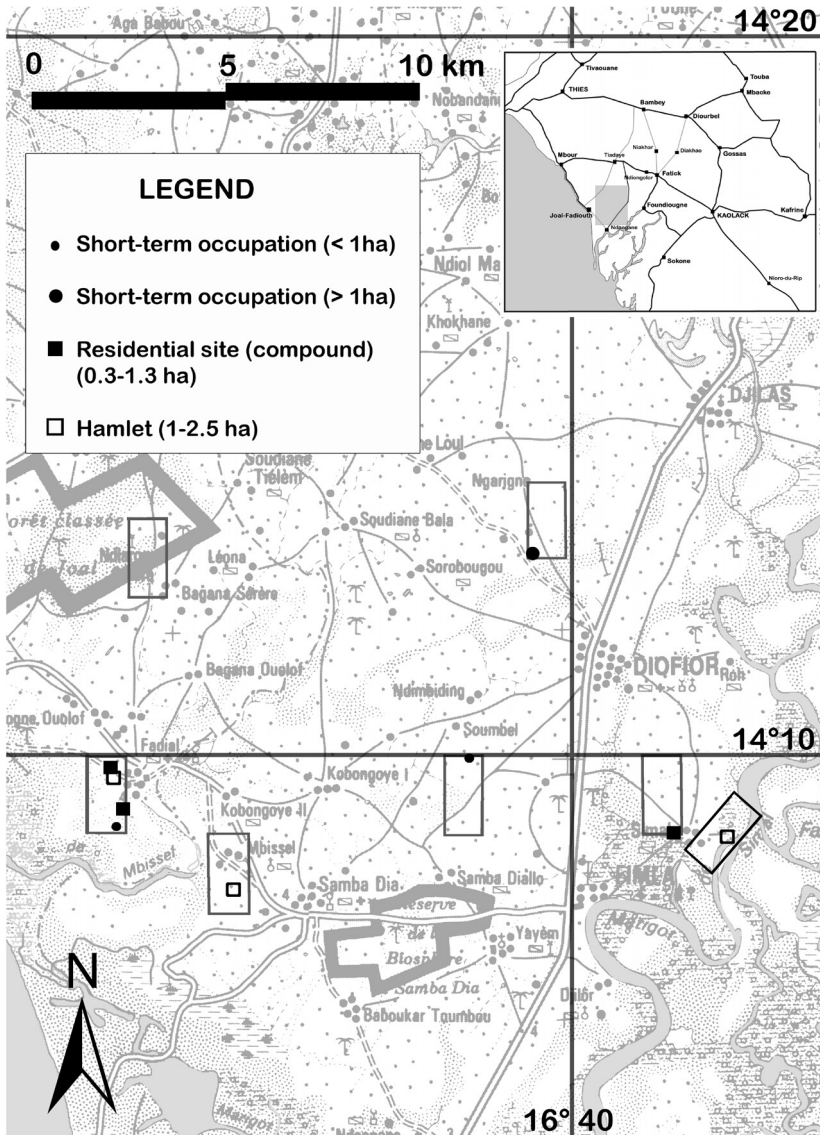


Figure 3 Settlement distribution in coastal Siin, 18th and 19th centuries. The grey rectangles indicate survey areas.

Atlantic-period settlements unfold as a mosaic of small and larger villages, ‘hamlets’ and more impermanent sites (figures 3 and 4). They present a number of long-term similarities, notably limited material accumulation indicating a pattern of residential mobility over time, and a certain structural homogeneity within phases, as various classes of site remain ‘relatively’ undifferentiated in their material expressions. Thus most sites will consist of a suite of trash and habitation mounds, varying only in number, size, surface

features and artefact density. Interestingly, the size or material abundance of a site seldom seems to correspond to its remembered political importance (Richard, n.d.). Social space is notoriously difficult to ‘read’ due to the impermanence of sites and invisibility of architecture.

The settlement landscape also exhibits considerable geographic and historical variation. Squarely centred along the coast and riverine channels before Atlantic contacts, the village habitat gradually relocated towards the hinterland after the 1500s. During the same period, habitation sites experienced a dramatic increase in number (and reduction in size and organization) to give way to a dispersed human landscape, made up of numerous small (often 1.5 hectares or less) and seemingly transient settlements.

Royal memory, village traditions and written documents were collected and consulted to anchor these sites more firmly in cultural context. While these sources must be treated critically, they often yielded information on the historical sociology of the settlements, the social identity of their occupants (royalty, aristocrats, slave-warriors, retainers, servants and domestic slaves, commoners) and their inscription in the remembered history of the kingdom, between recent migrations dating back to the 1960s and the more distant past of dynastic legends. Seven sites were selected for limited subsurface testing, offering a diverse sample of former capitals (Ndiongolor, Mbissel) and aristocratic settlements (Cupaan), villages associated with the foundation of the Siin polity (Dioral, Sagn Folo, Simal) and simple agricultural villages (Sorokh). Excavations consisted of a small number of trenches (generally two per site) and judgemental test pits sunk in trash middens and residential mounds, accompanied by extensive mapping and recording of surface features. Though not contemporaneous, these sites (or parts of them) nevertheless were occupied at various times in the past six hundred years. Their artefactual inventories, combined with those retrieved on surveyed sites, provide the raw material for the analysis below.

Regional assemblages in Siin are heavily dominated by local pottery, which accounts for over 90 per cent of their content and volume. Ceramic inventories generally feature low-fired globular jars and bowls of various sizes, decorated with roulette impressions, incisions and slips (Richard 2007, chapter 8). Most Atlantic-period sites will also yield a small collection of other artefacts, comprising local manufactures and trade imports, and largely composed of (in descending order of proportion) glass bottles (mostly wine or liquor, made in Britain, France or Holland), Venetian and Czech glass beads, tobacco pipes, oxidized metal objects and European ceramics (*ibid.*, chapter 9). Although preliminary at this point, artefactual evidence manifests rather counterintuitive trends for a period so closely associated with displacement and flagrant inequality. At first glance, one of the most striking features of Siin’s Atlantic assemblages is their homogeneity. The same kinds of local ceramics and factory-made goods (bottles, beads, pipes) are found across the region, and show limited spatial segregation. Instead, there seems to have been little, if any, accumulation of imported objects before the 19th century. The other key factor is the lateness of European-produced assemblages, which gravitate mostly around the post-1850s era. At the broadest of scales, regional

archaeological patterns raise serious questions about the material impact of the oceanic economy, and its effects on political and economic power. How do these patterns break down when examined through finer sets of lenses?

Assorted entanglements: coastal trade and the logic of composition

Atlantic exchanges, early on and continuing into the 19th century, were locally mediated by what Jane Guyer (1993) has called a logic of composition (also Guyer and Eno Belinga 1995; and Guyer 2004, for a critical expansion). That is, social power was created not only by *accumulating* rare or precious commodities, but by selectively *combining or composing* different classes of goods, and the substances, knowledge, relations and use-values that they embodied. Value thus inhered not solely in particular goods but in the *assortment* of a variety of commodities.

Throughout the Atlantic era, commercial *mémoires* list long compilations of objects, which in shifting arrangements permitted certain categories of local or other goods to be secured. Thus in the early 17th century, Ruiters (1969) documented equivalences between imported and local goods – what could be obtained in return for what – making it all too clear that local tastes in consumption regulated the nature and direction of exchanges. In 1610, Lancaster, while briefly stopping on the Petite Côte, complained that although ‘the natives catch much fish, they [the crew] did not buy any, the expedition being devoid of crystal beads, white and blue *counter* [glass beads], bloodstones [carnelian beads], knives with yellow handles, iron bars, liquor bottles, without which one can procure neither cattle, nor goats, nor chickens, nor wood, nor water, etc.’ (quoted in de Moraes 1993, 143). In 1720, André Brüe indicated that beads had to be strung by colour and in particular arrangements to be saleable on the coast (Brüe 1720). In the mid-1760s, Demanet (1767, 246–47, 250) remarked that baubles were absolutely necessary to obtain captives and foodstuffs, in association with iron, liquor, beads, weapons, ammunitions and gunpowder. Ten years later, Le Brasseur (1776) lamented the indispensability of assortments in return for certain local products.

Collectively, these various accounts underscore the importance of compositional practices in coastal trading, and the distinct modes of valuation on which they rested. Just as wealth flowed from the strategic mobilization of people and relations, ‘things’ could be selectively combined in various arrangements to meet local demand and tastes. While ‘real values’ slid up and down against absolute price scales depending of the combination of goods being exchanged (Demanet 1767, 242–50; Doumet 1974, 54–56; also Guyer 2004), imported commodities became imbued with cultural value and meaning as part of trade assemblages, whose composition varied on the basis of what was being transacted. The widespread nature of composition in African commerce at the time of contact suggests the probable antiquity of these modes of social consumption.

Liquid trajectories: notes on the social life of bottle glass ...

General trends in the structure of trade, commercial relations and imported products fluctuated both historically and geographically, following shifts in

the dialectics of supply and demand. In turn, the kinds and quantities of goods that flowed inwards impacted different spheres of local production and consumption in different ways. As elsewhere along the coast, historic documents stress the early popularity of trade alcohol in Siin (Lemos Coelho 1985, 1.6, 1.13). Many authors mention that liquor was more heavily prized on the Petite Côte than further to the south where populations were more heavily Islamized (J. Lemaire (1615), in de Moraes 1993, 168; Paris 1976, 23). Official correspondence between local administrators and French charter companies documents increasing local demand for alcohol and iron throughout the 1700s, with *alcool de traite* (trade liquor) moving to the strategic centre of commercial exchanges in northern Senegambia (e.g. Demanet 1767; Lemaire 1887). How the inflow of liquor affected cultural uses of alcohol in local settings during the 18th century is difficult to evaluate. One of the persistent difficulties we face is the virtual absence of evidence on alcohol consumption practices in coastal Senegal before the onset of Atlantic exchanges. Archaeological research has been too limited so far to suggest much of anything before the 16th century. On the documentary side, while it is known that populations on the Petite Côte made wine out of grain (millet) and the fruit of the palm tree at the time of early contacts with Europeans (e.g. Almada 1984, 37), coastal observers shed little light on the sociology of alcohol use, thus offering thin comparative ground for evaluating later archaeological trajectories.⁵ More intriguing still, considering the recorded antiquity of the liquor trade, is the fact that the latter has left practically no material trace on regional sites before the late 18th century. Preservation factors may in part account for this phenomenon. It is also possible that *alcool de traite* was traded in perishable, non-glass containers that would have no archaeological visibility.

This changes with the turn of the 19th century. In effect, the ubiquitous presence of alcohol bottles on archaeological sites in the Siin offers a material reminder of the central importance of liquor in international exchanges and processes of colonization on the coast of Senegal.⁶ While liquor was but one element in a complex assortment of barter items during the 17th and 18th centuries, it rapidly eclipsed other goods during the 19th century and came to dominate the sphere of commodities traded on the coast. Case bottle assemblages clearly illustrate the reign of gin as the trade import par excellence after the 1850s (figure 5). Writing in the last decade of the 19th century, Noirot (1892, 452), who administered the Siin province, admitted that ‘genever liquor’ was the main item traded on the coast and indispensable to obtain local products (see also Mbodj 1978, 336; Rocaché 1904). The sheer quantity of gin bottles also speaks to the dynamics of colonial capitalism and supply circuits in Senegambia at the time. The liquor trade reflects the economic success and productivity of the Dutch distilling industry, whose products inundated African overseas markets through the marketing channels of other European nations. Before that, as archival references appear to suggest, alcohol imports were probably more diverse in provenance, and included French liquor and rum from the Caribbean, and possibly wine (Lemaire 1887, 53).

The liquor trade had a considerable impact on local consumption in 19th-century Siin. This is clearly illustrated in what European sources portrayed

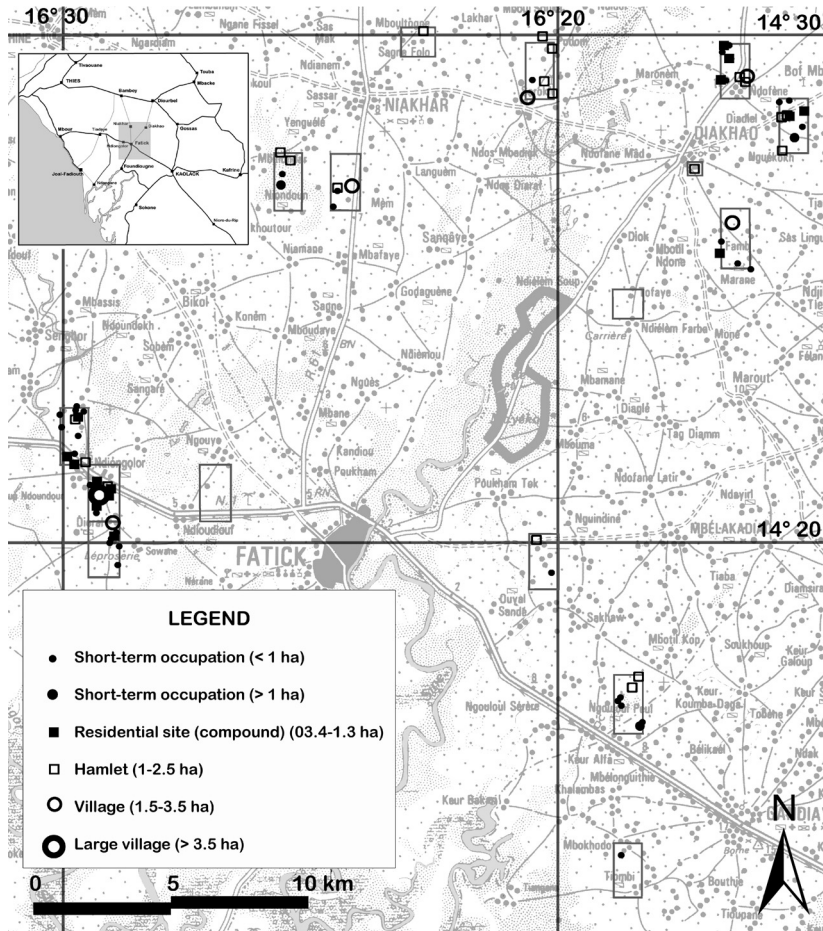


Figure 4 Settlement distribution in central Siin, 18th and 19th centuries.

as the generalized practice of drunkenness on the coast. Colonial observers perceived the abusive local alcohol consumption as a sign of degrading mores and cultural anarchy (Bérenger-Féraud 1879; Pinet Laprade 1865). On one level, this bespeaks a conscious attempt to highlight the vitiated morals of the local aristocracy, and to strategically exploit the rhetoric of oppressiveness and violence to justify colonial intervention (Richard 2007, 166, 212–13, 215). On another level, the consistency with which writers of all backgrounds discuss local liquor consumption and inebriation over time suggests that alcoholism in Siin was no simple political fiction or colonial exaggeration, but a social pathology that intensified to the beat of global flows. This is expressed all too concretely in the hundreds of liquor bottles collected on regional sites, from aristocratic residences to peasant villages. Survey evidence thus confirms that alcohol consumption was not only limited to social elites, but encompassed the full swath of the Serer social spectrum in the 19th century. In

this respect, the liquor trade indubitably eroded the local social fabric, as the landscape of violence and instability that crystallized in the second half of the 19th century would seem to suggest. More broadly, the situation in Siin joins a long list of examples stressing the part of alcohol in colonial world-building, as a vehicle of social and economic relations, an instrument of exchange and a component of imperial technologies of disruption and domination (Dietler 2006).

As with all material histories, however, there is a more nuanced side to the dynamics of 19th-century cultural consumption. For beyond the veil of rampant alcoholism, variations in artefact assemblages seem to lend suggestive light to the social dimensions of drinking and the role that alcohol may have played in the fashioning of social distance (Richard 2007, 607). Regional archaeological transcripts indicate that alcohol containers remain abundant on all 19th-century sites, yet a disparity emerges in the content of bottle assemblages between royal and aristocratic residences and settlements inhabited by non-elites. Specifically, the former not only revealed denser and more diverse bottle assemblages, but also featured higher proportions of wine bottles in relation to gin case bottles. While this trend may simply index differential access to commodity circuits, excavated material suggests a more subtle set of cultural dynamics at play, denoting the enmeshment of wine in local grids of taste-making and practices of distinction, and its mobilization for the pursuit of social power.

Evidence of the latter emerged during our examination of a site cluster near the village of Ndiogolor, remembered in oral traditions as a secondary royal residence. The complex is also known to have episodically served as primary capital in times of political instability or succession crisis; most recently, it was the residence of renegade king Sanumoon Faay, who reigned in the 1870s. Our excavations at the largest locus – a small trench near the centre of a plaza littered with late 19th-century artefacts – uncovered a feasting pit, which contained a dense bottle inventory consisting almost exclusively of wine and demijohn bottle fragments, in blatant contrast with the expected high frequencies of gin bottles common to most regional sites.

While this provides meagre ground for generalization, in light of the repeated association of wine with aristocratic contexts and its presence in prestational ceremonies in Siin, it is tempting to wonder whether wine may have evolved into an icon of social difference, publicly singling out elite consumption practices from those of commoners (see Dietler 2006; Hamilakis 1999). As a highly public and collective ritual experience, feasting frequently forms an arena for the elaboration, reproduction or consolidation of strategies of power (Dietler and Hayden 2001). The feasting ground excavated in Siin could represent an instance of what Dietler (2001) has called ‘diacritical feasts’, where the display and consumption of precious or prestige items serves to mark and remake social boundaries. Contemporary documents provide discrete allusions to such an elite aesthetic in the Siin (Boukar Dijlas n.d.), with resonances in other regions, where Bordeaux wines enjoyed considerable popularity within royal circles (Lamartiny (1884), in Gomez 1988, 151; Mollien 1818, 44). Adding independent voice to our case, oral memory in Siin recalls that wine (rather than any alcohol) was an essential element in the

initiation ceremonies of high functionaries of the state by the end of the 19th century (Faye 2003).

The fact that an imported commodity held central ground in local ritual events and in the making of political personas speaks volume about the appropriation and recontextualization of foreign objects into local social practices and logics of power. While different variants of liquor may have shared a common path across the various domains of consumption in Siin, wine may have become imbued with social significance, translated as ritual potency, and replaced local and imported liquor as an indispensable embodied substance associated with political power. Substituting, differentiating and demarcating between imported products enabled aristocratic elites to alter regimes of taste, by creating hierarchies of objects and practices that spelled out particular readings of social bodies and judgements of people (cf. Lesure 1999; Weiner 1985). Because it was readily available to the average villager, and thus less pliable as a material and symbolic medium, gin thus was kept out of the calculus of invented traditions. At the same time, based on colonial and ethnographic sources, it is very likely that, among commoners, trade liquor continued to emulate the ceremonial or ritual role played by wine in aristocratic circles, as it was commonly used for libations, propitiation of ancestral spirits, annual festivals, public ceremonies, funerals, work parties and so forth. Still today, while these practices have subsided with the growing influence of Islam, the fragments of commercial liquor bottles continue to adorn the base of spirit or ancestral shrines in Siin, especially at the time of Serer traditional festivities.

Proposing that wine and trade liquor may have shaped parallel spheres of social distinction is clearly tentative at this point. Yet it offers an incentive to examine archaeological assemblages with an eye for material paths and diversions, and in turn for the windows they open on the sociologies inspiring these changes (Appadurai 1986, 16–17, 21). Diversions from socially prescribed uses and flows of objects may well refract in fragmentary light episodes of the social history of value in Siin, the symbolic contests and manipulations to which it gave rise, and thus the cultural anxieties of power in times of uncertainty.⁷

Of other (small) things: trade, cultural strategies and regimes of value

Against the growing popularity of iron and liquor in Atlantic exchanges (Curtin 1975), glass beads continued to be imported at a steady rate. In European correspondence, beads are often depicted as essential items of trade, modes of payment, gifts or components of customs assortments along the coast, and were incorporated into local aesthetic systems and adornment practices (see references in DeCorse, Richard and Thiaw 2003). Coastal writers make frequent references to African men and women clad in bead paraphernalia, and the fervent demand that existed for them. This trend was vividly captured by Demanet (1767, 245–46) who marvelled at

how many trinkets are consumed along the coasts of Africa. Negros, negresses, mulattoes and mulattresses wear them in prodigious belts that are sometimes a foot in length and three or four rows thick ... Thus all the

kinds of baubles are absolutely necessary for the trade in slaves, as well as to procure the necessities of life.

Documentary sources seem to echo anthropological and archaeological analyses in other parts of the continent, which have underscored the centrality of beads to cultural and power transactions: as barter items; tokens of currency; money; luxury goods; and ritual, religious or decorative objects (Graeber 2001, chapter 4; Kinahan 2000; Stahl 2001a). Unfortunately, the partiality of archaeological information makes it difficult to understand the role which beads played in processes of social and ritual reproduction in Siin, and how their introduction transformed local practical embodiment. Clearly, beads were not exactly a novelty at the time of early oceanic encounters but had long been involved in local and regional exchange networks (Richard 2007, 363–64) – another reminder that the Atlantic trade often did not bring items that Africans did not produce or had no access to, but simply redirected economic gravities away from hinterland areas and grafted itself onto existing commercial circuits (Thornton 1998). Alas, while bead assemblages have been recovered from funerary contexts in the Senegal River Valley, megalithic and tumulus belts, and the Saalum Island Delta, beads and other imported materials are glaringly absent from Siin sites before the 17th century. While this probably in part reflects problems of archaeological sampling, it also raises pointed questions about the extent of Siin's connection to Saharan economic spheres.

Although the absence of robust archaeological baselines prevents us from comparing pre-15th-century contexts with ones from the Atlantic period, it is possible to pick up the trail and movement of beads across later historical settings by juxtaposing material archives against the textual records. One notes, for instance, a discrepancy between 16th- and 17th-century European sources that show the economic significance and cultural appropriation of imported beads, and their near absence from archaeological sites dating to that period. Although this incongruity surely finds some of its origins in post-depositional distortions, conditions of preservation and the difficulty of identifying early bead specimens with accuracy, the absence of beads may simply indicate that an area like the Siin may not have been as active or involved in local exchanges as portrayed in European sources. Alternatively, it is possible that, in the early decades of the Atlantic trade, the circulation of overseas commodities like beads, and access to them, may not have been as widespread as documentary evidence suggests, but subject to tight control on the part of political elites and dignitaries. Archaeological evidence is too limited to date to suggest differences in the geography of bead distribution that would support preferential consumption or their use as insignias of prestige and social valuation, but it is quite possible that relevant contexts have yet to be investigated. In effect, some 17th-century sources comment upon the local use of beads to make and mark social difference (Almada 1984, 24; Dubois (1669), in de Moraes 1998, 145), a form of 'practical logic' that has been documented in other parts of Africa (Ogundiran 2002; Stahl 2002).

By contrast, the omnipresence of Venetian and Czech beads on historic settlements in Siin offers unambiguous evidence of the widespread demand

for imported beads in the Siin during the 18th and 19th centuries. This is all the more interesting because this period appears to have experienced a precipitous decline in bead imports (Curtin 1975, 312, 318), as liquor and weapons and armaments supplanted earlier imports. The ubiquitous presence of beads on 18th- and 19th-century sites in various parts of Senegal (DeCorse, Richard and Thiaw 2003; Thiaw 2003) leaves little doubt that beads remained important elements of the regional economic and cultural landscapes, as many colonial authors have observed. A more nuanced expression of the continued cultural significance of beads in Siin (as commodities, currencies, body adornments and part of local sartorial grammars) can be seen in the growth of a local bead tradition during the 1700s, which probably has earlier roots in the 17th century. While perhaps fortuitous, we may wonder if the archaeological emergence of a local bead-making industry may signal a connection to the expansion of Atlantic commerce and shifts in commercial fluxes, although the meaning of these entanglements is uncertain. Were local clay beads used to emulate their imported counterparts, by whom and in what social situations? Did they acquire different values, functions and social messages? Perhaps clay bead production manifests a cultural response designed to substitute for episodic shortages or the possible decrease in bead circulation documented by historians. Perhaps local artisans may have tried to harness the local taste for beads by producing beads emulating their imported counterparts. Where these artefacts would have fitted in local systems of taste, and the kinds of cultural meanings, values and social messages they would have commanded, are uncertain. The small nature of the assemblage, and limited information on the contexts of clay bead use and production, only afford hypotheses.

Although less well studied because of its limited archaeological visibility, the fate of cloth seems to be telling yet another story. The Siin is described in Portuguese and Dutch sources as a textile-producing area, whose products were valuable items of trade in various parts of the African coast (figure 6) (Ruiters 1969, 108). Because local cotton cloth also served a domestic market, it is possible that textile production kept the demand for imported fabric much lower in Siin than in other parts of Africa until the 18th century, and maybe later (Anonymous (1670), in Thilmans and de Moraes 1977). Other documents, however, show that by the 1630s, Petite Côte traders purchased cotton cloth from the Gambia River from which they fashioned their valued garments (de Moraes 1973). Contemporary observers also allude to the possibility that local cloth may have embodied forms of social differentiation during the 17th century (de Marees (1602), in de Moraes 1993, 54; Fr Gaspar de Sevilla (1647), in de Moraes 1995, 363; Lemaire 1887, 54–55). Certain garments and textiles seem to have distinguished nobles and elites from commoners, in conformity with many other societies in Africa and elsewhere, where cloth and clothing, by virtue of their pliability, tactility and gradability, and because of their intimate linkages to bodies and selves, constitute veritable ‘social skins’, and were deployed and redeployed as political artefacts in daily negotiations of social geometries (cf. Comaroff 1996; DiPaolo Loren 2001; Hendrickson 1996). Because of its clothmaking industry, Siin was centrally involved in coastal exchanges during the Portuguese and Dutch periods (Dapper 1971; Lemos Coelho 1985). At the end of the 17th century, however, the rise of French and British commerce led to a rapid diminution of



Figure 5 19th-century gin case bottle.

the trade in local textiles (de Moraes 1972a; 1972b). These changes probably heavily impacted Siin's economy and its position in exchange circuits, since the region lost an important source of revenue and medium of exchange. The gradual peripheralization of Siin in the growing Atlantic economy may date back to these reconfigurations, after what appeared to be an enterprising start.

What is less clear, however, is how the collapse of a coastal market for indigenous textiles impacted Siin's clothmaking industries. Artisanal production probably experienced a decrease, and indeed European accounts report that imported cloth was increasingly popular throughout the 18th

century. We can also legitimately wonder how the surge in foreign cloth influenced the meaning and uses of textiles in Siin, and mechanisms of distinction reported a century earlier. How were imported textiles incorporated and reframed into local social aesthetics and body politics? What kind of value did they acquire, and did the meaning of local cloth get redefined in the process? Transformations surely occurred, but their cultural significance unfortunately lies beyond archaeological interpretation at this point. A very small collection of highly variable spindle whorls scattered across the region and spanning at least three centuries bespeaks considerable heterogeneity in manufacture. This certainly demonstrates some historical continuity in the practice of cotton spinning into the 19th century (Geoffroy de Villeneuve 1814, 179–83), although the concurrent scarcity of spindle whorls in recent archaeological contexts may reflect the fierce competition which imported textiles posed to local clothmaking industries.

Because of small sample sizes, no real geographic or temporal patterning emerges from the artefact assemblage. Following oral and historical accounts, one might have expected to see some spatial clustering of spindle whorls in the vicinity of royal settlements and attached satellites, where servants and craft specialists (including weavers) appear to have resided. At the same time, ethnographic and historical accounts also remind us that spinning probably was a domestic activity practised by all women, while loom-weaving may have been confined to slave specialists, artisans or caste weavers (see discussion in Richard 2007, 210). While we should be cautious about assuming continuity in craft traditions and technologies, particularly in textile production (Roberts 1996; Stahl and Cruz 1998), the heterogeneity of the spindle whorl assemblage does not contradict the possibility of part-time or unspecialized cotton spinning, and suggests the decentralized production of cotton threads.

While the Atlantic era was a narrative of disruption and turbulence, there is another side to the story that must not be overlooked. Atlantic entanglements entailed a certain ‘democratization’ of the trade economy, by bringing commoners into contact with new goods and possibilities. While kings and court retainers may have held special control over precious commodities (slaves, horses, iron), particularly early on (Almada 1985; Lemos Coelho 1985), textual references on rural women’s bead assortments from the 16th century onwards hint that over time Atlantic commodities came to elude royal monopolies to fall within the reach of Serer commoners – something also attested by the unrestricted presence of European imports at all levels of Siin’s settlement hierarchy. By the late 18th century, most villagers appeared to have been able to trade cereal surpluses in return for imported merchandise, as a way to fulfil the need for grain and provisioning in French trading posts. Le Brasseur (1776), for instance, deplored that ‘almost all the women on the continent have obtained [the right] to sell millet so they could request that the [trading] assortment contain all the baubles that they need. Have we ever traded such large quantities of millet without being obliged to give in exchange all the necessary merchandise?’ This congruence in documentary and material patterns lends credence to Searing’s (1993, 51) suggestion that Senegambia’s engagement with the Atlantic economy was structured by a ‘dual seller’s

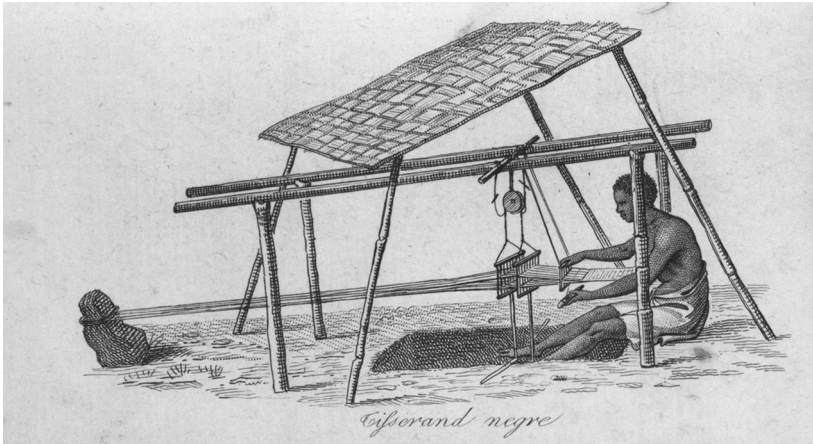


Figure 6 'Negro weaver' (late 18th century) (by R.C. Geoffroy de Villeneuve, 1814); image reference VILE-180, as shown on www.slaveryimages.org, sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library.

market, one dominated by consumption goods valued by the peasants, the other by aristocratic prestige goods'. While the realities of political violence in the 18th and 19th centuries are inescapable, the convertibility of peasant goods and foodstuffs, and commodities acquired through the slave sales, ensured the widespread circulation of trade imports in the local economies and the participation of peasants in external exchange on an unprecedented scale (e.g. Piot 1996). These new exchanges and trade relations were elevated above the restrictions which traditional spheres of circulation and sumptuary laws imposed on peasant consumption and accumulation (Mbodj 1978, 81). By opening commodity circuits to peasants and non-elites, the Atlantic trade challenged local power relations, systems of inequality and the practices of distinction that reproduced them. This reached a particularly concrete expression in the 19th century, when peasants were able to trade agricultural products for weapons and ammunitions, which they could use to protect themselves against state violence (Klein 1968, 67; 1979). In return, the entry of peasants into a wider world of trade and consumption demanded adjustment on the part of elites, as the example of wine discussed earlier perhaps illustrates.

That a broader swath of Sinig society was drawn into global political economy thus does not entail its cultural subjection to interests and decisions fashioned in Western capitalist centres (Thomas 1991). The recent dates on trade import assemblages indicate that European goods do not make a visible material impact on the regional landscape until the 19th century. Colonial documents do not disagree with a picture of relative autonomy in Siin, even as villagers were encouraged to accept French authority through the medium of commerce. Thus, in the late 1800s, colonial administrator Ernest Noirot (1892, 457) lamented that the Serer were largely indifferent to European goods. Four years later, he reported that colonial authorities' attempt to replace alcohol with imported cloth and make the latter the chief means of

barter was largely unsuccessful, since the Serer were unwilling to let go of liquor and preferred African cloth (Noirot 1896, 54–55).

With the advent of the 20th century, however, a new page turned in the history of material practices in Siin. While, as a whole, Senegal's dependence on the world market had remained low until the late 1800s (Moseley 1992, 548), the explosion of colonial agriculture, the spread of monetization and taxation and growing reliance on French products effectively tethered local lives to the fate of peanuts, generally at the expense of local modes of subsistence, production and sociality (Noirot (1896), in Klein 1968, 174–75). Framed by the peanut trade and consolidation of colonial authority, this period was one of dramatic social and economic transformations, yet, true to nearly five hundred years of global enmeshments, one permeated by local negotiations and cultural syncretism (Galvan 2004; Mbodj 1978).

Conclusions (and openings): lights and shadows in portraits of the Atlantic past

The Atlantic era was a period of momentous social change, and reconfigurations rippled across a wide range of local social fields. Some of these changes have left tangible traces in the landscape, while other transformations in cultural practices and moral economies are bound to remain poorly known. One particularly under-studied phenomenon, for instance, is the impact of violence and depredations on social regimes of value. To illustrate, in a 1753 letter to the Company of the West Indies, French administrators informed the directors that the Siin, which was caught in a war with neighbouring Kajoor, 'for more than 3 months cannot even supply itself with cattle; the famine obliged this country's people to eat them and they have become so rare than we are forced to furnish them from here' (Conseil Supérieur de la Compagnie 1753). The same year, Estoupan (1754) attributed Siin's afflictions to

three years of consecutive famine, which have obliged the negroes to eat their cattle; but the country will refurbish itself after a few years of abundance, since, the herds being the negroes' principal article of wealth, they will doubtlessly apply themselves to recoup their losses by acquiring cattle.

Considering the historical qualities of cattle as symbolic capital and collective wealth – the stuff of social contracts, relations and identities – in the region (Doumet 1974, 47, 91; Ruiters 1969, 119), the repercussions of this particular episode on local social logics must have been consequential. One wonders how the accretion of instability during the 18th and 19th centuries assaulted cultural conceptions of wealth, and the reproduction of social relations in peasant communities. In turn, the strategies and mechanisms developed by villagers to cope with insecurity are bound to remain obscure. The reality of fluctuations and reversals in constructions of social wealth becomes all the more apparent when we consider that a short hundred years after the episode described above, the decline of slavery and rise of the peanut trade may well have conspired to revive the importance of cattle as capital investment (Klein 1977, 352). Determining the fate of cattle, that prime emblem of social wealth, would be particularly crucial in unwrapping local practical logics of exchange

and social construction. Livestock, however, remain frustratingly elusive in Siin's archaeological contexts, though work in other parts of the world, on faunal size and culling patterns, strikes a promising note for historical understanding (see Creighton 2006; Reid 2004).

This example reflects a perennial frustration for the study of African–European engagements – what Jane Guyer has called the dialectics of ‘turbulence and loss’ unleashed by Atlantic processes (in Stahl 2004a, 258). The advent of global connections engineered considerable uncertainty that dramatically reconfigured African societies, but also opened the way to new possibilities and trajectories. At times, however, turbulence was synonymous with loss, as certain strategies that had previously oriented political action fell by the wayside of history and memory. Our challenge, then, is to devise ways of retrieving these cardinal practices that may not have made their way into the ethnographic or documentary records.

In this article, I have tried to conjure up some of the historical fragments scattered by the turbulence of Atlantic history and its representations. I have drawn multiple sources to track the historical trajectories of different classes of objects across a variety of contexts. Even within a small area such as the Siin, and despite the disparity of evidence, analysis suggests that different fields of practice, production and consumption changed differently with the introduction of foreign commodities. This speaks to the braided diversity of local responses to global political economy, challenging conventional writings on Senegambia.

Rather than shifting wholesale or not at all – an impression sometimes left by historical treatments, particularly as regards matters of culture – material practices, via their agents, engaged unevenly with global market forces, and thus acquired their own social histories mediated by different conceptions of what is good, acceptable or possible, by different imaginations and representations of a changing world. It is in this context that we should understand why such avid smokers as Sinig villagers never quite adopted imported pipes (Richard 2007, 609–19), but quested after liquor and beads; why local cloth and imported textiles may have been locked in a complex dance of gains and losses; or why, indeed, the social trajectories of wine and gin may have bifurcated, as liquid commodities became embroiled in the politics of consumption. In this sense, I have also tried to show that any moment of consumption is also one of cultural production, or that production processes always already presume consumptive needs and desires. The same can be said of change and continuity, which are not historical absolutes, but whose expressions and ‘effects’ are tied to social architectures, moral economies and cultural sensibilities.

Tracking these dynamics requires particular attention to time and space, and to the levels of social experience channelled at different scales and by different sources. Thus, in navigating between feasting pits and settlement networks, between aristocratic residences and peasant villages, between the coast and the hinterland, between Siin and other parts of Senegal, with an eye on commercial flows radiating from Europe, I attempted to craft a narrative sensitive at once to worldwide political economy and the eventual stranglehold of geo-capitalist relations, and to their imbrication and

actualization in local worlds – the way historic communities in Senegal made and unmade their localities in the face of changing tides and forces they tried to domesticate but could not fully control. When archaeological evidence proved too limited, I attempted to rub whatever was there against historical archives to open spaces of interrogations – raising questions about ‘History’ as we understand it, attempting to spot contradictions in sources, and suggesting directions for historical inquiry.

Clearly, these are very preliminary steps that leave much unaccounted. In part, this is because the effects of loss and turbulence are doubly compounded by what we could call the ‘pathos’ of objects, to stretch Simmel’s (1971) phrase, in that they embody not only the limits of social relations, but also the limits of their own ability fully to re-present what these relations entailed. Objects both delimit and work in fields of social relations, and when the latter are no longer present or have transformed into something else, objects only afford partial reconstruction of the broader sociology in which they were inscribed. Another archaeological difficulty is that we are often left to infer the processes of *production* (of things, values, peoples) and *exchange* through the recovery of artefacts in their contexts of *use* or *consumption*, which introduces shortcuts in our portrayals of material histories.

Within these constraints, little is said, for instance, about power, or gender, or the presence of the state, which were undoubtedly pivotal constituents of life (Richard, n.d.). Also, much of the interpretation stays within object classes, and fails to examine transactions *between* categories of goods and the regimes of value sustaining them (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Graeber 2001). For lack of historical and archaeological resolution, the analysis reads the process of value production and the kinds of people it created through a rather coarse sociology, separating elites from non-elites but struggling to refine, historicize or indeed problematize these categories. A more nuanced exploration of value must involve more systematic analysis of the *properties* of objects and their spatial expressions: qualities (colour, tactility, sensuousness, material, shape, size, interior–exterior, etc.) and quantities (numbers, ratios, densities, etc.), scales of expression and relationality (asymmetries, ranking, grading, equivalences, compositionality, etc.) (Guyer 2004). The relational element is particularly crucial considering the historical importance of compositional politics in Senegambia, which should encourage us to look at artefacts in the context of the broader *assemblages* of which they are a part.

At the same time, parts of the analysis show occasional flashes of what a ‘thicker’ cultural description might look like, and thus offer a few promising guidelines. For example, the different trajectories of objects brought together in the analysis inspire a move away from directional histories and towards a more complex understanding of historicity, glimpsed at the intersection of different material pathways. Relations of force are also immanent to the analysis, although they are treated mainly indirectly, through their effects (Foucault 1994). Rather than being sidelined, power is highlighted through its generative properties, which constituted African history in relation to a global architecture of inequalities. Instead of fitting into simple equations of imposition/coercion, political and economic forces defined more or less

expansive fields of action in historic Senegambia. While the fields of African actors may have grown narrower and increasingly uneven over time, which constrained their ability to effectively impose or alter the direction of exchanges, exchanges *were* constantly negotiated within a frame of available options. For example, the existence of different spheres of circulation between social classes, linked to each other and to Atlantic supply routes through different social calculi and conversion logics, speaks to the kinds of insight that the combination of history and archaeology can produce. In turn, this evidence hints at the potential of archaeological research in helping us to understand how objects create value and patterns of action in historical situations, how they define different kinds of people, subjects and persons, and how they enter the making of social power within a larger topography of exchange (Graeber 2001; also Piot 1991).

Remapping the problem-space of the Senegambian Atlantic to take greater stock of African historicity and subjectivity is not solely an exercise in fact checking and fact making. Beyond factuality perhaps, it also rearticulates our positionality vis-à-vis the past and, simultaneously, the relationship between our historical imaginations and the present and future with which they converse. The historical imaginary of Senegambia has been haunted by the spectres of the slave trade and colonialism, historical tragedies that are faulted for plunging Africa into an abyss of alienation – from itself, from its resources, from the world, from its historical path and its legitimate future. Part chronicle of loss and suffering, part moral commentary, Senegambian history has unfolded as a narrative of melancholia and betrayal, underwritten by a deep nostalgia for a once authentic Africa, whose descent into ‘nothingness’ under the blows of external intervention has been methodically chronicled, leaving its historical potential unrealized. In these narratives, moreover, the Atlantic era and colonialism also served as mobilizing tropes, around which Africans would rally in their quest for meaning, self-identity and sovereignty (Mbembe 2002, 242). If such a project failed to crystallize, as Mbembe (*ibid.*, 272) indicates, it is in part because it mobilizes history to construct political futures as the ‘recovery of an essential but lost nature – the liberation of an essence – or as a sacrificial process’. Absent from this discourse is a sense of identity as history. Likewise, in framing the African Atlantic as a space of loss swallowing the continent as a whole, or one polarized between dependence and autonomy, post-independence writers and their interlocutors distanced themselves from the very historicity of these global moments: the contingencies, hybrid engagements with the world and paradoxes that are part and parcel of Africa’s historical experience continue to animate the African present and to inform its future. In turn, it is perhaps the lack of openness of post-independence imaginaries to these dynamics that drove their political visions into an impasse, disjointed from the realities of African experiences (Scott 2004, 220).

Does that mean, as Sarkozy intoned, that African political futures lie in coming to terms with the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism ... by turning this page of history over and turning themselves over to global obsessions? If the outraged responses to the Dakar speech are any indication, substituting oblivion for morality plays will not do either. More pertinent, perhaps, as I

have suggested, is the recuperation of the Atlantic moment (and its colonial extensions) as a historical space – indeed a space of historicity – that was not simply a process of negation but was absolutely fundamental to the shaping of African memories and identities into the present (Austen 2001; Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). This past is there to linger, not necessarily as a burden, but as a reminder of the violence (symbolic and material) of any cultural encounter, and as a reminder that African experiences of the self and of the world are born out of their intersection with global historical flows (Mbembe 2001). In this light, in addition to providing historical depth on the politics of difference, geometries of power, and tensions arising from the creation of states and subjects in the postcolony, the Atlantic past also offers a historical key into the cultural aesthetics that have mediated and emerged in relation to Africa's engagement with the world at large (Mbembe 2002).

While it is necessarily partial, and suspended in webs of silences of its own creation (Trouillot 1995), this reformulation of the problem-space of the African Atlantic forces us to confront Africans as producers of history and culture. In this light, it may offer a historical inspiration for new cultural productions and imaginations. Because of their openness to the reality of contingency, and thus their outlook on the future, these alternative pasts can provide starting points for the production of new memories and subjectivities, both within African nations and also by linking the chronotope of the Atlantic to other historical imaginations of Africanity (Clarke 2004; Gilroy 1993; Hanchard 1999). What form will these links and imaginaries take, how can they can be forged, and how will they enhance and constraint African cultural and political expressions? Only time may tell.

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Notes

¹ The full speech (in French) can be read at the website of the Elysée: http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/2007/juillet/allocation_a_l_universite_de_dakar.79184.html and at <http://www.ldh-toulon.net/spip.php?article2173>. Elsewhere, Fassin (2007) has critiqued Nicolas Sarkozy for his 'rhetorics of confusion' – the art of arguing one thing and its obverse at the same time – a narrative mode which certainly transpires in the Dakar allocution. Diouf (in Ndoye 2007), Mbembe (2007), and Thioub (2007) have analysed some of the contradictions, empty generalizations, inaccuracies and historical shortcuts that litter the speech.

- ² David Scott (2004; also 1999) sees ‘problem-spaces’ as discursive configurations that envelop historical inquiry, and shape the mode and conduct of thinking, the kinds of questions and answers one pursues, and the imaginations and political projects enabled by these inquiries. Problem-spaces are themselves situated in particular political and historical fields, to whose conditions they respond.
- ³ Research to date suggests that Siin’s supposedly ‘strong’ monarchy may have been caught in a far more dynamic relationship with its subordinate provinces. From the 16th century onwards, the Siin kingdom appears to have oscillated between phases of greater centralization and political dispersion, in response to shifts in ambient economic and social forces. A more complete account of the history of political power and its cultural logics in Siin can be found in Richard (2007, chapter 10; n.d.).
- ⁴ For a more elaborate treatment of the research design and methodology, and description of the survey and excavation results, see Richard (2007, chapter 7, 580, 583, 727–46).
- ⁵ Note that the production and consumption of indigenous alcohol remains poorly documented even into recent periods, making it difficult to understand the history of entanglement between imported liquor and local beverages. We may also wonder whether local alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages remained valued over imported ones for certain activities, functions and contexts, and for how long. Until recently, *soum-soum*, a liquor made of the pulp of cashew apples, was still produced in Siin, but whether it is a long-standing distilling tradition or a response to Atlantic imports is difficult to ascertain clearly.
- ⁶ We should, however, note that a persistent problem in bottle analysis is the phenomenon of reuse, which applies to glass containers of all kinds. For instance, one cannot infer with absolute certainty that an imported gin bottle found archaeologically would have necessarily contained gin, and it is likely that empty bottles would have been put to other tasks. In the absence of residue analysis, archaeological contexts, associated artefacts and historical texts can help to strengthen our interpretations of bottle usage.
- ⁷ If *alcool de traite* was a consistent fixture of the 19th-century political economic landscape in Siin, glass assemblages are not reducible to hard liquor only. Peppermint alcohol, mineral water and cosmetic and pharmaceutical bottles offer additional clues to the circulation of glass objects within local practices of consumption (Richard 2007, 608–9).

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Small trenches. Archaeology and the postcolonial gaze

Audrey Horning*

The comments of Nicholas Sarkozy provide a powerful and forceful opening to Dr Richard’s article and remind us of the potential significance of academic considerations of colonial legacies in the contemporary world. Dr Richard argues strongly against static conceptualizations of pre-‘Atlantic-era’ Africa and seeks to recast Africans not as victims, but as active ‘producers of history and culture’ (p. 26). In so doing he aligns himself with current trends in critical scholarship on colonial encounters in the Atlantic worlds of the last four centuries, scholarship that overtly criticizes dichotomous understandings of such encounters in favour of approaches that emphasize ambiguity (e.g.

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Hall 2000; Silliman 2001; 2009; Stahl 2007). Dr Richard's introductory suggestion that we should formulate 'new questions instead of supplying different answers to the quandaries of an earlier generation of historians' (p. 3) is clearly applicable to studies of colonial arenas beyond West Africa. In all parts of the world touched by European colonialism (including, of course, Europe itself) the ways in which scholars approach their subjects are very much conditioned by more widely held cultural memories, whatever the relationship of those memories may be to whatever may have occurred in the past.

I am sympathetic to the author's desire to explore how 'object circulation and appropriation can complicate conventional readings of Atlantic dynamics' (p. 4) and found the suggestion that 'we must document the cultural translation of economic encounters before and during the Atlantic era, and the different forms of experience forged in these interactions' (p. 7) to be entirely sensible as a means to evaluate and interpret object trajectories and systems of value. However, I must admit that I came away from several readings of the article wishing that Dr Richard had spent more time fleshing out the actual object trajectories and rather less time arguing for the need to examine such trajectories. I want very much to believe that archaeology has an integral role to play in re-envisioning African pasts and presents, but I was left uncertain as to whether or not the author personally finds much value in archaeological evidence. Discussions of liquor bottles, beads and cloth were intended to illustrate complexity and agency on the part of the inhabitants of Siin during the 'Atlantic era', yet the complete lack of specificity in the discussions robbed the evidence of much of its expostulatory and explanatory power. We are told that a 'small trench' was 'littered with late 19th-century artefacts', including a 'dense bottle inventory consisting almost exclusively of wine and demijohn bottle fragments' (p. 15), but this is a meaningless description. How small is small? What is a dense inventory?

We are then informed that Venetian and Czech beads are an 'omnipresence' (p. 17) and a 'ubiquitous presence' (p. 13) on historic settlements, while an assemblage of only a 'small nature' (p. 18) of locally made beads is known. In discussing cloth production, we are expected to accept the author's judgement that its 'cultural significance unfortunately lies beyond archaeological interpretation' (p. 19) as there exists only 'a very small collection of highly variable spindle whorls scattered across the region' (p. 19). Such vague descriptions hinder substantive considerations of meaning and materiality. While I found the argument about the presence of differential social practices linked to the choice of alcohol products a compelling proposition that intersects well with understandings of the role of alcohol in other colonial spaces (eg. Dietler 2006; Smith 2006; 2008), it was difficult to evaluate the interpretation without a clearer sense of the evidence.

More serious than any latent data fascism on my part is a concern that in downplaying the specificity and therefore the significance of material evidence, the author inadvertently risks supporting, rather than refuting, Sarkozy's version of a static, oppressed Africa with no history of its own. Statements such as the following could be read as implying that the people of Siin were in fact passive victims of global forces beyond their control: Dutch 'products

inundated African overseas markets' (p. 13), alcohol abuse was a 'social pathology that intensified to the beat of global flows' (p. 14), and 'the liquor trade indubitably eroded the local social fabric' (p. 15). This is unfortunate, as I am certain that the author did not intend or anticipate such a reading. The discussion of drinking practices and the multivalent uses of alcohol provides a critical and more 'nuanced' perspective on social hierarchies and the ways in which non-local products intersect with local realities. But despite emphasizing the need to understand 'economic encounters before and during the Atlantic era' (p. 7) the author provides very little information about earlier practices. I would suggest that shipping records prior to the mass circulation of glass vessels in the 18th and 19th centuries would be a useful place to start to quantify alcohol imports, given that wine as well as spirits was typically shipped in casks and barrels.

The need to tease out the meaning of alcohol and associated social practice prior to the introduction of new products and practices speaks directly to me in terms of my own work in trying to understand the intersection of Gaelic and English drinking customs in late 16th- and early 17th-century Ireland (Horning 2009). In that colonial setting, the cultural contexts of alcohol consumption were outwardly similar, yet the high percentage of instances of violence occurring in spaces of cross-cultural consumption suggests that, following Bhabha (1994), meanings were routinely misunderstood and signs misappropriated. The archaeological signature of such encounters rests not so much in primary evidence for shipping containers or production sites, although such evidence does exist, but in the physical and recorded evidence of related activities, including assemblages related to hospitality and feasting. While the intangibles of social practices are inherently difficult to read archaeologically, I remain convinced that it is possible to extract meaning from even the smallest of assemblages. I empathize with the author's apparent frustration at the dearth of available evidence from the Siin region, but I would urge him to take what does exist more seriously. There should still be a place for the quantification of bottle glass fragments and charcoal spreads in the kind of thoughtful and theoretically sophisticated studies of colonial entanglements otherwise exemplified by Dr Richard's research. I accept that such data may well exist in the author's Ph.D. thesis (Richard 2007) but its invisibility in this article is troubling.

Moving away from contemplating the contributions (or lack thereof?) of field archaeology to understanding the ways in which the people of Siin engaged with European goods, I would like to return to the broader issue of the impact of the present on formulations of the past. As previously stated, I wholeheartedly agree with the desire to step outside remembered colonial histories and remembered colonial dichotomies in favour of an approach that, in the author's words, 'rearticulates ... the relationship between our historical imaginations and the present and future with which they converse' (p. 25). Despite this statement, I was left wondering exactly how the author sees this new approach to African histories, one which challenges a 'narrative of melancholia and betrayal, underwritten by a deep nostalgia for a once authentic Africa' (p. 25), playing out beyond academia. Or, put differently, who is the audience for this critique? For all the emphasis upon acknowledging

African histories and agencies, I struggled to hear many African voices in the telling.

Perhaps Mark Pluciennik (2009, 153) was correct when he recently wrote in this journal that archaeology 'is neither particularly useful nor necessary, but it is intellectual fun', yet for archaeologists dealing with the still suppurating wounds of colonial pasts there would seem to be other imperatives than just having a good time. Dr Richard assigns a seriousness of purpose to his recasting (reclamation?) of Siin history when he references the present and the future, yet leaves out the detail. I cannot help but be curious about how a de-emphasis on the slave trade in recognition of Senegal's rather more complicated Atlantic-era experience might interface with the economic realities of 'roots' tourism (Bruner 1996; Handley 2006; Osei-Tutu 2007). I do not expect a simple answer, but when we begin to cage our discussions of the past with explicit references to the present, as exemplified by the use of the Sarkozy quotation as a framing device, then it would seem to me that we have to be explicit about our own positionality and the potential consequences of our statements. Perhaps a return to those ambiguous 'small trenches' of Siin, accompanied by the contemporary inhabitants, would create a space for recognizing the multiple perspectives of the present while unearthing the physical traces of similarly multivalent perspectives from the past.

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Disentangling histories *Timothy Insoll**

I like this paper firstly for it attempts to redress, forcefully, the biased perceptions of Africa often still held by usually external observers, and secondly for it engages directly with materiality through an object-based perspective in indicating the complexities that existed in the Siin (Senegal), primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries. Richard is to be congratulated on providing us with a thoughtful and thought-provoking paper indicating that, like other recent research on African and external entanglements and connections (e.g. Croucher 2006), research framed broadly under the remit of 'historical archaeology' is some of the most stimulating currently being undertaken in the continent (e.g. Gavua 2008; Schmidt 2006).

Richard places emphasis upon the concept of history, historical silences, and the 'production of alternative historical imaginations and subjectivities' (p. 1). The ridiculous remarks of Nicolas Sarkozy in his speech in Dakar are rightly criticized, but perhaps it should be remembered that Sarkozy (and his speechwriters) would make such remarks for political capital, in an attempt to make an impact for the then new French president, and to obtain the requisite column inches. Richard reminds us, in relation to Sarkozy's

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un-erudite points, that such a perspective often entails a shifting of the supposed historical vacuum in which African ‘man’ (*sic*) is trapped, following such thinking, onto the ‘Africans’ themselves. Richard notes (and with which I wholly agree), that this is something to which he takes a ‘severe exception’ (p. 2). Richard indicates that in relation to the Atlantic world this is, of course, untrue – Africans, as represented by the people of the Siin settlements, steered history in alternative and indigenous directions through utilizing the objects such as liquor bottles in new ways and contexts, and in so doing imbuing them with new meanings.

None the less, perhaps more of a break from the concept of history as, albeit inadvertently, defined here through the contextualization of the paper within the framework of ‘Atlantic encounters’ (i.e. an onus being placed upon Euro-American history) could be made. This is not a major criticism and perhaps Richard already does this elsewhere (e.g. Richard 2007), but to provide these trajectories of cultural and historical subjectivity this also needs to be undertaken looking east to the broad sweep of savanna and semi-desert running ultimately to the Red Sea, as well as north to the Arab and Arabized polities of North Africa. This would allow the examination of the construction of history in Islamized and semi-Islamized contexts as well – Islamic history – in which one assumes Siin was also entangled. This is alluded to, again in the discussion of alcohol usage, but the other categories of objects recovered might allow greater engagement with the interplay of different historical narratives and traditions that existed, and in so doing give greater weight to the historical complexity Richard is so effectively beginning to tease out.

Beyond the objects, the glass bottles, spindle whorls and beads, the potency of ‘fields’ of ritual and magical power (of protection, subversion, syncretism and fusion, of different efficacious agents) might also be evident if these different histories are woven together. Belief can obviously be a powerful agent in how people relate to materials, and to other people, and of significance where the construction of difference in, for instance, creating the concept of ‘other’ in the process of enslavement, and the interaction with ‘others’ in the context of Atlantic encounters, might be key. This might be derived from looking out to the ocean, as well as within the immediate local environment, but might also have been constructed through interaction beyond into the African interior. Hence, certainly by the 18th and 19th centuries, the influence of Islamic beliefs, practices, ‘powers’ and material culture, often reworked to suit different world views and requirements, was substantial, stretching from coast to rainforest, from mosque to power-drenched amulet. This was not a simple rendering of an all-powerful faceless ‘Islam’ supplanting all that went before, but rather a variable syncretic and multiply reworked phenomenon (Insoll 2003) that by its nature would engage within the entangled historicities and materialities Richard explores. In Senegal, for instance, Cantone (2006) has in part indicated how mosques are utilized in the negotiation of power and in the construction of gender, kin, ethnic and religious identities.

Richard also draws attention to the role of oral traditions in, for example, illuminating narratives as to what was a secondary royal residence near the

village of Ndongolor, and its sometime assumption of the role of ‘primary capital in times of political instability or succession crisis’ (p. 15). Again, the inclusion of oral history, tradition, myth – sometimes blurred in form, sometimes more clearly separated – speaks to the complexity of the African historical subject, collectively, or where perhaps a biographical prominence survives, as an individual agent. Vansina (1985) problematized this over two decades ago, whilst the empirical database and the practical application of ‘oral tradition as history’ (ibid.) has been subsequently enriched by the UNESCO General History of Africa project (e.g. Ki-Zerbo 1990).

To this can also be added the recent historical archaeological scholarship emanating from Africa itself. For example, the Department of Archaeology at the University of Ghana, Legon, has deliberately repositioned itself so that its disciplinary identity encompasses also the concept of cultural heritage. Not, however, cultural heritage as might be defined from a Euro-American perspective that revolves around gift ‘shoppes’, historical re-enactments and neatly mown lawns, but rather one that seeks to embed the archaeological and architectural legacy, as with the forts and castles linked with the slave trade on Ghana’s Atlantic coast, within the requirements of the local communities and ultimately the nation itself (Insoll 2008). To help achieve this, archaeology theses, especially at the research master’s (M.Phil.) level, now incorporate exactly the types of approach Richard demands in their fusion of archaeology, material-culture studies, what might be termed ethnohistory drawing upon oral narratives and written history where available, and ethnography (e.g. Eyifa 2007). This example is provided to indicate that positive historicity is occurring inside Africa – not the continent without history at all.

On the contrary, in my experience the perception of history, not only what is sometimes vaguely referred to as ‘tradition’, is frequently vivid and embedded in the present, be it in Ghana, Mali or Burkina Faso, admittedly countries only in West Africa rather than representative of the whole continent but which I know best. This history – within linear frameworks of people and events – often serves to run coterminous with ancestral narratives that are perhaps cyclical. Two mechanisms for appropriating the past within the present that are sometimes materialized – the extant mosque of Askia Muhammad in Gao or the subsurface remains of the mosque and town associated with Kankan Musa in Gao, Mali, for instance – constitute ‘concrete’ architecture and archaeology locked into indigenous Songhay historical narratives.

Similarly, outside the domain of indigenous historical chronicles with which the Songhay past is associated and within which it is recorded (e.g. es-Sa’di 1898–1900; Kati 1913), history can be even more fully materialized and objectified, perhaps through being linked to place and object as in northern Ghana. And Richard is right: the disruptions, abrupt junctures, and impact of the outward ripples of the Atlantic slave trade were felt here, so that some areas became wholly depopulated, stripped of people, history and tradition, whilst others were historically restructured whereby the slave shackle, or slave camp, might become the prominent focal point of new or altered narratives encompassing and reconciling this with existing histories. The dialogue that Richard initiates would be made even more fruitful and relevant to the African

context through reconciling these different histories and materialities so as to attempt to piece together the ‘rich text’ of the past that we should all ultimately seek.

A further strength of Richard’s argument, and one that can be given supplementary evidential support, is with regard to his indicating ‘how Atlantic objects and forces unevenly rippled across the area’ (p. 4). This links back again to the earlier point made with regard to the variable impact of Islam in the West African context, but is equally applicable to more specific historical circumstances as, for example, with the Fulani *jihads* or holy wars of the 19th century. Outside the literate or semiliterate context of the historicity of world religions, similar evidence for differential impact can be found – Richard’s ‘ripple’ effect. Hence, for instance, the franchised Talensi shrine forms of the *boarbii*, ‘shrine’s child’, and *boarchii*, ‘shrine gourd’, vary in how embedded they are in consciousness and history dependent upon their perceived power. In one area, a shrine hotspot might occur, drawing in clients and generating traffic back to the ‘mother’ shrine of Tongnaab Yaane, whilst close by the shrine might have no impact at all – its place supplanted perhaps by another form of shrine, or one linked into other webs of belief and other historicities (Insoll 2006; in preparation). The dismantling by Richard of ‘historical tableaux’ (p. 5) and his stressing their replacement by more dynamic and variable historical reconstructions provides a useful addition and impetus to further research on these processes.

In summary, this paper is to be welcomed as a nuanced reading of complexity, materiality and historicity in the African continent. I hope that Richard publishes his thesis as it will be interesting to see at greater length how these entanglements and material histories are disentangled.

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Developing an archaeology of African consumers

Sarah K. Croucher*

I applaud Richard’s article for continuing to move forwards the study of historical archaeology in African contexts. This article seems to fit within an ever-growing dynamic field of historical archaeologists who move easily between the realms of archaeological data, documentary and oral histories (e.g. Dawdy 2008; Voss 2008). As highlighted by Reid and Lane (2004a; see also contributions to Reid and Lane 2004b) it is perhaps better to conceptualize the study of historical archaeology on the African continent as a field of historical *archaeologies*, where pluralistic theoretical and methodological directions can be attended to, driven by a diversity of locally contextualized research agendas.

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Reading through Richard's study of Senegalese Atlantic-era archaeology, one does not get the sense that the archaeology is in any major way driven by research questions that are drawn from the wider discussions of African diaspora archaeology (Fennell 2007; Ogundiran and Falola 2007; Singleton 1995), as has been the case with much work examining West African historical archaeology (e.g. DeCorse 2001a; *pace* Stahl 2002). No picture emerges from this work of research that has been concerned with fleshing out analogies and starting points for those interested in interpreting African diasporic contexts in the Americas. The questions upon which Richard focuses his work, particularly the idea of the particularities of the specific trajectories and realms through which the Siin was drawn into wider Atlantic economies and commodity exchanges, are focused upon themes of history within this regional context and the African continent as a whole.

The manner in which this discussion draws out of wider debates in African anthropology and history is one of its strengths. Yet there are some wider issues upon which African historical archaeologists, historians and anthropologists have focused which I think Richard could address with some further discussion. One of the stated aims of this article is 'making alternative histories'. Interestingly, this same phrase has been used as the title for a volume (Schmidt and Patterson 1995) which takes a similar stance, but attempts to foreground the voices of communities at and around the sites of archaeological research, a theme echoed in the work of many scholars working in this field in Africa interested in issues of praxis (Schmidt 2006; Schmidt and Walz 2007; Shepherd 2002). At times, Richard mentions the use of oral histories in his work. Yet the voices of any residents of the Siin region seem absent from Richard's writing, which instead seems directed by larger themes of economy, issues of social hierarchies, and questions of colonial histories. Since it seems that Richard has engaged with local communities in the course of his research, it would be interesting to see if it would be possible to intertwine some of the perspectives of contemporary residents of the Siin region into the archaeological interpretations. I should also note that I make this comment having been pushed in this direction myself by a similar critique (Shepard, personal communication).

As the Siin residents of the Atlantic era are discussed in Richard's work, I wanted to hear a little more in relation to finer-grained social distinctions in operation within the Siin region. The interpretations made by Richard clearly showed that there were obvious disparities between Siin residents in terms of social status and wealth, with these two positions of power generally subsumed together. The Siin, from the 15th century through to the 19th, was obviously occupied by a stratified society, in which access to imported goods may have, in many ways, been surprisingly egalitarian – certainly from the point of view of those used to an easy equation between wealth, access to commodities and status. The almost democratic ability of many Africans to obtain imported trade goods, with a desire by elites to attempt to control only very specific material goods, seems to potentially echo the situation found in other regions of Africa as more and more Africans participated in Atlantic and other international trade (Kelly 2001; Burke 1996). This generalized picture of large numbers of Africans potentially becoming consumers in a specifically

modern sense of the word is of import to the global study of consumption in general. It is an area in which historical archaeologists may be at the forefront of contributing new data outside traditional historical sources, thus extending and adding nuance to current debates on this topic.

Concomitant with a general study of the uneven and sometimes unexpected trajectories of consumerism within the continent of Africa, many authors have paid careful attention to the way in which a diversity of subject positions played into access to and symbolic uses of imported goods. On Zanzibar, for instance, enslaved and formerly enslaved residents of the islands specifically utilized imported clothing and accessories to enact their desired position as fully recognized members of Zanzibari society (Fair 1998; Prestholdt 2008). Many of these patterns of consumption were also intimately intertwined with gendered identities, and those which might sometimes be relationally constructed through sexual relations (Fair 2004; Hansen 2003; McCurdy 2006; Stahl and Cruz 1998).

The specifics of consumer goods have also been recognized as important for their potential symbolic meanings and for the manner in which they can be utilized in practices of consumption. Clothing (Fair 2004; Hansen 2000) may have had very different symbolic meanings and practical uses than did beads (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006), pipes (Stahl 2002) or alcohol (Akyeampong 1996; Willis 2002). Richard wants us to consider the goods found at sites in the Siin region as 'compositions' of artefacts, an approach which he argues can better enable us to understand specifically African regimes of value. Such attempted holism seems to offer great potential for doing precisely as Richard suggests. But I feel it is undermined by the scant attention paid to the locally produced ceramics, which we are told amount to over 90 per cent of the total excavated material. This pattern matches many other African period sites (Croucher 2007; Croucher and Wynne-Jones 2006; Stahl 2007), although it contrasts with many other contexts of historical archaeology. Even at sites in America where locally produced ceramics are present on colonial sites, by the later 18th century these seldom come close to matching the proportions of material we face within African contexts. A specifically African historical archaeological approach, then, needs to address this massive category of material culture which was surely a central part of African regimes of value. Richard mentions local bead and fabric production, but local ceramics also provide potential routes to understand local tastes at a variety of levels, along with strength in local craft production in relation to increased international imports (e.g. Gosselain 1999; 2000; Lyons 2007; Stahl and Cruz 1998). An interpretation which stresses the importance of taking goods together as elements of compositional trading practices must also recognize the compositional nature of daily material lives. It is easy to fall back on the manifests of trade goods that were bought and sold in West Africa, but these manifests were likely not the same compositions of goods that were meaningful to the majority of Siin residents away from trading stations. A strength of historical archaeology is that we have the ability to draw together materials that do and do not make it into documentary sources, yet Richard seems to let local foodways-related material culture drop from his frame of analysis with no satisfactory explanation as to why this is the case.

In contrast to this critique levelled at the selective nature of Richard's composition of artefactual analysis, I also think that some problems exist in the lack of engagement with studies that have foregrounded particular commodities in order to understand their specific histories for African consumers, along with these same consumers' impacts within transnational networks of commodity flows. Attending to the particular meanings of singular commodities or goods opens up potentials for engaging with the material qualities of artefacts outside their place in compositional schemes. An important strand in the study of commodities in the contemporary world is increasingly attuned to their materiality (Jackson 2004, 172). Even as trade goods had to be put together in particular compositions for successful trading, the specific material qualities of goods were also vital to their inclusion within new material regimes of trade and modernity (Burke 1996; Prestholdt 2008; Taussig 2009). Richard brings up the potential importance of the materiality of some of the trade goods he interprets, particularly the relation of the qualities of imported beads in comparison with locally produced beads. Such important discussions must also be predicated on the fact that commodities were not only meaningful in compositional groupings. Instead, particular qualities of goods often laid down genealogies that made for specific paths through local regimes of value, use, exchange and meaning within colonial transactions (Thomas 1991).

Alcohol, particularly as imported spirits, has been a singular category of analysis for some West African historians (Akyeampong 1996; Van den Bersselaar 2007; see also Willis 2002 for East Africa). These histories have shown that alcohol was often 'domesticated' within West African contexts, coming to take on specific local meanings, and that in some cases alcohol was even decommodified by chiefs as it moved from international networks of commodity trade to local contexts of practice (Akyeampong 1996, 15). Richard reads European commentary on alcohol use in the Siin region combined with high incidences of alcohol bottles across wealth divides to argue that alcoholism was 'a social pathology that intensified to the beat of global flows' (p. 14). I do not wish to sidestep the realities of alcohol abuse, which have continued in West Africa to the present day, particularly for urban migrants (Akyeampong 1996, 71). However, seemingly excessive alcohol consumption elsewhere in colonial West Africa had complex social meanings. It was often an area for the specific contestation of power relations between groups of men, with women excluded from alcohol consumption. It could be the expression of royal largesse through the distribution of alcohol in a generous manner, as well as a central part of public rituals that could 'service' local inequalities, set against potential instability bought about by increasing participation in modern Atlantic worlds (Akyeampong 1996). This type of historical account stresses the *local* emic meaning of a commodity, which may have often been markedly different from the perceived meanings of European commentators. In thinking of local regimes of value it is vital to probe as deeply as possible into potential historical discussions that relate to local practices within various regions of Africa. If alcohol may have been decommodified within many of its contexts of use, what does this mean for its relation to other goods bought by Siin residents through commodity markets?

We might also question how women's positions may have changed if alcohol, specifically tied to men (and I make this comment on a purely speculative basis in relation to Akyeamong's study in a different region), became central to feasting rituals in the Siin that were used to reinforce power – did this act to close women out of structures of power? I find it notable that Sarkozy's speech refers specifically to the universal masculine African subject. Rather than only writing 'the African man' into nuanced historical archaeologies of Africa, we can attempt to explore a range of Africans, who were positioned in diverse gender, status, ethnic and other subject positions – the recognition of which may also aid in moving us away from the type of homogeneous history of the continent imagined by Sarkozy and many others like him.

In line with many other regions studied by historians and anthropologists, scholarship on the African continent has recently begun to take something of a 'consumerist' turn (Burke 1996; Hansen 2000; Prestholdt 2008; Van den Bersselaar 2007). These types of history seem also to offer the potential to reconfigure the historical space, as Richard is interested in doing. My final comment on this article would be to question whether this seems to be a useful perspective to apply in any way to the Siin region. The ambiguous terrain of Senegambian history which Richard's research helps to illuminate seems partially to be one in which Africans increasingly began to define their lives through the acquisition and use of commoditized goods. Such a step seems an important one in understanding the trajectories of modernity within this particular region.

Overall, Richard's article provides rich territory on which to begin to debate and explore the widening field of African historical archaeology. His work demonstrates the potential that archaeologists have to be at the forefront of some historical study on the continent. This work should be congratulated for its thought-provoking depth in making us reconsider the place of the Siin within the Atlantic world through specifically archaeological perspectives.

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Complex histories *Peter van Dommelen**

Asking different questions about and adopting an alternative perspective for understanding what happened in the past are rightly highlighted by François Richard as crucial to our understanding of colonial situations like that in 16th- to 18th-century West Africa. He frames his discussion with a speech given in Dakar by Nicolas Sarkozy, who in mid-2007 had just assumed the office of French president, and uses the strong reactions to those words very effectively to make it clear why thinking about the colonial past continues to matter, both in Africa and elsewhere.

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Richard's article is nevertheless not primarily about how France or other former colonial powers continue to wield influence in their ex-colonies or why the colonial past remains a key feature of modern-day relationships between those regions and Europe. His aim is to look beyond Sarkozy's words and, more pertinently, to deconstruct conventional historical accounts of West Africa in general and of Senegal in particular in the context of European colonization. Because the European presence and European activities in West Africa between the 16th century and the 20th A.D. are habitually equated with the Atlantic slave trade, he argues that the conventional historical representation of the region is one-dimensional and too narrowly focused on the slave trade. As a consequence, he argues, most research continues to foreground the colonialist dimensions of the colonial situations in West Africa and, by implication, to obscure indigenous African perspectives and experiences.

Other histories

Richard places his paper squarely in the anthropological tradition that explores and deconstructs European representations of other cultures, even if he limits his references to scholars like Bayart, the Comaroffs, Cooper and Mbembe, who actively work on African materials. In intellectual terms, his approach owes much to influential studies with a wider scope like *Time and the other*, *Anthropology as cultural critique* and *Anthropology through the looking-glass* (Fabian 1983; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Herzfeld 1987) that not only showed how Western scholars constructed their objects of study but also explored how the notion of the cultural Other served to construct Western self-identity (Schmidt and Patterson 1995). With regard to colonial situations in particular, Stocking's work (1991) on the colonialist roots of anthropology itself has been no less significant for exposing the role of colonialist representations in anthropology.

No doubt because of the colonial focus of Richard's paper, postcolonial studies are a notable second source of inspiration for exploring how (colonial) history has been written by colonial powers to the detriment of the colonized and their experiences of and views on colonial situations. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and the so-called Subaltern Studies group lie at the root of this particular strand of postcolonial theories that critically explore colonial discourse and actively attempt to give a voice to the 'subaltern' and other groups and communities who had been airbrushed out of history by colonialist representations (Pels 1997; Van Dommelen 2006).

Eric Wolf's *Europe and the people without history* (1982), finally, defies easy categorization but should nonetheless be mentioned here, because it represents an early attempt to write an alternative history of European colonialism. Richard's paper can in many ways be seen as situated in this by now well-established field between history and anthropology. But rather than offering yet another postcolonial attempt to write an alternative history of colonial West Africa, Richard's paper stands out from the crowd, it seems to me, because of the breadth and depth of the material he draws on in this endeavour: while postcolonial studies have long been criticized for their narrow focus on literary accounts and concomitant 'weakly contextualized analyses' (Thomas 1994, 6; Turner 1995, 204), Richard draws on a wide and indeed interdisciplinary range of historical, ethnographic and archaeological

evidence and, in a postcolonial spirit he undertakes to read ‘against the grain’ this often disparate mass of material.

He is mostly successful in doing so, as the archaeological material he has collected allows him to see the historical evidence in another light: the distinction between wine and gin bottles on 18th- and 19th-century sites nicely shows how these material remains do not just confirm what the company archives and travellers’ accounts tell us about the levels of alcohol consumption in colonial Senegal but also enable him to propose a meaningful interpretation of local cultural tradition and, crucially, the role of drinking in this context. This brings out the complexity of the colonial situation and begins to contextualize alcohol consumption.

Although Richard thus manages to sketch an ‘other history’ of colonial Senegal, his study overcomes the colonialist bias of conventional historical accounts only to some extent: because his focus is largely on Siin society and southern Senegal as a whole and because their experiences are contrasted with those of European colonizers and slave traders, he largely leaves intact the colonial divide between colonizers and colonized in West Africa. In this respect, therefore, this paper has only just begun to explore the complexities of the colonial situations in West Africa and Senegal – as Richard indeed recognizes when referring to the ‘diverse levels of social response’ (p. 71). The crucial point is that colonial situations were far more complex than the focus on interaction between just colonizers and colonized would suggest or allow. Neither group was culturally or socially homogeneous and just as the indigenous inhabitants of West Africa were divided into numerous ethnic communities that in turn were articulated by social standing, gender and age, colonizers themselves were also made up of distinct groups with their own ambitions and histories. The colonial settlements on the West African coast offer a fine example, as they were first founded in the 15th and 16th centuries A.D. by Portuguese and Dutch trading companies who were primarily interested in obtaining fresh supplies for their sailors, while under later British and French colonial rule these settlements became actively involved in the slave trade to the point that it became their primary function.

The implication is not only that colonial situations cannot be reduced to a contrast between colonizers and colonized, but also that local differences, specific backgrounds and, most of all, local developments over time are to be taken into account. A good example is the French colonial presence in North Africa, beginning in 1831 with the occupation of Algeria, which became a classic settler colony that drew large numbers of settlers from France and other Mediterranean regions. French Algeria developed along notably different lines than Morocco, however, which only became a French protectorate in 1912 and never saw the arrival of significant numbers of civilian settlers. The different historical trajectories and changing colonial ambitions are thus just one, albeit significant, variable in the complexity and variability of colonial situations (Stoler 1989; Thomas 1994; Van Dommelen 2002, 124–26; 2006, 108).

Local materialities

Notwithstanding the strong interdisciplinary character of Richard’s arguments – or perhaps precisely because of it, as some would insist (Tilley

2006, 1–2; Miller 2010, 1–11) – material culture plays a pivotal role in the interpretations he proposes. In doing so, his approach to material culture is basically twofold. In the first place, he uses the material evidence in a straightforward way as an alternative source of historical information. This may be seen as a primarily archaeological approach, albeit in the strictest sense of the term. As best exemplified in the introductory discussion of the historical and archaeological contexts (pp. 8–12), this means that past material remains are simply used as markers of certain presences or absences. Imported items in particular are classified as colonial and taken to denote ‘colonial contact’ in a direct, but otherwise unspecified, sense. As Richard notes (p. 11), however, such observations concern archaeological distribution patterns and do not explain anything in themselves, even if they may usefully complement or indeed contradict documentary evidence. The presence and absence of imported beads in indigenous Siin contexts is a good case in point (p. 17), as the lack of archaeological finds would seem to contradict 16th- and 17th-century European sources.

While this is surely a common way of using (past) material remains that may often even be quite effective, it represents at the same time also a rather elementary approach to material culture, because it ignores how objects were perceived and used in the contexts concerned. It is probably no coincidence that the discussion of the archaeological evidence for indigenous Siin settlement sites (p. 11) remains for instance somewhat superficial. There is, after all, no need for a more detailed consideration of specific sites, as the purpose of noting absences and presences is sufficiently served by classifying sites as indigenous or colonial – a practice that incidentally reinforces the dualist tendency observed above.

Richard’s study rises well above this basic level to adopt a more sophisticated approach to material culture. In the above-mentioned case study of alcohol consumption, which is the most substantial one developed in this paper, he is not content merely to note the presence of European glass bottles but explores how they may be understood in the 18th- and 19th-century colonial contexts. He does so through the notion of consumption and rightly discusses the imported gin and wine bottles in terms of the ‘appropriation and recontextualization of foreign objects’ (p. 16).

While this discussion goes some way towards taking into account the diverse communities and social groups involved in the colonial situation and their different attitudes towards these objects, Richard pays relatively little attention to the items themselves and to the practices they were used for. He generically refers to the occasions on which alcohol was consumed at ‘feasts’ but does not consider to what extent the elite events were comparable to those hosted by other social groups. Because of his focus on the content of the bottles (alcohol), it is not just the imported bottles that are overlooked (did the shape or colour of the bottles play any part?) but also, and more importantly, whether their adoption was accompanied by other changes in practice and material culture: were new drinking or pouring vessels introduced and, if so, were these also imported or locally made? In the ancient western Mediterranean (8th to 4th centuries B.C.), Greek and Phoenician amphorae mark an extensive trading network of wine but different local traditions of

consuming the wine are signalled by the differential adoption of pouring and drinking vessels of both colonial and indigenous types (e.g. Dieler 2005; Hodos 2000; Sardà Seuma 2008; Vives-Ferrándiz Sánchez 2008). The question is therefore whether Siin (ritual) practices remained unchanged in the 18th century. In other words, while it is surely significant that imported alcoholic beverages were incorporated into local practices, it does not follow automatically that these practices remained unchanged. Equally interesting is the question how this appropriation process developed and whether it entailed further (unintended) consequences for indigenous traditions and practices.

A final point concerns the emphasis on imported objects and substances and the concomitant lack of attention to the variability and transformations of indigenous material culture as noted. While this is not uncommon in the archaeology of colonial situations in general, because imported colonial goods such as glass bottles and ceramic fine wares like ‘cream wares’ and ‘black gloss’ tend to be more readily identifiable and datable (‘diagnostic’), it only adds to the dualist tendency previously noted. The consequences of this emphasis become apparent in Richard’s discussion of beads that have been found in far smaller numbers than documentary sources would suggest. Richard is able to break free from this dualist presentation by pointing to the local production of clay beads without which it is surely not possible to understand how imported beads were perceived and used (pp. 17–18). Locally produced storage, transport, pouring and drinking vessels that imitate imported bottles and colonial ceramics or adapt them more freely may likewise be expected to have played a significant role in the appropriation process of gin and wine as discussed above.

Overall, it is a measure of the richness and nuances of the evidence and arguments put forward by François Richard in this paper that he is able not just to rechart the ‘Atlantic encounters’ of colonial West Africa but rather to propose alternative histories of Senegal in the context of the Atlantic trade that bring out both the richness and the complexities of local and regional cultural traditions.

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Response and responsibility (before and after the ‘facts’).
Postcolonial thoughts on ethical writing *François G. Richard**

Let me begin by expressing my heartfelt thanks to Sarah Croucher, Audrey Horning, Tim Insoll and Peter van Dommelen for their thoughtful comments. It is not uncommon for academic critique to be seduced by the facility of *criticism*, to draw its impulse from what, with Freud, we might call the ‘narcissism of small differences’, and proceed with the obstinacy of the hatchet

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headed for the jugular... More artful, and far more difficult, is a form of engagement that gives more than it takes, that disputes but in the spirit of generous exchange. I feel that the respondents have accomplished precisely that. They have crafted a space of 'hospitable' discussion (cf. Derrida 2000), which rests on a double movement of 'interruption' (Westmoreland 2008): of their plane of thoughts, by bringing my article within the ambit of their conversations; and of my ideas, by making them a little less self-evident, a little less 'at home'. This act of 'making strange' – when one's viewpoints acquire a different face as they are presented anew through the minds of others – is the cloth of which constructive dialogue is made.

As I read them, the responses also drive home a more general point about the hybrid constitution of academic writing, knowledge and authorship in a postcolonial world: that our arguments take shape and acquire significance in the act of addressing one or several audiences, that self-clarification is only achieved by exposure to others and their opinions (Butler 2005), and that our ideas are constantly shot through with the outside world, and may follow unsuspected trajectories as they travel across different political fields and spheres of consumption (di Leonardo 1998). Far from a liability, this relinquishing of control – accepting the overdetermined nature and openness of our narratives – also poses exacting terms for academic responsibility and integrity. Our indebtedness to different publics and interlocutors obligates us to our addressees. Our accountability to the past, archaeological evidence, and the stories we write is inseparable from our accountability towards the publics we write *for* and the descent communities whose pasts we write *about*.

These important questions of ethical responsibility have rightfully moved to the centre of archaeological inquiry in the past two decades, in Africa and beyond, and very much inform this reply – or indeed the obligation of replying (Bakhtin 1993), in a way that reciprocates the respondents' generosity and does justice to their comments. While the commentators have raised more questions than space will allow me to examine here, one notes interesting convergences between them. And so, rather than a point-counterpoint progression, which would ultimately not be very useful (at least not in this context), I would like instead to use the responses as points of departure for broader reflections about postcolonial perspectives, colonial encounters and the making of Atlantic histories. I will do this addressing five clusters of themes: (1) epistemologies, (2) narratives and publics, (3) voicing and authorship, (4) materialities and (5) ethics and politics.

Postcolonial epistemologies, through thick and thin

In her response to the 'Recharting' piece, Audrey Horning expresses disquiet towards what she sees as a certain 'thinness' in the presentation of archaeological data, which makes her wonder whether I find much value in material evidence. These comments are entirely consistent with her important contributions to global historical archaeology. In effect, as Martin Hall (2010, 4) has recently noted, Horning (2007a; 2007b) has emerged as one of historical archaeology's consciences, working tirelessly to keep its practitioners honest, and to hold them accountable to the promises/pitfalls of the craft. Particularly forceful has been her concern with the potential

insufficiencies of postcolonial thinking in archaeology, and whether the field is truly relevant to our understanding of the past – whether it might not be an expensive (but fun) way of telling us what we already know. These points are well taken and command attention.

As I began to think of a way of engaging these comments, my mind somehow wandered to George Marcus's *Ethnography through thick and thin* (1998). A play on words on Clifford Geertz's famous phrase, Marcus meditates on the analytical appropriateness of 'thick description' in a world no longer solely bound by the densities of 'place' but increasingly distended and displaced by global circulations. *Sotto voce*, the book seems to suggest that, on occasions, 'thinner' kinds of analysis might be better suited to capture the logics and labile expressions of global emergences, circuits and experiences (also Tsing 2005). Leaving aside the merits of Marcus's take on globalization, or the 'degree of fit' between ethnographic and archaeological situations, the book does raise an interesting point about the relationship between the mode of presentation, the calibration and robustness of evidence, and the nature of the problems we seek to tackle or points we seek to make. When are data enough to 'say something', and what constitutes acceptable support for interpretation? Are there contexts where 'thinner' expositions might be the way to go, or one way to get by in the absence of fuller investments?

Let me hasten to note here, that, in raising these questions and invoking Marcus, I do not intend to rake through the ashes of postmodernism in search for a cheap form of analytical evasion or justification for shoddy research, or to advocate a return to the endless regress of relativism. Nor am I unappreciative of deep empirical engagement and robust datasets. Surely, archaeological evidence is one of our safeguards against theoretical excesses, and its materiality both authorizes and lends palpable support to historical discourses (cf. Trouillot 1995). But not all datasets are equal, and their quality, richness or absence also constrain *what* we can say, and *how* we can say it. This is especially true of many African contexts, where historical archaeology, despite tremendous advances in the past 20 years, often continues to trail behind with respect to datasets, empirical infrastructure, the kinds of question we can address, and what we can say about the past (DeCorse 1999). Such is the case for the Siin, for instance, where nearly all the post-1500 archaeological evidence for the region derives from my dissertation. In these contexts, where historical evidence is sparse (and confined to a thin coastal band until the mid-1800s), I would argue that archaeology, albeit thin and initial, is absolutely relevant to a richer understanding of Atlantic encounters, not so much in terms of 'filling holes' in the historical fabric, but in combining with other forms of evidence to generate different ways of looking – or to productively reconfigure problem-spaces, as I phrased it earlier.

Horning is correct that I could have provided a more precise and quantified account of archaeological materials. But I would also add that the article's thinness, its form, is also a product of its message. Surely, a big part of the article is devoted to discussing materiality, value and object trajectories, but those are mobilized to make a broader point about epistemology – one which, incidentally, expresses some reserve towards the promises of quantification. Debates over the Atlantic trade in Africa have often been

conducted under the aegis of numbers and statistics, and operated by the principle that the discovery or addition of new evidence would help redress the mistakes of yesteryear and craft truer portraits of the past. Without denying that new empirical work has improved our understanding of the Atlantic trade (e.g. Eltis and Richardson 2008), part of the intervention proposed in the ‘Recharting’ piece is to point to some of the epistemological limitations inherent in this approach. With Ann Stahl (2001b, 33), I am doubtful that adding more evidence can always erase historical silences, in that these silences are also created by the assumptions and questions that frame historical inquiry (Trouillot 1995). Nor does it necessarily result in more ‘complete’ accounts of the past (in that they often continue to reproduce the gaps on which they are built). And so rather than stitching sources together, as if assembling a puzzle, we might be better off starting from the premise of their ‘productive tensions’ (Stahl 2001b) – that is, confronting sources of different kinds to attend to the construction of history, historical evidence and historical representations, and think of new ways to imagine the past.

Horning places deserved stress on thicker discussions of archaeological evidence as a way to get at ‘substantive considerations of meaning and materiality’ and catalyse artefacts’ ‘expostulatory and explanatory power’ (p. 28). Without disagreeing with her, my sole concern is that such emphasis can, in its own inadvertent way, lead to an essentialization of archaeological information (data fetishism rather than fascism) and drive us back to reductionist debates pitting artefacts against texts (or other word-based sources) – thus replaying historical archaeology’s long history of disciplinary anxiety and fear of subordination to history. Rather, I would suggest that what gives archaeological information its epistemic vantage is its ‘tense relationship’ with a broader repertoire of evidence, the fact that archaeological evidence’s autonomy is a relation of heteronomy. Put differently, historical archaeology’s strength, to me, does not simply lie in its access to artefacts and their raw concreteness, but in a particular sensibility to the material world, one predicated on bringing different lines of evidence to bear on an understanding of materiality in the past (and present). Strong illustrations of this approach can be found in recent archaeological accounts that craft astute histories of colonial materiality from an engagement with archival and documentary records (e.g. Hall 2000; Dawdy 2008). If part of the archaeological thinness of my account is undoubtedly a matter of empirical shortness, it is also because I have chosen to frame it as a historical anthropology, one that privileges materiality and the relationality of sources, rather than according *de facto* superiority to artefacts.

Narratives and publics

Horning identifies a tension perhaps not entirely resolved in the article when she asks who the audience is for this critique – one which also impacts the mode of presentation. In effect, who we are writing for also determines the form and content of our narratives, and perhaps also some of the reactions they generate (Stahl, Mann and di Paolo Loren 2004). Again, writers, texts and publics are inextricably connected: publics come into being through the circulation of texts, by virtue of being addressed, while the existence of publics

and of the fields of discourse they inhabit creates the conditions of possibility for academic texts (Warner 2002). Part of the success of a discourse lies in meeting the expectations of one's interlocutors (Bakhtin 1981) – another feature of hospitable thought. Striking 'the right note', in turn, often implies a balancing act: knowing what to retain and what to sacrifice to make the argument intelligible, anticipating how one's ideas will be, imagining how much context audiences need and what they can live without ...

While the intended audience was never quite specified, the respondents have no trouble identifying the various domains of ideas that informed the article: historical archaeology (Croucher), postcolonial studies (Van Dommelen), African archaeology (Insoll), and Atlantic world studies (Horning). *Archaeological dialogues*, rather than a more topical venue, provides an interface for addressing these different audiences and literatures. The public I am imagining is one conversant with archaeological theory, and concerned with conceptual interventions, which imparts shape to my writing. For this reason, while I recognize the mutual constitution of data and theory, the article is less an exposition of empirical evidence than an attempt to draw on such evidence to make a conceptual point about the relationship between history, discourse and politics – an argument which I think has relevance beyond Senegal or African archaeology. The imagined public I write for is explicitly *not* africanist, revealing another set of motivations left unspoken in the article, namely my feeling that African archaeology enjoys a somewhat provincial status in global archaeology, but that the continent's material pasts have important things to say about materiality, colonialism and historical production in other parts of the world at different points in time.

These background conditions framed my assumptions about readers' expectations and how to meet them. This led to editorial decisions as to how much information to leave in or take out. In combining with my respondents' interests and concerns, these calculations (or miscalculations) elicited different responses. Where Horning would like to see more precise engagements with data, Van Dommelen finds the superficial discussion of archaeological information less alarming, and in some sense justified by the level of argument to which it is directed (e.g. noting presences and absences). Croucher, whose teaching responsibilities involve a joint appointment in gender studies, asks rightfully about the absence of gender (and other subject positions) in my account, while Insoll, who has written extensively about African Islam, would like to hear more about how religious expressions mediated political-economic encounters in west-central Senegal. These topics are important but, for reasons of space, empirical resolution and intention, had to be left unaddressed (but see brief notes below).

Unfortunately, in this process of textual construction, formative parts of the story get elided: its context of emergence; the twists, turns, false starts and hiccups in its development; the surprises, discoveries and hesitations afforded by the confrontation of ideas and evidence; the various voices and conversations shaping its arguments; and so forth... By the time of a text's publication, the subterranean histories, which are essential to understanding its significance, have all but been erased, eclipsed as they are by the authority of printed word on the page. Oftentimes, in fact, the prehistory of our

writing has little place in academic settings, where intellectual value (and its recognition) is structured by certain performances of authority, regimes of truth and modalities of certainty.

I would suggest, as others have (Joyce 2002; Stahl, Mann and di Paolo Loren 2004), that part of accepting our answerability for the histories we paint, theories we choose and different publics we touch lies in making the process of narrative construction clearer; that is, in developing modes of writing and forums where one can both deconstruct historical discourses and simultaneously unpack the construction of our narratives – and thus formulate different criteria of evaluation. Attending to these issues would have perhaps helped to clarify why African voices were largely dropped from the analysis or why a discussion of local ceramics contained in an earlier version of the article had to be removed for lack of space, or examined how contradictions emerging ‘on the ground’ in the confrontation with local senses of history seminally shaped the argument made in the article ... These could have helped to craft a richer context for the article and its reception, by explaining why the narrative took the shape that it did, and ultimately providing more solid grounding for the political claims of the piece.

Voicing: ‘other’ ways of imagining histories

If, as indicated above, the article and its mode of address were calibrated to an academic audience and were engaging academic discourses, the dynamics of problem-spaces and archaeological research have farther-reaching implications that trickle beyond academia (Richard 2009, 117–21). The respondents notice an omission in the ‘Recharting’ piece, namely the absence of African voices. In doing so, they underscore some of the potential dangers or ironies of postcolonial theory, which, despite its theoretical advocacy of ‘other histories’ and *petits récits*, sometimes contradict or obliterate the very subaltern memories which it seeks to recuperate or celebrate (Liebmann and Rizvi 2008; Loomba *et al.* 2005). As I point out in the article, and as others have noted, every attempt to ‘revise’ particular discursive regimes and their ‘truth-value’ is itself situated within particular regimes of knowledge, which contain their own blindspots, silences and partialities. The idea of ‘problem-space’ is not innocent or objectively emancipating; it is itself conditioned by, and producing of, forms of authority and inequality.¹ For, as Horning notes, what are the consequences of a de-privileging of the Atlantic slave trade (and colonialism), when local knowledges, historical understandings, and identities may well be built around these very motifs? Clearly, it would take another article to address this question in full, but let me make some quick points of context.

As Insoll indicates, perceptions about the past in Africa are often ‘vividly embedded’ and contested in a complex assortment of local discourses and historical memories framed in the present. Scholarship on the continent has shown that there are many ‘routes of remembrance’ of Atlantic encounters in Africa (Holsey 2008), and that different societies express, commemorate or forget the traumas of slavery and colonial violence in different fashions (Cole 2001; Piot 1996). Senegal is no exception. On Gorée Island, for instance, one of the iconic sites of the Black Atlantic (Ebron 1999), transatlantic

slavery is centrally featured in official historical transcripts, no doubt because of the economic realities of heritage tourism. These memories, however, are not uncontested. For example, archaeological research on the island has downplayed the historical importance of global slavery and racial politics, by illuminating another side of the Gorean story, that of a vibrant multiethnic community, where domestic slavery and cohabitation between free and unfree residents actively shaped local experience (Thiaw 2008). In turn, this portrait stands at odds with the narrative of displacement linking black diasporic subjectivities, and local discourses intent on suppressing traces of indigenous slavery.

In Siin, by contrast, the Atlantic economy has left surprisingly few traces in historical memories. While Senegalese historiography has underscored the disastrous impact of Atlantic forces on northern Senegal, contemporary discourses of historical trauma in Siin revolve around the violence of colonialism and, more recently, that of the postcolonial state. Clearly, these discursive silences do not mean that Atlantic processes had no bearing on the structure of historical experience (Holsey 2008). There are many West African instances where the wounds of transatlantic slavery find little expression in language or memory, but quietly linger in other, more embodied realms of cultural production, such as religious performances, witchcraft and the ritual landscape, as noted by Insoll (Baum 1999; Shaw 2002). The point, rather, is that the revisionist account presented in 'Recharting' emerged precisely from an on-the-ground engagement with the disconnect between academic and folk historical discourses, a 'synaesthetic and largely pre-theoretical' (Appadurai 1996, 1) grappling with local historical imaginations, which was given theoretical shape by later readings in postcolonial scholarship. African voices thus echo throughout my discussion of 'problem-space', though they are not given sufficient recognition in the narrative.

Of course, there is no easy correspondence between the 'histories' emerging from my research and those told and remembered by people in Siin, in part because the politics of memory in the region are complex, and historical representations fluid in time and space (Galvan 2004). Our research has been at times welcomed by elders, teachers and interested parties, at others fiercely contested by historical stakeholders (descendants of the nobility, especially), but more generally flatly ignored by most villagers as something superfluous which *tubabs* ('white people') do and which does not concern them (Richard 2007, 7–15). This phenomenon is not unusual in Senegal, where archaeology has a poor history of engagement with broader publics (Thiaw 2003), and imagination of the nation places much greater attention on precolonial kingdoms, colonialism and Islam than on the Atlantic slave trade. This has perhaps been one of the most disappointing aspects of the project, whose objective was to unfold in dialogue with local memories to forge the kinds of alternative history evoked by Croucher. Clearly, success in this endeavour will not arise from the circulation of texts, and must involve modes of engagement suited to Siin's fairly dispersed village landscape, its mosaic discursive communities and the uneven literacy (in French or other national languages) of its rural populations.

Materialities

Many of the commentators' questions concern issues of materiality (broadly construed). Notwithstanding the analysis's preliminary character and evidential limitations, I would like to think through some of their suggestions and outline how they can help to refine portrayals of Siin's Atlantic world. I agree wholeheartedly with Van Dommelen, for example, that, while the article aims to do justice to Siin's complexity, it does on some level maintain a separation between 'colonizers' and 'colonized'. In effect, the hard lines blur quickly when we realize that for people in Siin during the period of observation, especially along the coast, European merchants had long been a familiar sight, that Africans developed complex relations with foreigners that ranged beyond trade or barter, and that these cultural interactions spurred the growth of a thriving community of Luso-Africans that endured well into the 19th century. By all accounts, the conditions for ambiguity and hybridity had long been established in the region by the onset of formal colonization in the 1860s, thus underscoring the need for more nuanced analyses (Bhabha 1994; also Van Dommelen 2002). Likewise, as Croucher indicates (and as I lament in the article), the current state of artefact assemblages only enables us to scratch the surface of Siin's layered sociology, which far exceeded the elite/commoner distinction presented in the article. Historians of Senegambian kingdoms generally distinguish a complex architecture of social positions, differently ranked in relation to wealth and status. The four major social orders (aristocracy, freemen, slaves, socio-professional 'castes') showed numerous internal divisions that conditioned the kinds of political, economic, social and spiritual actions which cultural agents were able to exercise. What is interesting, of course, is the extent to which these political hierarchies appear to have been laterally tied by object circulation and redistribution, which index a complex, cross-cutting network of obligations, labour exchanges and social relations. By contrast, archaeological information for Gorée Island is showing a much different history of local entanglements with the outside world, marked by different experiences of class formation, creolization and social intimacy between European, mixed-race and free/enslaved African dwellers (Thiaw 2008; also Hinchman 2000).

Van Dommelen is also correct when he notes that my reading of materiality pays little attention to the physical properties of artefacts. In effect, objects' material qualities are always already implicated in their ability to carry or convey meanings, and thus in their capacity to signify value (Keane 2007). To illustrate, I have long suspected that bead shape and colour were particularly important to African buyers along the coast, and may help to identify differences in consumption patterns, aesthetics and cultural preference between regions. Perhaps, as Van Dommelen suggests, similar considerations apply to other artefact classes (glass bottles, for instance), where form/texture/colour, rather than function/content, could have guided local practices of acquisition, consumption and reuse.

Another important dimension of local assemblages, which could not be included in the article, are locally produced ceramics. As argued by Croucher and Van Dommelen, this omission, and thus the primacy placed on more easily dated and better-contextualized trade imports, may lend inadvertent

support to narratives stressing the triumph of global agencies over local ones. This is an astute point, and indeed a look at local ceramic assemblages suggests otherwise – or lends greater subtlety to the picture of entwinements between local crafts, the sociality and collective values they channelled, and broader economic circulation. Unlike other parts of West Africa (e.g. DeCorse 2001a), where one finds over time the adoption of imported ceramic traits into local pottery repertoires, ceramic vessels in Siin show no incorporation whatsoever of European forms or styles prior to the 20th century. In fact, this lack of popularity applies to imported ceramics, which never quite found their way into local social and culinary worlds. Not only did Siin potters continue to meet local domestic needs until cheap, mass-produced enamelled metalware and cast-iron cooking pots began to flood African markets in the 20th century, but European ceramic forms were simply ill-suited to local practices of food preparation, serving and consumption, and not readily translatable into local systems of symbols. Today in Siin, food and the items associated with its collection, production and preparation, though heavily gendered, evoke an ethos of sharing, commensality, communal experience, and social belonging rooted in matrilineal identities. While ethnographic analogies can be misleading, it is likely that 18th- and 19th-century imported ceramic sets or vessel forms, with their focus on individual consumption and partition, may have projected an image of ‘asociality’ clashing with local conceptions of eating as a conduit of solidarity-building. At the same time, Van Dommelen does well to remind us that local ceramic assemblages, and the social practices they encode, did not remain static in time. Local vessel forms, types, and decorations become less variable during the Atlantic era. Likewise, the appearance of ‘steamers’ (perforated ceramic pans) suggests that the practice of steam-cooking millet couscous (which continues to this day) emerged during the era of oceanic commerce, though its origins probably lie somewhere else, perhaps Mauritania.

In tandem with the artefact trajectories mapped in the article, this schematic history of local pottery vessels supports Croucher’s intuition that studies of consumption have much to tell us about colonial entanglements (Stahl 2002) – so long, of course, as studies of consumptive practices remain paired with concurrent analyses of production and exchange, at different scales. In effect, production, exchange and consumption are always co-constituted over time and space. Such a conjoint look ensures that our considerations of African consumption remain situated in broader fields of power, involving consumer markets, spheres of circulation and apparatuses of production in Europe, the Americas and Asia, and the local systems of labour, modes of economic organization and politics of gender raised by Croucher.

Extending previous arguments, Insoll is absolutely correct to note that placing too much weight on the transformative gravities of Atlantic forces, by itself, reproduces certain Eurocentric narratives (Feierman 1993), while disregarding the fact that early Atlantic circuits grafted themselves onto pre-existing trading spheres and coexisted with them for centuries, that imported commodities filled no demand which local industries did not already satisfy, and that Africans for many decades controlled the terms of exchange. What needs to be examined in greater detail is this process of grafting, or, more

broadly, the complex questions of transitions occurring between political-economic spheres over time (Stahl 2004b), and occluded behind catchy phrases like ‘the caravel replacing the caravan’. This demands a much closer archaeological engagement with the period directly preceding ‘the Atlantic moment’, so as better to contextualize changes that occurred during the era of European expansion. Equally relevant here are the temporalities of the long term and multiple durations of experience encoded in archaeological assemblages, which can help us to question and ultimately revisit historical periodizations for the continent, which have been so influenced by European historiography/modernity. For instance, understanding cultural contexts of alcohol consumption before 1500 (for which there is virtually no information) would provide much-needed baselines to assess the practices of drinking that developed during the Atlantic era.

At the moment, my discussion of the liquor trade raises the respondents’ concern. Horning’s (2002; 2007b) important work on cultural stereotyping in Ireland and Appalachia makes her particularly aware of the unsuspected dangers lurking in certain portrayals of the past. She legitimately worries whether stressing the negative impact of the liquor trade in Siin might not have unforeseen consequences. Interestingly, I have in fact long struggled with this problem, or at least with the interpretations arising from my reading of both archaeological and historical evidence, and their broader implications. Discussing the disruptive effects of the liquor trade in Siin is not only precarious because it seems to suggest a certain passivity in the face of global commodities; more importantly, perhaps, it also runs the risk of reinforcing certain contemporary stereotypes about Siin’s Serer populations. Because of the region’s long history of resistance to Islam and its rural character, popular imagination in Senegal tends to regard the Serer as being out of sync with the country’s Muslim, urban modernity. Although the Siin is today an epicentre of rural exodus and boasts a large Muslim majority, its inhabitants continue to be derided as culturally conservative and animistic, and thus heavy consumers of alcohol.

I have repeatedly shared these concerns with some of my informants, and they have consistently surprised me by downplaying them. Again, the reasons are numerous: as mentioned above, the Atlantic era is often accorded limited valence in the public sphere; archaeological texts have little circulation beyond academic circles; Muslim informants relegate excessive alcoholic consumption to a pre-Muslim past from which they feel disconnected; Christians and practitioners of local religion lay claim to alcohol use as a central feature of their non-Muslim identity, social practices and religious rituals ...

Ultimately, I have chosen to retain this element, because omitting it would be omitting an important part of the story of Atlantic exchanges: that they were complex entanglements, that their effects were multisided and ambiguous, and that practical logics cannot be abstracted from larger structural forces. On one level, the introduction of trade alcohol triggered new cultural productions: it became an important part of different rites of passage, libations to ancestors and offerings to spirit shrines, celebrations of life and death, social occasions, labour parties and collective work. On another level, kings and their political entourage pillaged, fought and enslaved to obtain

liquor, weapons and ammunitions, which escalated levels of social violence in Senegambia. Later, alcohol became an important medium of commerce (serving as currency at times), and played a key role in the fashioning of a space of colonial regulation structured by commodification, taxation and cash-cropping. This was not confined to the Siin only. With the usual caveats about European representations of cultural others, historical archives show that trade alcohol was appreciated by political elites in all coastal kingdoms, whether Muslim or not. As Horning anticipates, economic records provide empirical glimpses into the liquor trade. For instance, commercial documents for the French *Compagnie des Indes*, which serviced northern Senegambia, show that in 1718, 'brandy' or 'spirits' represented 25.4 per cent of all imports (in value) into the Siin, easily outdistancing the second-greatest importer of alcohol at 11 per cent. More generally, estimates computed for commercial records between 1718 and 1838 show a steep increase in the volume of alcohol (surpassed only by imported textiles) matched by a comparable decline in prices (Curtin 1975, 316–17, 322).

While I agree with Horning that material evidence should not be downplayed and that quantification should have a place in archaeological analysis, I am not sure that raw bottle-herd counts can really tell us much at this point, because we are not sure what they represent socially. Again, here is a problem of commensurability across archaeological contexts. Unlike other parts of the world, depositional processes and the absence of permanent architecture in Siin make it difficult to 'read' spatial patterns on the level of the site and secure the social context of deposits, thus confining archaeological analysis to the burden of site-wide aggregate statistics. Combined with the fact that excavations have so far been small-scale, on sites occupied at different points in time over the past 1,500 years, there simply is not the critical mass of data and quality of context for the Atlantic period sufficient to delve into the kinds of subtle readings which Horning advocates. I have good faith that these readings will become possible in time, particularly as robust assemblages are collected on residential sites in other parts of the coast. Once a more solid comparative framework develops, it will enable us to delineate archaeological patterns in time and space, and compare them with commercial figures (made somewhat unreliable by the French companies' archival negligence) and documentary accounts. There, quantification will surely offer an important window into social processes of alcohol consumption and assessments of the culturally mediated violence of the liquor trade. I am particularly interested, for instance, in the prospects of comparing Siin's archaeological materials with those from different loci on Gorée Island, where different observers during the 18th and 19th centuries also lament the abundant consumption of alcohol associated with company employees, traders and workers. Still, as we await vaster campaigns of excavation, one of the upsides of the article is that limited archaeological baselines may still allow us to 'say something'.

Ethics, politics, 'others'

I would like to conclude by returning to questions of ethics and politics. In starting with Sarkozy and ending on the Black Atlantic, via

problem-spaces and object trajectories, the 'Recharting' article sought to underscore the inevitably political nature of discourses about Africa's Atlantic past, and archaeology's ability to create corrective, open-ended narratives that can reformulate historical understanding while opening the possibility for different or new political imaginations. By virtue of my own positionality in different fields of power/discourse/knowledge, this argument inevitably generates certain partialities, which my respondents have brought into clearer view. In doing so, they remind us that our choice of theory has real consequences for which we hold responsibility. This is so because our writings are given life and meaning by 'others' (people to whom we talk or listen, with whom we work or interact, with/for/against whom we write), whose engagement and responses we try to provoke; because our texts can travel across multiple realms of discourse, and sometimes pick up unintended messages along the way; and because not all 'others' are equal under the sun – some are indeed more precariously exposed or impacted by the 'authority' of what we say. Horning is thus right to alert us that making light of certain issues (data presentation, alcohol consumption) can be heavy with implications, that archaeology's lightness can be harmless fun just as it can be unbearable (politically).

In this light, I am grateful that, in inviting and challenging me to respond and clarify, the commentators also pushed me to become more accountable to the varied publics and audiences implicated in the problem-spaces I engage: those that may read this article (but do not get to respond), my informants, the people whose past I research, Senegal's public sphere, my students, people at conference, and so on ... Relationally, the hyphen that connects self and others, that defines authors and audiences, that makes ethics and politics each the condition of possibility for the other, can also guarantee the productive articulation between different communities of memory across uneven terrains of power. As I have argued above, while local historical imaginations in Siin make few direct references to the Atlantic world and while academic visions of Africa's past are saturated by it, the kind of narrative I propose chooses to unpack the 'time-knots' entwining global history and local histories, and bring different discourses into conversation with each other, without one eclipsing the others (Chakrabarty 2008). This perspective can help us to pry open our historical imaginations by vernacularizing narratives of global processes and 'Atlanticizing' African oral memories, to recognize that the past five centuries of African cultural experience remain unintelligible without the 'Atlantic moment' and that Atlantic modernity is unimaginable outside the archipelago of cultural worlds that constituted it.

Finally, recognizing the mutual embeddedness of different ways of thinking, telling or remembering history also poses the basic conditions of an ethics of writing – not simply a *philosophical* ethics concerned with fixed moral positions and ideas of right or wrong, but a *relational* ethics, sensitive to establishing a particular *quality of relationship* (Derrida 2002) between different pasts and knowledges about the past, unevenly situated in shifting worlds of power (cf. Pels and Meskell 2005; Hamilakis and Duke 2007). In effect, if ethics is the fact that 'obligation happens', then politics is the space in which the exercise of this obligation acquires its justification, meaning,

shape, and effects (Simmons 2006, 89). The state of tension between ethics, politics and histories preserves the possibility of dialogue, the openness of our conclusions, and our accountability in the face of changing times, discourses and political realities. This might involve, for instance, appreciating the legitimacy of indigenous claims, sensibilities and views of the past, and making space for them, even as they may depart from what archaeological analysis seems to say. Or thinking through the consequences of our interpretations for descendent communities. Or doing a better job of discussing the multiple voices, tensions, and preoccupations entering the knowledges we produce (Stahl, Mann and di Paolo Loren 2004).

If I have come any closer to fulfilling the conditions of such ethics in this response, it is, of course, thanks to my respondents, guardians of my integrity. And, although I get the final word here, the problem-space I have opened remains for others to expand, reframe, ignore or close.

Note

¹ I wish to thank my colleague Hussein Agrama for encouraging me to think about the relationship between problem-spaces and power.

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