Presenting Archaeology and Heritage at a UNESCO World Heritage Site: Gorée Island, Senegal

Ibrahima Thiaw and Gerry Wait

In the late first and early second millennium AD, a small-scale community with a marine-oriented economy settled on the Island of Gorée, located 3 km off the coast of Dakar in Senegal. There is no known earlier historic or prehistoric settlement on the island, but this may reflect a lack of investigation—something we return to repeatedly below—rather than a true absence. As early as the fifteenth century, Portuguese sailors visited the island, but later it fell under Dutch, French, and British control. By the eighteenth century, in the heyday of the slave trade, Gorée became a nodal site in the Atlantic nexus

ABSTRACT

Gorée Island is Senegal's first site on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It is associated with the infamous Atlantic slave trade, and over the past few decades, Gorée has become a prime destination for global tourism, particularly for the African diaspora from the New World but also for many Europeans and African nationals. Today, Gorée is a forum where different stakeholders battle over the role, place, and significance of the island in the Atlantic slave trade and its enduring legacies in the present. While Gorée owes much of its reputation to its heritage, including architecture, archaeology, and monuments, recent controversies over site preservation and policy compliance raised questions about heritage presentation and consumption. This article analyzes stakeholders' attitudes toward archaeology and heritage to gain insights on how they are presented and consumed by different stakeholders and eventually destroyed by them as well. The discussion shows ambiguous attitudes toward site presentation and preservation, which might be linked either to stakeholders' subjectivities or hypocrisy or to poor and uncoordinated communication strategies by heritage professionals.

La Isla de Gorea es el primer sitio de Senegal en la Lista del Patrimonio Mundial de la UNESCO. Está asociada a la infame trata de esclavos a través del Atlántico y en las últimas décadas se ha convertido en un destino importante para el turismo global, especialmente para los descendientes de la diáspora africana en el Nuevo Mundo, pero también para muchos europeos y africanos. Hoy en día, Gorea es un foro en el cual diferentes partes interesadas luchan sobre el papel, el lugar y la importancia de la isla en la trata atlántica de esclavos y sus legados actuales. Si bien Gorea debe gran parte de su reputación a su patrimonio, que incluye la arquitectura, la arqueología y los monumentos, las recientes controversias sobre la preservación del sitio y el cumplimiento de las políticas plantearon cuestiones de presentación y consumo del patrimonio. Este artículo analiza las actitudes de los interesados hacia la arqueología y el patrimonio para obtener información sobre su presentación, consumo y eventual destrucción por diferentes partes interesadas. La discusión muestra actitudes ambiguas hacia la presentación y la preservación del sitio, que podrían estar vinculadas a las subjetividades o la hipocresía de las partes interesadas, o a pobres estrategias de comunicación y falta de coordinación por parte de profesionales del patrimonio.

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providing critical services to oceangoing ships, including food and water supplies, an excellent harbor, and an easily defensible site that kept local African polities at a respectable distance.

The promotion of Gorean heritage, as well as other such sites associated with Atlantic slavery, grew in West Africa in the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Cape Coast and Elmina in Ghana; Hueda; Kunta Kinte Islands in the Gambia, etc.) owing to the UNESCO Convention. However, while the UNESCO World Heritage listing made site recognition and worldwide publicity possible, site management and development activities remained the responsibility of state parties. Sadly, the 1980s coincided with a time of deep economic crisis, structural adjustments, and social upheaval with serious consequences for state parties' investments in the cultural sector (Arazi and Thiaw 2013). Heritage management in Senegal, as elsewhere in many parts of Africa, was subsequently hampered by weak heritage legislation, lack of clarity on the linkages between heritage sites' management and development activities and on the limits and boundaries of jurisdictions between the administrative body (Ministry of Culture through the Direction du Patrimoine) and the operational research and valorization body (Ministry of Higher Education and Research, particularly the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire and the Cheikh Anta Diop University [Thiaw 2017]). This has become more complicated recently by Act 3 of Decentralization, which grants managerial authority to local communities through the city administration.

Although it does not, in theory, have managerial authority, UNESCO is very much watching for potential threats and degradations that might affect the "outstanding universal value" of the sites on its register. This is why it has instituted a list of endangered sites that can be withdrawn from the list if the local government does not provide appropriate preservation and up-to-date conservation policies and actions. Yet, the absence of on-site professional heritage managers with the capacity to quickly identify problems, intervene, or send alerts to either the government of Senegal or UNESCO is symptomatic of the weakness of this system.

Equally, while the government of Senegal was very enthusiastic about presenting elaborate dossiers for site listing on the World Heritage list, particularly after 2000, there was little or no follow-up once sites were on that list. Site listing served the political agenda of the Direction du Patrimoine, which used it for its own promotion and propaganda. Despite the growing number of sites both on the national register and the World Heritage list, heritage legislation and policies in Senegal have remained unchanged since the 1970s. As a result, there have been very few or no reforms to on-site management and conservation or even social, economic, or educational benefits to communities living nearby. In fact, the lack of adequate management policies left many sites in a state of advanced degradation (e.g., Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dioron Boumack). More strikingly, from 2000 to 2012, the cumulation of administrative duties assigned by one individual to the Direction du Patrimoine for operational research and conservation—ones traditionally assigned to the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) and the university—caused fraught relations between these two institutions. Not only did this approach marginalize local expertise and research-based institutions but also jeopardized dialogue between administrative and professional stakeholders.

At the same time, sites like Gorée and Saint-Louis were exposed to real estate development, which meant more threats and rapid destruction of the very heritage resources that made their worldwide reputation possible. Some of this is speculative for-profit development aimed at the tourism trade, while other development is for civic infrastructure. This makes it even more complicated with the case of Gorée Island, which was listed in 1978 without a management plan. Yet, the site received considerable worldwide attention that boosted heritage tourism, particularly after the 1980s. By that time, Gorée Island had progressively become an iconic site for the African American diaspora and international tourism, and also an ideal destination for Senegalese students as part of pedagogical/educational excursions on the theme of Atlantic history and slavery (Hinchman 2000; Thiaw 2008a).

Ironically, as heritage tourism grew, and more revenues were generated, populist narratives, demagogy, and unsubstantiated claims replaced evidence-based history. Research efforts dwindled for lack of official recognition and support. One is struck by the lack of interest in research by the local government and the focus of the official Gorean narrative almost exclusively on the Maison des Esclaves, which came to epitomize the history of Atlantic slavery on Gorée and beyond in the whole Senegambia.[1] It is as if there is a fear of research, inquiry, and evidence particularly when it concerns the Maison des Esclaves.

At the same time, international and local visitors had specific demands and expectations that sometimes differed significantly but that could be bridged by research and inquiry. A visit to Gorée Island is a unique opportunity to engage with the history of Atlantic slavery and heritage tourism in complex and multiple ways. The question that heritage professionals thus face at Gorée is how to serve various audiences that are nationally, racially, socially, and culturally diverse? How to address the heritage of Atlantic slavery that was bundled with issues of moral, political, and economic significance, all with enduring legacies in the present? Intriguingly, the shared traumatic experience of the Atlantic past and its subjective memories and collective identity forged at the crossroads of the Atlantic Ocean coalesced with the commodification of culture, new technologies of corporate marketing, and global consumerism (Ebron 1999). How then to commercialize a difficult and traumatic past, and who shall benefit from it?

Visitors' experiences are shaped by various records of the Gorean heritage and the ways in which it is presented to them whether in the form of museum exhibitions, scholarly discourse, tourist guides, architectural buildings, monuments, or archaeological material remains (Thiaw 2003a). Although the number of tourists grew, and Gorée Island gained international recognition and hence more revenues from tourism, the government of Senegal invested very little to maintain, document, and enhance historic properties. Consequently, heritage professionals have had to struggle to access external funding for site preservation, documentation, and promotion.

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FIGURE 1. The Maison des Esclaves, Gorée Island (Photograph, I. Thiaw).

This article is a subjective account of these multiple tensions but one that tries to disentangle their complexity, triangulating between heritage presentation to the public, its preservation and consumption, and ultimately, its impact on visitors' experiences. It showcases a recent crisis in heritage management in Gorée Island and uses that to reflect and explore a new way forward. The first section analyzes how heritage is communicated and presented to visitors and how this shapes visitors' experiences. The second section tries to comprehend the misunderstanding and differences of opinion among key stakeholders and reflects on consequences for heritage preservation. The final section explores new ways to present heritage in Gorée Island to enhance visitors' experiences while also preserving archaeological heritage resources.

PRESENTING HERITAGE IN GORÉE ISLAND

Heritage knowledge in Gorée Island is produced and consumed by different stakeholders who nurture various iconic projects both within and beyond Senegal. It is largely tied to records of the Atlantic past that are preserved in multiple tangible (archaeology, architecture, textual/documentary) or intangible (oral traditions, memory) forms. Narratives presented to different stakeholders include museum exhibitions, particularly from the Maison des Esclaves, or Slave Warehouse, on the one hand (Figure 1), and academic discourse on the basis of historical archival sources, architecture, and archaeology, on the other. However, it must be pointed out that the production and dissemination of this knowledge are unevenly accessible to the different stakeholders. Regardless, it has palpable impacts on visitors' experiences (Thiaw 2008a).

Joseph Ndiaye can be credited for being one of the major actors who made Gorée Island a UNESCO World Heritage site and a powerful *lieu de mémoire* (place of memory). He accomplished this first and foremost through a performance that largely drew on his personal experiences as a resident and his imagination (Ndiaye 2006). At the beginning of his career as the self-proclaimed curator of the Maison des Esclaves in the 1960s, he combined his own imaginations, memories, and creativity to counter official narratives then-dominated by colonial historians, conventional archives, including written documentary sources, and so-called colonial architecture.

To do this, Ndiaye used his extraordinary oral talents to craft a narrative that was articulated around the Maison des Esclaves: the story of the middle passage and the inhumane treatment of the enslaved from the time they entered the Maison des Esclaves through their forced labor on plantations. With his voice, he hypnotized his audience, leaving some inevitably soured and angry and others sorry for being vilified for a past they were not responsible for but from which they might have benefited (Thiaw 2008a). Today, Ndiaye's successors in the Maison des Esclaves, as well as other local tourist guides, serve much the same narrative to visitors, though sometimes adding their own flavor and twists to it.

Unlike Ndiaye's narrative, early European historical appraisals of Gorée were concerned primarily with European chartered companies, European companies' directors and personnel, and European governors and traders (Cariou 1966; Cultru 1910; Delcourt 1952; Machat 1906). European expatriates were portrayed literally and metaphorically as the architects of the Gorean historical landscape and its picturesque, so-called colonial houses. African contributions were barely perceptible in European conventional accounts in which Africans and Afro-Europeans only played marginal roles.

Many postcolonial Africanist historians also addressed Gorean Atlantic heritage from the vantage point of European archival documentary sources. This was the case of Philip Curtin, a

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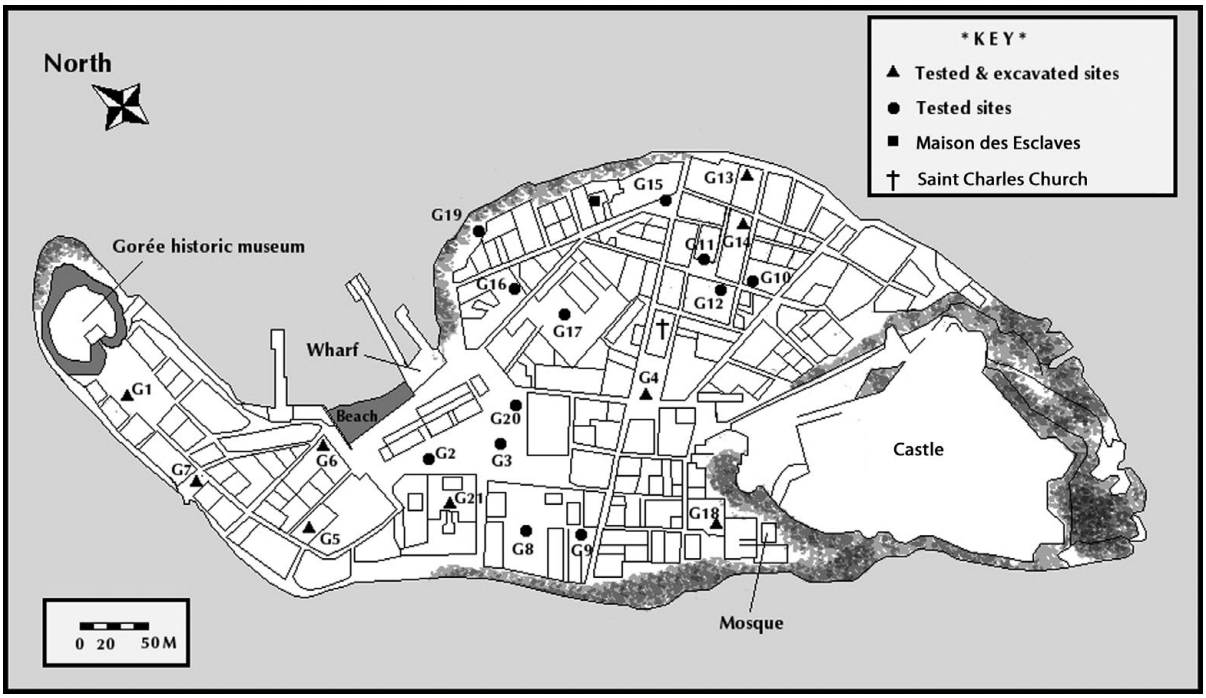

FIGURE 2. Map of excavated sites on Gorée Island (map by I. Thiaw).

renowned American historian, with innumerable publications in his academic record. Curtin (1969) was one the strongest critics of Ndiaye's narrative, arguing that it and the Maison des Esclaves in which it was articulated were hoaxes because Gorée Island and the Senegambia were proportionally small contributors to transatlantic slave exports compared to other points of departure and therefore were less impacted by it. His arguments were based on a painstaking project of collecting vast quantities of archival data on Atlantic slave ship voyages from around the world. The debate ignited by Curtin's findings shaped the course of Gorean and African history for a long time.

While Curtin reached out to an elite and educated audience via books and articles, Ndiaye spoke and interacted directly with visitors of the Maison des Esclaves, and through oral performance, was much more effective than Curtin, in that Ndiaye's audience was more diverse and perhaps more inclined to listen and feel than to read. As a nonacademic, Ndiaye's success highlights the power of oral performance in presenting heritage to the public, particularly in a context dominated by orality rather than literacy.

As we began our archaeological inquiries in Gorée in 2000 (Figure 2), we were fully aware of the importance of presenting heritage to a public that preferred to listen than to read. On Gorée Island, differences are generally grounded in essentialist perspectives. Therefore, since the inception of the research, we thought that one of the roles archaeology could play was to test and materialize historical claims. In doing so, it could subvert old assumptions about race, identity, power, class, and gender and produce a more inclusive narrative. Reassessments of Gorean architecture within the context of Atlantic history, for instance, showed that it was the product of complex intercultural interactions that were a combination of adaptation to local weather and a response to the social needs associated with the operations of the trade, as well as markers of identity (Brooks 2003; Hinchman 2006; Mark 1995, 1996, 1999).

Prior to our work (which was undertaken in mixed academic and planning-led contexts by a team from the university), archaeology played a very limited role in historical reconstructions in Gorée Island and was initially largely practiced in the form of salvage interventions. Meaningful archaeological work on the island has been relatively recent (Croff 2009; Thiaw 2003a, 2008a, 2012). One major concern was with power in both past and present constructions, and we were committed to scrutinizing the evidence (archives, popular narratives, and material culture) from both sides of the power divide to explore synthesis between past practices and present sensibilities (Stahl 2001). In particular, we collected archaeological material evidence to evaluate the role of the different identities that cohabited on the island, including those traditionally marginalized in classic historical sources. In lending its voice to the voiceless and the disfranchised, our archaeological endeavor provided a forum for greater equality, becoming a venue for a more democratic knowledge.

The Gorean stakeholders (residents and community groups) have a different understanding of what heritage and archaeology are and do but were all eager to engage in site interpretations and historical claims about dead bodies, architectural ruins, and features (Samb 1997). Most of the residents were curious about the work of archaeologists who make a show of "useless" bits of things. However, they seemed to accord very little interest in our work, excepting perhaps those seeking paid labor. In general, foreign tourists seemed more informed about archaeology, but

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this not always the case (Thiaw 2011). However, excavations of human remains during the 2002 season received considerable attention and myriad conflicting interpretations. As a result, we became extremely cautious in handling that kind of evidence in the following seasons.

Our work also offered the first opportunity to participate or visit an archaeological excavation for many Senegalese students. We offered site tours to many groups as part of our public outreach activities. Raina Croff went even further to develop an open-door exhibition at the Historical Museum of Gorée to present her collections and her results to the public. All of this was insufficient, however, for a change in the narrative as the Maison des Esclaves remained for many stakeholders (e.g., government, local Senegalese and African visitors, Afro-descendants) the ideal site at which to learn and feel the history of the Atlantic slave trade.

A STORM IN A GLASS OF WATER

Today, scholars of various disciplinary backgrounds continue to dispute the historical significance of Gorée Island within the Atlantic World. Heritage is either claimed or contested by various groups of belonging that appropriate and consume it or refute it in complex ways (Curtin 1969; Ebron 1999; Roux 1996; Samb 1997; Thiaw 2008a). Over the past three decades, politicians and religious leaders (including Pope John Paul II, former South African president Nelson Mandela, and former US presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama) came to Gorée to express regrets and sadness, and to beg for pardon in the name of the institutions they represented for the violence and destruction of lives and property they had historically inflicted on Africans and people of African descent (Tillet 2009). Other visitors, including political activists, artists, and many laypersons, have written about, depicted, and protested on the ruins of Gorée Island and its Maison des Esclaves museum. All of this is the product of a very successful strategy in terms of heritage communication. However, the polarized black-and-white perspective centered on the Maison des Esclaves and the middle passage is the driving narrative. Until now, all other scholarly works, although based on evidence, have had a very little impact on the popular narrative and therefore appear largely like a storm in a glass of water.

There has been much discussion about Gorée Island's role and place in Atlantic navigation. No matter what this role and place might have been and how reliable its assessments and evaluations have been, the fact of the matter is that today, Gorée still owes much of its national and international reputation to Atlantic slavery heritage. It is on that basis that it has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site under criterion VI that refers to one of the most traumatic events in human history. Because both documentary and oral sources are partial and fragmentary, archaeological deposits constitute some of the best archival and direct empirical evidence of this turbulent and difficult past. Thus, its preservation is a guarantee to maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the outstanding universal value of the site. Although Gorée was on a colonial registry of historical sites as early as 1944, archaeology contributed very little to the debates as the discipline's initial interests were geared toward prehistory (Thiaw 2003b). Consequently, the broadcasting of Gorée as a World Heritage site since 1978 and the broadening of its stakeholder audiences, particularly among Afro-descendants, had very little implication for archaeology—despite the archaeological potentials of the island (Croff 2009; Thiaw 2003b, 2008a, 2012). The state government, the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel et Historique, the City of Gorée, and even UNESCO have largely ignored the archaeological potentials of the Gorean heritage that so far has received little attention. For instance, Ibrahima Thiaw recently requested a research clearance to carry out archaeological excavations within the Maison des Esclaves' courtyard. The request was made within the context of a development project for the revitalization and expansion of the museum. Initially, the request was approved but then was withdrawn soon thereafter without any further explanation by the Direction du Patrimoine. This makes us believe that some stakeholders, particularly the government represented by the Direction du Patrimoine, seem to fear research and its evidence-based narratives.

The Maison des Esclaves' success in presenting Gorean heritage has no counterpart in other academic narratives. While publications in academic journals and books can be effective in communicating about heritage and archaeology, this is only true for certain audiences. In contexts like Gorée, and perhaps in many other parts of the non-Western world, it is critical that archaeologists explore other ways of communicating about their research and engaging more effectively with stakeholders and local communities (Atalay 2012; Schmidt 2014; Schmidt and Pikirayi 2016). Without this kind of commitment to communities, archaeological endeavors are prone to failure over the long run in many contexts. For heritage preservation, community stewardship is more effective than professional, as the primary beneficiaries and consumers are situated within the community.

The archaeological potential of Gorée Island seems to be the concern solely of professional archaeologists and, in particular, the very few interested in Atlantic history. Gorée Island was listed as a World Heritage site in 1978 without a management plan. The first management plan for Gorée Island was written in 2016–2017. It is ironic to note that while the most senior archaeologist in Senegal (also a former director of both the administrative and operational research branches of the Direction du Patrimoine of the Ministry of Culture) was the only one who participated in that project, there was no single word in the plan about the archaeological resources that layer the island. This cannot be ignorance or a mistake. For more than 30 years, Gorée Island had no management plan, and heritage preservation was the domain of a small elite who capitalized on the emotionality of the issue of slavery to ban most meaningful research and maintain the status quo of the Maison des Esclaves narrative through bricolage and improvisations.

The question is why should we fear research, and who specifically needs to maintain fixity and ignorance in knowledge production and dissemination—and why? We would argue that the problem on Gorée Island is not just about differences of opinion on the basis of race, identity, power, gender, et cetera. That might be a part of it, but there is more. We will use the case of a recent controversy surrounding urban development on a site in the northern part of the island, with severe consequences for archaeological cultural resources, to shine a light on the hidden agenda of some key stakeholders.

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FIGURE 3. Construction works occurring on Gorée Island without any archaeological involvement (Photograph, I. Thiaw).

Gorean stakeholders always seem to be eagerly committed to the Maison des Esclaves and its narrative. However, this is not the case for the island archaeological heritage that is constantly threatened by the decisions and actions of some of its key stakeholders. Recently, the European Union granted funds to the City of Gorée for development in the northern part of the island. Japon is cited in another project to prevent coastal erosion. Both projects gained the official support of the City of Gorée, the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel et Historique du Senegal, and UNESCO's local office in charge of culture, to name the most important institutions involved as listed in the management plan and in local media (Actusen 2017; Ly 2017; Sambou 2017; PPL and CMP-UNESCO 2016).

Sadly though, these development activities failed to include an archaeological and heritage impact assessment prior to disturbing the site (contrary to accepted good international practice), causing substantial damage to the archaeological deposits. Over the past 20 years or so, such practices are not uncommon on Gorée Island or in Senegal in general (Arazi and Thiaw 2013; Thiaw 2008b, 2017). In the early 2000s, a soccer field was developed on top of an eighteenth-century cemetery. About the same time, a Senegalese entrepreneur was given clearance by the City of Gorée to build a restaurant just a few meters away from the recent EU-funded development project. On a daily basis, Gorean historical landscapes are being transformed without any heritage impact assessment or any sort of mitigating data collection (Figure 3).

This cannot simply be attributed to the weak cultural heritage legislation that characterizes Senegal. The attitude of the key stakeholders here—namely, the Direction du Patrimoine, the City of Gorée, and to some extent the UNESCO local representative for culture—breached not only the UNESCO Convention but also the Cotonou Agreement (2000, revised in in Luxembourg in 2005) that requires the European Union and African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP)-member countries (signatories to the Cotonou Agreement, also known as the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement, which binds them to the European Union) to work together for the preservation and the enhancement of cultural heritage at the international, bilateral, and private levels. Therefore, there are ambiguities and hypocrisy on the part of the very institutions that are supposed to enforce and safeguard heritage resources. This raises serious concerns that need consideration, not only locally but also at the international level.

The development project funded by the European Union is also accompanied by place renaming. The funding of the program could be an interesting example of reparation that could benefit various stakeholders. However, renaming a site "Place de l'Europe" does not appear like an act of reparation but instead like an act of neocolonialism or even of recolonization, claiming yet more of Gorée for Europeans. Today, the majority of place-names on the island are reminders of the European colonists, not as oppressors but as heroes. This ambivalence characterizes the processes of memorialization on Gorée Island and in Senegal in general. It is in stark contrast to the narrative of the Maison des Esclaves, which privileges anonymous slaves who experienced captivity in the west African dungeons, the middle passage, the trauma of exile and the horrors of plantation life in the Americas, gruesome death, and survival and extraordinary success stories in the present (Ndiaye brochure ca. 1965: a copy may be consulted at the library of the Laboratoire d'Archéologie, IFAN-UCAD,

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FIGURE 4. The harbor on Gorée Island (Photograph, G. Wait).

Dakar, Senegal). In almost all cases, the funding determines the choice of sites, place-names, and types of memorials.

USABLE PASTS, SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

The history of Atlantic slavery is one of tragic human loss that might have caused the political decomposition, the depopulation, and the impoverishment of African societies, resulting in modern dependence and stagnation (Barry 1972; Bathily 1989; Rodney 1982). From the Afro-descendants' perspective, the Maison des Esclaves' guestbook in Gorée is a remarkable barometer of visitors' experiences. It yields personal and first-hand accounts of visitors' experiences following the powerful performance of the curator and a tour of the site. A first glance at some of the entries clearly shows a predominance of African-American and African visitors (identifying themselves as such in their comments, though there has been too little effort made to interview visitors—either African or other—about their experiences at Gorée) and yields unique insights into not only their experiences but also the meaning and significance of their journeys. The processes of identity formation of the African diaspora were painful as the enslaved, at sites such as Gorée, were subject to hazing and torture and were forced to abandon their African homes and identities before shipment to the Americas. In contrast, the voices of the modern local Gorean community, which might include indigenous slave descendants, are barely heard. In fact, with the collapse of the illegitimate trade by the mid-nineteenth century, many resident Goreans left the island (Sané 1978). Additionally, with the growth of the tourism industry in the 1980s, most newcomers arrived on the island to profit from economic opportunities and didn't necessarily have historical or affective ties to it. (Figure 4 shows the tourist potential of the harbor.) The fact of the matter is that the notion of community in Gorée Island is very much blurred by these more recent processes (for example, historic buildings not being maintained).

Whether claims of historical, affective, or symbolic relationships to Gorée are real or not, we must look at their contemporary and future reverberations. Even though this study is qualitative rather than quantitative, debates about the role and place of Gorée Island in Atlantic commerce have driven the development of global and local tourism in which the past is appreciated, appropriated, and consumed by audiences with different subjectivities in different ways. Thus, expectations from tourism are multiple and may range from contemplation/pilgrimage to appreciation of scenery to economic opportunities (Bruner 1996). For instance, homecoming tours to Africa are part of a much bigger economic enterprise involving capital investment and advertisement (Ebron 1999). Therefore, it is critical that the different stakeholders engage in conversations with local communities to make sure that the concerns of each are taken into account.

Gorée's status as a UNESCO World Heritage site requires new appraisals of its history and new possibilities for more inclusive narratives, which would incorporate the different identities that have lived side by side on the island. This is consistent with the mission statement of the World Heritage Committee, which sees World Heritage sites such as Gorée Island as universal properties without regard to economic disparities, races, nationality, class, gender, or other forms of identity (UNESCO 1972).

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FIGURE 5. Historic building on Gorée Island (Photograph, G. Wait).

Archaeology can contribute a great deal to that by becoming a forum and a venue that gives voice to the voiceless and the disenfranchised who are generally silenced in documentary and oral sources. This would require greater community engagement that incorporates reflexivity, multivocality, consultation and joint decision-making, reciprocity, and power and skills' sharing for alternative practices informed by "community participatory approaches" (Atalay 2012). That way, heritage would no longer be the affair of an elite alone, either in charge of its administration or of its research and conservation, as is the case for Gorée Island today, but instead it would belong to the community that shares the same space and that constitutes its primary stakeholder. Engaging that primary community would be critical for the production of alternative histories, community development, human rights (Meskell 2010), religious freedom, social health and stability, interconnectedness, mitigation of cultural stress, and reparative history (Schaepe et al. 2017).

TOWARD THE FUTURE

There are many stakeholders in Gorée and at the UNESCO site. The person or group who gets to interpret the past, if it is considered at all, is usually the person or group with the most public support or the most money. At Gorée, however, the history from an expert authorized source (such as the Ministry of Culture) is hardly heard, while the loudest and most heard story is both unauthorized and not very factual. Archaeologists are not really present in this "conversation" at all. This leads to some misinformation, for example, in what the tours present as the (perceived) experiences within the Maison des Esclaves and about how past and current power relationships are said to be structured on the island. We believe that allowing scientific interpretation, as through archaeology, to be an arbiter of all these dialogues would be a valuable way of grounding the various stories in a more factual history. However, archaeology has few advocates with any power. What is needed, therefore, is the voice of an African archaeologist to be heard, advocating for scientific archaeology, in light of all the possible dialogues about this place, as this would allow for a more fact-oriented version of the past to be considered.

Heritage, whether it is reconstructed from documents, monuments, archaeological research, or anything else, is not merely a site of past knowledge retrieval, but above all, a site of knowledge production for individual or collective interventions (Sather-Wagstaff 2011). As controversial as it is, the Maison des Esclaves narrative succeeds in communicating about heritage. What we argue, however, is that its sustainability needs to be evaluated with respect to the emotional experience of the visitors and the authenticity of its foundations. An articulation of this narrative to archaeological and architectural new research on the island should therefore not be seen as a threat to it but instead as an enrichment, as it will broaden the range of visitors' interests, experiences, and choices for discovery. We also argue that the Maison des Esclaves should be open to archaeological and architectural investigations that involve local communities. The data collected in those investigations should then be used in the museum exhibition as facts to tell more inclusive narratives that could enhance visitors' experiences and hence attract more tourist visitors to the island, which could create more revenue.

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Developing these new possibilities for Gorean heritage should be accompanied by other innovations to enhance heritage to make it more profitable to all stakeholders. This should involve greater community engagement and efforts to identify and develop new educational materials, new signage, and artisanal and artistic production that are tied to local traditions and the needs of the visitors. Problems such as security, trash disposal, sanitation, and preservation of property also need to be given serious consideration. Stakeholders at all levels, including professional heritage managers, city and government officers, and UNESCO itself, must be more attentive to local social dynamics, power relations, and economic imperatives within the communities and not impose a top-down approach in their endeavors (Balzar 1997; Joy 2012; Meskell 2000:147).

Today, the entire economy of Gorée Island is dependent on its heritage, which is a nonrenewable resource. Therefore, its destruction, as illustrated in this case study, or its loss of credibility due to the revelation of seriously inauthentic interpretations might have severe consequences on the economy and local community well-being. As a living site, occupied by real people with real needs, the continual growth of the island will require development projects, but these must reconcile community development and conservation such that heritage resources are preserved and valorized in a sustainable manner.

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Data Availability Statement

No original data are presented in this article.

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NOTE

1. The Maison des Esclaves was built between 1780 and 1784 and was the home of Nicolas Pépin, the son of a very wealthy *signare*, Catherine Baudet, who had several domestic slaves and held real estate on the Island. With the listing of Gorée Island as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1978, the Maison, along with its "Door of No Return," has achieved fame as a symbol of the Atlantic Slave Trade, a fame that may not be historically authentic but which is well rooted in folklore.

AUTHORS INFORMATION

Ibrahima Thiaw ■ PhD, Laboratoire d'Archéologie IFAN-Université Cheikh Anta Diop BP 206 Dakar, Senegal (thiawi@yahoo.com)

Gerry Wait ■ Triskelion Heritage, 190 Wadards, Witney, Oxford UK (gerry.wait@outlook.com, corresponding author)

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