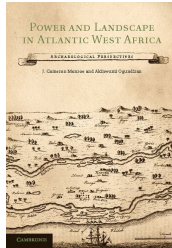


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Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa

Archaeological Perspectives

Edited by J. Cameron Monroe, Akinwumi Ogundiran

Book DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511921032>

Online ISBN: 9780511921032

Hardback ISBN: 9781107009394

Chapter

3 - Political Transformations and Cultural Landscapes in Senegambia during the Atlantic Era: An Alternative View from the Siin (Senegal)? pp. 78-114

Chapter DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511921032.006>

Cambridge University Press

3

Political Transformations and Cultural Landscapes in Senegambia during the Atlantic Era: An Alternative View from the Siin (Senegal)?

François Richard

INTRODUCTION: MINDING POLITICAL LANDSCAPES

Landscape perspectives have enjoyed meteoric popularity in the past twenty years in archaeology. While there are many reasons behind the archaeological turn to landscape (and while the latter is, indeed, not without precedents), the attractiveness of the concept partly rests on the fact that it provides a link between theory and data, mind and matter, past and present, and archaeological remains and the physical world in which they are embedded. Landscapes involve material settings and the ways in which they are experienced, perceived, and imagined by different social actors (cf. Lefèbvre 1991; Moore 2005; Smith 2003). These settings, however, are not just physical givens – mere stages on which humans move and act. Rather, landscapes are socially produced and rendered meaningful by the people who inhabit them. At the same time, while agents work to construct their landscapes, material worlds recursively act back to create the people who belong to them. Landscapes, then, materialize long, cross-cutting histories of social, political, economic, environmental, and semiotic relations; they are, to evoke Gosden and Head (1994:114–15), “both the locus of past action and the medium within which evidence of the past is preserved or destroyed.”

This juxtaposition presents archaeologists with three enticing implications: (1) An engagement with landscapes can usefully assist historical reconstruction precisely because landscapes bear traces of the various processes that went into their creation; (2) Landscapes are not just assemblages of space, place, and practice – they compel

attention to temporality. It is important to inscribe transformations at various points in longer histories of change, just as it is essential to situate archaeological analyses in the evolving landscape (milieu, politics, representations) of the present; and (3) Lastly, as a “concrete abstraction,” which combines real-world referents and analytical remove, the landscape provides a powerful interface between archaeology’s units of analysis (regional survey, sites, artifacts, etc.), the past cultural environments we seek to understand, and the historical agencies that shaped them.

In sum, it seems particularly apposite that archaeology openly welcomed the landscape concept in that it capitalizes on two of the discipline’s most critical vantages – its attention to materiality and its grasp of multiscalarity (Marquardt 1992). These two dimensions seem particularly crucial to the study of the African past because they conjure qualities and levels of experience that often evade the scope of the documentary record and oral traditions – the empirical cornerstones for most of what we know of African history, especially during the Atlantic Era. Investigating African life through the lens of materiality can shed light on the constellation of object-oriented or spatial practices (consumption, production, exchange, subsistence, technology, residential logics, and political configuration) that mediated Africans’ interactions with the broader world and variably transformed in response to changes in Atlantic circulations. These practices, incidentally, often receive sparse coverage in archival records, in which remarks often are confined to panoramic treatments of political and economic conditions near the coasts and along navigable rivers. Moreover, the kinds of social phenomena captured archaeologically seldom amount to discrete events, intentional actions, or conscious decisions, which generally are the province of documented history; rather, they represent the aggregated effects of these shorter-term processes and the longer-term dispositions that framed past courses of action, and were themselves reshaped in the entanglement with outside people, objects, and ideas (Dietler and Herbich 1998). Concurrently, archaeology’s ability to plumb social and material expressions at a variety of scales, from the humble artifact to settlement systems and region-wide exchange networks, permits us to monitor how the effects of Atlantic forces might have been felt and negotiated on different planes of human experience. Rather than portraying Atlantic forces as a monolithic process equally impacting all aspects of African life, archaeology can show that change at one

level of social relations did not necessarily entail similar changes at other scales, complicating the temporality, agency, and causality of global encounters in Africa.

As with other contributors in this volume, my objective is to use the lessons of landscape archaeology to complicate existing readings of Atlantic encounters in coastal Senegambia. Again, mirroring most chapters in this book, my interest lies particularly in the twinned questions of power and political architecture and using archaeological information to revisit their expressions in Atlantic-Era Senegal, with focus on the Siin polity. In this chapter, I engage with “politics” on two related fronts, in reference to (1) the (shifting) assemblage of institutions, structures, and practices involved in the making of governance, authority, and power relations in the past – in contexts in which history often privileges the deeds of elites and states, and (2) the legacies of the Atlantic past in contemporary narratives of the nation or, more specifically, how historical representations forged in the cauldron of global encounters have assisted the fashioning of difference and exclusion in present-day Senegal.

In the course of this chapter, I use archaeological information to shed alternative light on past politics to rethink the position of marginalized groups in the political arena of Senegal. With regard to the former, the chapter draws inspiration from recent scholarly attention to the distinctive cultural logic animating African modes of power (S. K. McIntosh 1999; Monroe and Ogundiran, this volume) to examine how elites and nonelites took part in the construction of state authority and how the material properties of the Siin social world may have partly constrained the operation of governance in the region (cf. R. J. McIntosh 2005). In this sense, this chapter seeks to present political landscapes once described as state dominated and hermetically centralized in a more ambiguous light – or in a more “fragmented” state, as the editors propose in their introduction. The internal dynamism emerging from the analysis seems to challenge popular perceptions of the Siin (and its historical residents) as a back-water mired in pristine, age-old tradition and aversion to change. Instead, the province and its dominant ethnic population, the Serer, can be moved from the historical backseat to which they have been consigned and recuperated as bona fide actors in and contributors to regional history, who can, in turn, reclaim a legitimate place in the space of Senegal’s political modernity.

Finally, this chapter also is indebted to developments in the archaeological literature of Senegal, which, for some years now, has certainly been mindful of landscape, albeit more in its commitment to track archaeological and geoenvironmental expressions at multiple scales and over the long term (e.g., S. K. McIntosh and R. J. McIntosh 1993) than in an explicit concern with landscape as conceptual framework. Drawing on this tradition of region-wide research, recent archaeological work in Senegal has mounted an appreciative critique of earlier historical scholarship (S. K. McIntosh 2001; see Richard 2009 for a review), driven by the pursuit of “small narratives” that relentlessly supplement the “master narratives” of the nation – in other words, the sidelined material histories of under-represented groups (ethnic and religious minorities, slaves, women) and geographic peripheries that simultaneously undermine the certitudes of canonical history while forming the necessary underside to the making of Senegal’s past, present, and future.

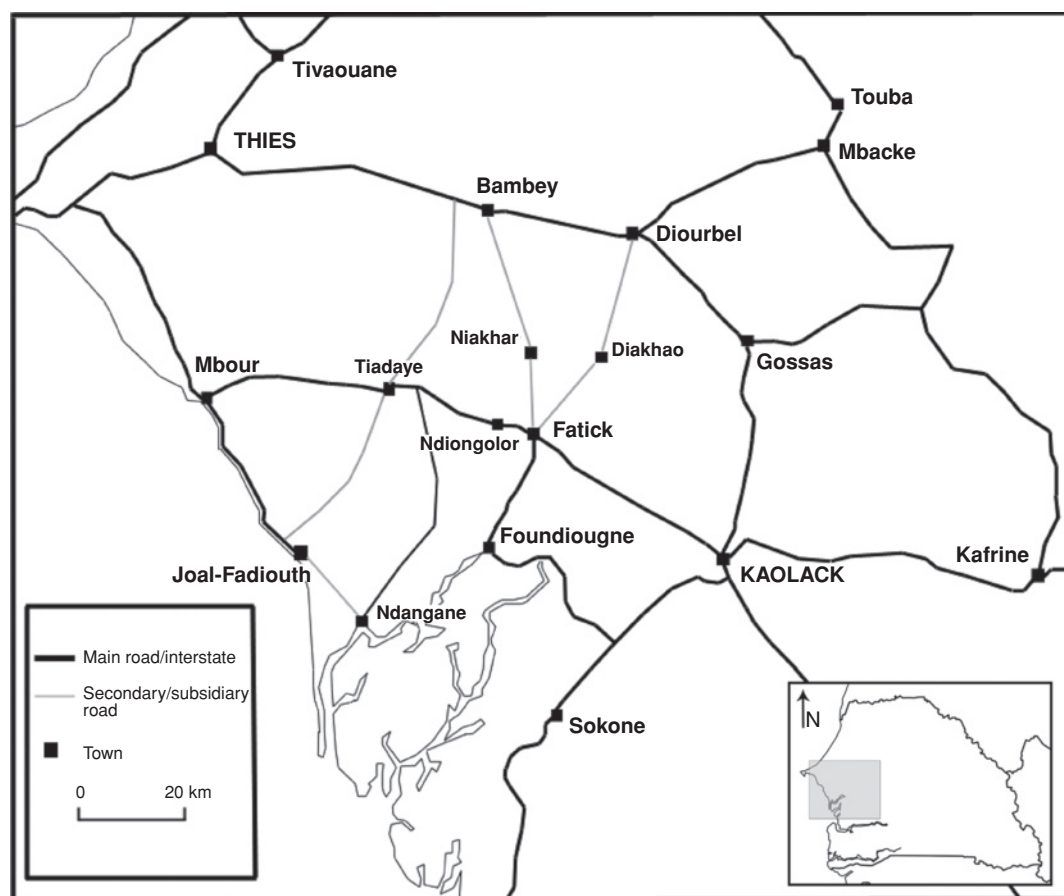
ATLANTIC TURBULENCES AND SENEGAMBIAN HISTORY

The past 500 years mark a turbulent period in the political–economic history of Senegambia, one defined by the collapse and emergence of regional polities, the lures of the Atlantic trade, gradual immersion into the world economy, Islamic revolutions, and incorporation into colonial empires. This period, traditionally, has been examined through the lens of large coastal or riverine polities deeply enmeshed with oceanic commerce and historically well documented, such as the Wolof kingdoms of Waalo and Kajoor, the Soninke state of Gajaaga in Senegal, or the Mandinka polities lining the Gambia River (Barry 1972; Bathily 1989; Becker and Martin 1975; Klein 1977; Wright 1997). Sifting through European accounts and oral traditions, historians have written compellingly about the disruptive effects of Atlantic and colonial interactions on local African societies caught in a spiral of social disintegration, chronic warfare, slave raiding, political upheavals, and ecological crises (Becker 1986). The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are often viewed as corresponding with the ascendance of strong, predatory kingdoms – feasting on peasant populations, growing rich from the proceeds of the slave trade, yet increasingly dependent on foreign commodities for their reproduction (Klein 1992). In this light, some of the scholarly literature has

equated Atlantic contacts with Senegambia's irreversible economic dependency on the outside and its crumbling political autonomy, underdevelopment, and loss of historical agency (e.g., Barry 1998; Curtin 1975; Rodney 1982; Searing 1993).

Against this broad historical backdrop, it is nevertheless possible to discern a more nuanced picture of Atlantic encounters by looking at the experiences of smaller polities that played a secondary role in oceanic transactions. One such more distant participant was the coastal kingdom of Siin in Senegal, which witnessed firsthand the momentous changes that reshaped the political geography of the region. Once a vibrant frontier on the margins of Sahelian empires and powerful regional states (Figures 3.1, 3.2), the Siin appears to have oscillated between a variety of political arrangements throughout its history, from loosely integrated village communities to centralized polity (Galvan 2004; Gravrand 1983). Oral traditions are rife with narratives of sweeping population movements, tracing the

Figure 3.1
The Siin-Saalum region
of Senegal.



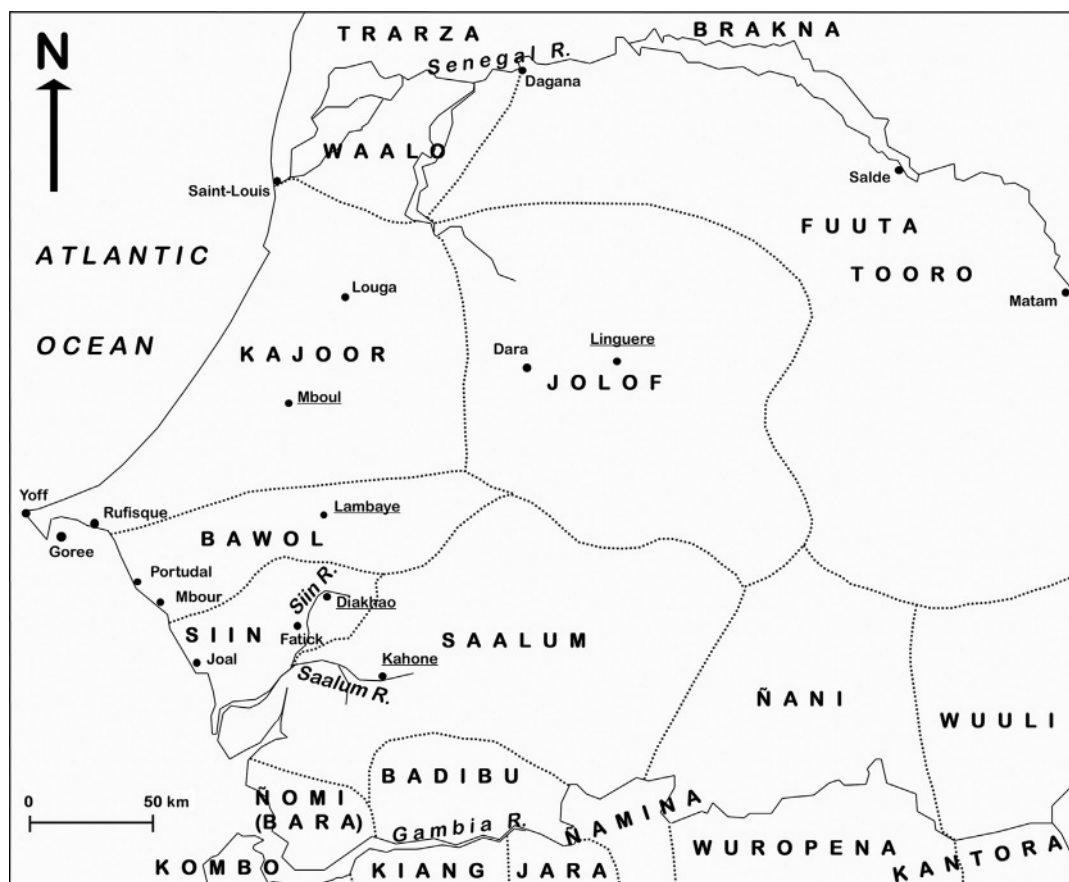


Figure 3.2
Precolonial kingdoms of
northern Senegambia
(c. 1850s).

kingdom's origin to Mandinka migrations in the mid-fourteenth century (e.g., N. Diouf 1972; Sarr 1986–1987). From the 1450s onwards, historic accounts pick up the storyline and depict the Siin as a modest participant in Atlantic commerce but one increasingly affected by the region's deteriorating political climate and dependence on imported goods (e.g., Klein 1992; Mbodj 1978). By the nineteenth century, this corpus of documents grows into a rich, if uneven, database for studying the local impact of the colonial conquest or probing the more distant past (Klein 1968, 1979).

Although rich in cultural detail, oral and documentary narratives afford a portrait of local histories painted only in the broadest of strokes. Oral traditions are frequently obscured by uncertain chronologies, factual license, and stylized presentations of the past (Henige 1974, 1982; Lentz 1994, 2000; but see Barber 1991; Baum 1999; Schmidt 2006; Shaw 2002). Oral memory tends to gloss the complexities of historical change and process behind a façade of

sweeping population movements (Wright 1985). Although textual sources are more specific on the timing of events and processes, the settings they depict were perceived through the filter of cultural distance and can only be known reliably for the European trading posts and their close perimeter (Becker 1985, 1987). Collectively, existing sources shed meager light on precolonial social structures and political trajectories, especially for the more remote past. They leave the dynamics of population encounters and cultural contact unspecified, and they offer a very spotty coverage of the impact of outside forces on the cultural fabrics of local societies.

WRITING THE SIIN FROM THE MARGINS OF HISTORY

Despite its seemingly dynamic history, curiously, the Siin has been portrayed as a cultural backwoods, moored to a timeless past and shackled to the rock of custom. This historical discourse has roots deep in the colonial imaginary. Very early on, indeed, Siin's Serer people came to be seen as primitive agriculturalists barely touched by contacts with the outside (Boilat 1853; Galvan 2004:33–71).

In 1879, two years after the creation of the Siin protectorate, amateur ethnologist and colonial administrator Béranger-Féraud described local rural villagers in the following terms: "The Sérères are peaceful, [they] live off the soil to which they are extremely attached," and have little "taste for migration," before concluding that their "lack of industry failed to trigger sustained relations with the outside" (Béranger-Féraud 1879:279, 274). Unlike the French political reports and correspondence of the 1860s, which had focused on the alcoholism, degeneracy, and tyranny of the local political elite, military pacification now afforded a picture of Siin painted in the colors of reified tradition, trapped between the twin poles of social conservatism and cultural isolationism. It is in the crucible of France's colonial racial imagination, in effect, that subsequent images of the Siin and Serer populations congealed. The myth of the "typical peasant," held back by the burden of traditions, became one of the cornerstones of the colonial reflection on the Serer. This view is echoed by Aujas, who in 1931 wrote that "[d]espite the blending, unions, alliances with neighboring tribes, the Serer constitutes today for the foreign observer a very primitive individuality which has jealously retained its customs, beliefs, language, and religion. He did not let civilization cut into him a lot. His local evolution itself has varied

little throughout the centuries. There is then in him a type of humanity whose originality is undeniable" (Aujas 1931:293–94). Two years later, Geismar (1933:23) branded the Serer as the "very model of the Black peasant." Senegal's "colonial library" abounds with such references (e.g., Bourgeau 1933; Carlus 1880; Corre 1883; Dulphy 1939).

These perceptions, however, did not stop at the colonial offices in Dakar or Saint-Louis. Indeed, the colonial discourse on the Serer continued to frame subsequent writings on the region well into the postindependence period. Thus, they recur with surprising resonance in Paul Péliissier's monumental and authoritative study of Senegalese agrarian societies, which describes precolonial Siin as "the very model of egalitarian and anarchic peasantry" (Péliissier 1966:198). Linking past and present, he conjures up nostalgic evocations of a people wedded to land and cattle, industrious, respectful of the environment, fearful of the ancestors and earth spirits, tradition bound, culturally conservative, adverse to change and movement, and so forth. This remarkable "geographic patriotism" is praised as the natural expression of "a society which up to now has derived its strength and persistence from its fidelity to the past, from an essentially defensive political organization, from eminently conservative social structures" (Péliissier 1966:224).

These views are problematic on several levels, of course, if only for their flickering attention to the play of history, power, and discourse in the fashioning of colonial identities and the African past. And yet, the notion of "generic peasant" cannot be easily dismissed, insofar as it has broadly set the terms in which Siin's history has been interpreted, from colonial reports to the ethnographic and geographic work conducted in the decades following independence. Péliissier's views on rural Africa have been critical in this regard, both in providing a juncture with colonial perspectives and in influencing the development of later research on Siin's economy and society. Subsequent cultural geographers have drawn a sharp line between the precolonial era and its immobile institutions, and the post-peanut era, roughly the late nineteenth century, which in essence brought the Siin within the stream of history, world economy, and modernity (e.g., Dupire et al. 1974; Gastellu 1975). To be sure, some historians have been more sensitive to historical dynamism in the Serer past, drawing from oral traditions and written documents to trace deep-time population movements and recent political history (e.g., Klein 1968, 1992; cf. Galvan 2004). Yet, they have also stressed that

Siin's moderate involvement in the slave trade largely sheltered Serer populations from the rampant instability experienced by neighboring polities. In doing so, they have tended to map *political* changes against a rather placid *cultural* background, left relatively unmoved for centuries before colonial contact. In tacit ways, culture – the stuff of tradition – is accepted as a conservative force that endures through time and precedes politics – the stuff of history, motion, and change (see Dirks 1996 for a related point).

Although often ostensibly couched in the *longue durée* and material processes, archaeological research should recognize the salience of social contexts in understanding the recent and more remote past. In this light, historical construction, discourse, power, and the social landscape ought to form a critical scaffold for any exploration of the African past (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). Here, I follow the lead of recent scholarship, which has pleaded very cogently for the need to consider history as a *process* blending both reality and narration (Trouillot 1995; also Cooper 2005; Stahl 2001; Stahl et al. 2004). In the process of disentangling these threads, David Cohen (1994:xxii) urges us to examine what he calls the “folds and the layers of [historical] production that join the past and the present” – the making of historical memories, the contradictions between different models of the past, the discordant voices, the silences of history, and the broader discourses framing the whole (Moore and Roberts 1990).

The image of the typical peasant – with its implications of social stubbornness and stagnancy – has had a complex “social life.” The concept has combined and recombined with a variety of parallel discourses, keeping or losing some of its elements, but leaving a distinct imprint on the production of Serer history and the experiences of contemporary populations. Assumptions of the Serer peasant, pagan and backward looking, have trickled into popular consciousness. The trope has also framed how the region has been incorporated into national narratives and pushed to the marginalia of Senegal's history and modernity. Today, one finds a palpable sense of malaise across the Serer countryside with regard to its position in the national community – the feeling of being left out of state programs, a sentiment of marginalization and discrimination, and a sense of disempowerment when it comes to controlling local history (Faye 2003). These concerns can be seen as structural offshoots of what Momar-Coumba Diop and Mamadou Diouf (1990:46–47) have called the Islamo–Wolof model. The model refers to the long-term processes of political

peripheralization and cultural exclusion that have shaped Senegal's social landscape since the opening of the Atlantic frontier.

Over the past 500 years, Senegal's interactions with the world economy have increasingly privileged coastal areas dominated by Wolof populations, which have become the uncontested political-economic hub of the country and the center of gravity of national sensibilities. These material processes have been articulated and legitimated in a broader discourse, which accords a preponderant place for Islam, the Wolof language, urban lifestyle, and the Wolof way of life in the national imagination, while downplaying the importance of the pre-Muslim past, non-Wolof groups, and rural settings in national narratives. As a result, culturally and economically stigmatized groups like the Serer of Siin, or the Joola of Casamance, have been increasingly estranged from Senegal's imagined community. Another consequence has been the rewriting of the country's recent history as a tale of Wolof and Muslim achievements, focusing on the resistance to the forces of colonialism (M. Diouf 1990), a process amply assisted by state cultural politics in the post-independence era (Thioub 2002). In this narrative, the Serer and other peoples serve as a ready-made foil for the historic élan and success of Wolof populations, occupying what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003:7–28) names the “savage slot” in Senegal's national ethnic imagination.¹

In his recent examination of Senegal's history, Mamadou Diouf (2001:9–10) urges us to offset accounts of the Islamo–Wolof past with alternative visions of history produced and experienced at the periphery of Wolof hegemony. He makes the valid point that Senegal's past is an ensemble of pluralities sharing a common field of historical experience; as such, it cannot be captured adequately without reference to the past of its peripheries, which were integral parts of the process of history. As spaces where social processes often are in a state of *becoming* (and thus acquire particular salience), margins, frontiers, peripheries, and interstitial settings provide alternative windows into regional trajectories. Juxtaposed over broader patterns, these settings reveal unseen textures and variability in historical experience and expose silences that haunt historical discourse, while stressing that different peoples are part of a common history and geography of exchanges.

This is one such alternative history that I propose to explore in the rest of this chapter, an alternative that navigates between archaeology and history, between experience and representation, and between

the past and present to retrieve the distinctive qualities of Siin's past without losing sight of its inscription within the broader stream of Senegambian history. Because of its ability to confront material culture with more "logocentric" lines of evidence (Stahl 2002), archaeology is well positioned to expose the contradictions between *lived* history and historical *representations* (Trouillot 1995), thus promising fresh understandings of the past (Pauketat and DiPaolo Loren 2005; Schmidt 2006; Schmidt and Patterson 1995). Recent work has shed increasing light into Africa's past by revisiting established historical scenarios and expanding our understanding of political economy, trajectories of complexity, and social variability across the continent (DeCorse 2001; Ogundiran 2001; Ogundiran and Falola 2007; Stahl 2001, 2002, 2005).

In many respects, Siin is an ideal case study for investigating these issues because it provides a number of epistemic vantages into the Senegambian past: (1) The region appears to have exhibited a broad range of political forms – spanning the heterarchy–hierarchy spectrum during its history; (2) It was embedded in different scales of economic and social networks; and (3) It is described as a political frontier in the pre-Atlantic Era and remained an influential, if secondary, player in Atlantic exchanges. These characteristics clearly resonate with recent anthropological advocacy for grappling with complexity through the more de-centered angle of rural hinterlands and political peripheries (Amselle 1998; Kopytoff 1987; LaViolette and Fleisher 2005; MacEachern 2005; Schwartz and Falconer 1994; Stahl 2001; Stein 2002), a trend also emergent in Senegambian history (Baum 1999; Hawthorne 2003; Klein 2001; Linares 1987; Searing 2002). These characteristics are also consistent with the broader project to re-think African political change outside of the canons of evolutionist thought, in a light attentive to history, political economy, landscape, and alternative social logic.² In other words, the region shows clear potential for illuminating the diversity and broader contours of historical developments on this stretch of the African coast.

THE SIIN LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT: METHOD AND EVIDENTIAL ARCHIVES

Recent archaeological research conducted in Siin in 2003 and 2004 offers independent evidence for assessing conventional historical scenarios of complexity (Richard 2007). Initial results from regional

survey, excavations, and extensive archival work provide a suggestive *entrée* into different scales of social and material existence that can be brought to bear on questions of historical experience. Research was framed in broad geographic terms, a strategy motivated by the need to develop an initial archaeological database for the region, which could guide subsequent research and be revised by the acquisition of new data and perspectives.

The large-scale survey was designed to retrieve surface information on settlement patterns and archaeological variability across the region (Figure 3.3). Three 200-km² survey zones were defined around the villages of Fatick, Diakhao, and Mbissel, which oral and documentary traditions associate with political formation and commercial activity. A 6 percent sample was drawn from each survey region and examined in full through a pedestrian survey. Over 180 sites or loci were identified and surface-collected, which exhibited a diverse array of assemblages, ranging from late Neolithic materials to recent historic and contemporary deposits. Sites also showed considerable size variation, from single finds and thinly spread surface scatters to large site complexes and areas of densely interconnected deposits covering several hectares. Several classes of sites were identified, the majority of which were habitation sites, characterized by widespread surface scatters of cultural materials and mound accumulations varying in size, number, and density. Survey material was complemented by limited excavations at seven locales, spanning the past two millennia. Although modest in scale, excavations were aimed at retrieving clues about settlement chronology (which is difficult to access through surface archaeological evidence), landscape history, as well as village life and cultural economy.

The final research component included the examination of available archival collections. This work aimed at gaining a clearer understanding of historical dynamics in the precolonial and colonial Siin, diversifying the repertoire of evidence and creating an ethnographic baseline to compare archaeological patterns. Extensive original research was conducted in the Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS) in Dakar and the Archives Françaises d'Outre-Mer (ANF) in Aix-en-Provence. This work focused largely on political, commercial, and military reports covering the 1850–1900 period and on original company records, letters, travel accounts, and correspondence spanning the late seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries. Prior to the 1860s, these documents tend to focus on commercial

transactions (with some references to political intrigues and conflict between the coastal kingdoms), but they provide rather anemic descriptions of cultural practices. While preliminary, these archaeological baselines can be used to examine the impact of Atlantic entanglements on past political economy in Siin. Archaeological signatures offer proxy measures of change in past cultural and spatial fabrics, providing an empirical ground for interrogating the course and forces of Siin's social history over the past 500 years. In tandem with other lines of evidence, the material record promises to contribute critical readings of long-term political dynamics in Senegambia and finer insights into Siin's historical encounter with global forces.

ATLANTIC TRANSFORMATIONS: SETTLEMENT LANDSCAPES AND POLITICAL ECONOMY IN SIIN (1400–1900)

Survey evidence suggests relative stability in Iron Age occupations during the few centuries that preceded the Atlantic Era (c. 600–1400 A.D.) (Figure 3.4). Siin's coastal façade seems to have supported the bulk of human occupations, although we see the emergence of a few hamlets and smaller sites in the interior, particularly along dessicated tidal channels and the low-rising plateau overlooking the dried-out bed of the erstwhile Siin River. Aside from a handful of large coastal sites, the picture is one of a dispersed habitat made up of small-scale, shifting communities leaving relatively impermanent traces in the landscape and no significant long-term accumulation (S. K. McIntosh and R. J. McIntosh 1993). While the region was connected to the Saharan economy (Garenne-Marot 1993; Thilmans et al. 1980), material assemblages are conservative and relatively homogeneous across the sites. They show some trade in regional ceramics and marine resources (e.g., Fernandes 1951) but little evidence of long-distance exchanges (e.g., Almada 1984; Brooks 1993; Cadamosto 1937 [1456]).

Following the advent of oceanic contact, settlements underwent a clear shift manifested by a sharp decline in human densities along the Petite Côte, yet village remains are present in the vicinity of Joal, Siin's principal trading post during the Atlantic Era (Figures 3.5, 3.6). Concurrently, the social habitat seems to have been reoriented towards a new sphere of interaction centered on the Siin heartland. Interior areas witnessed a demographic explosion, perhaps in

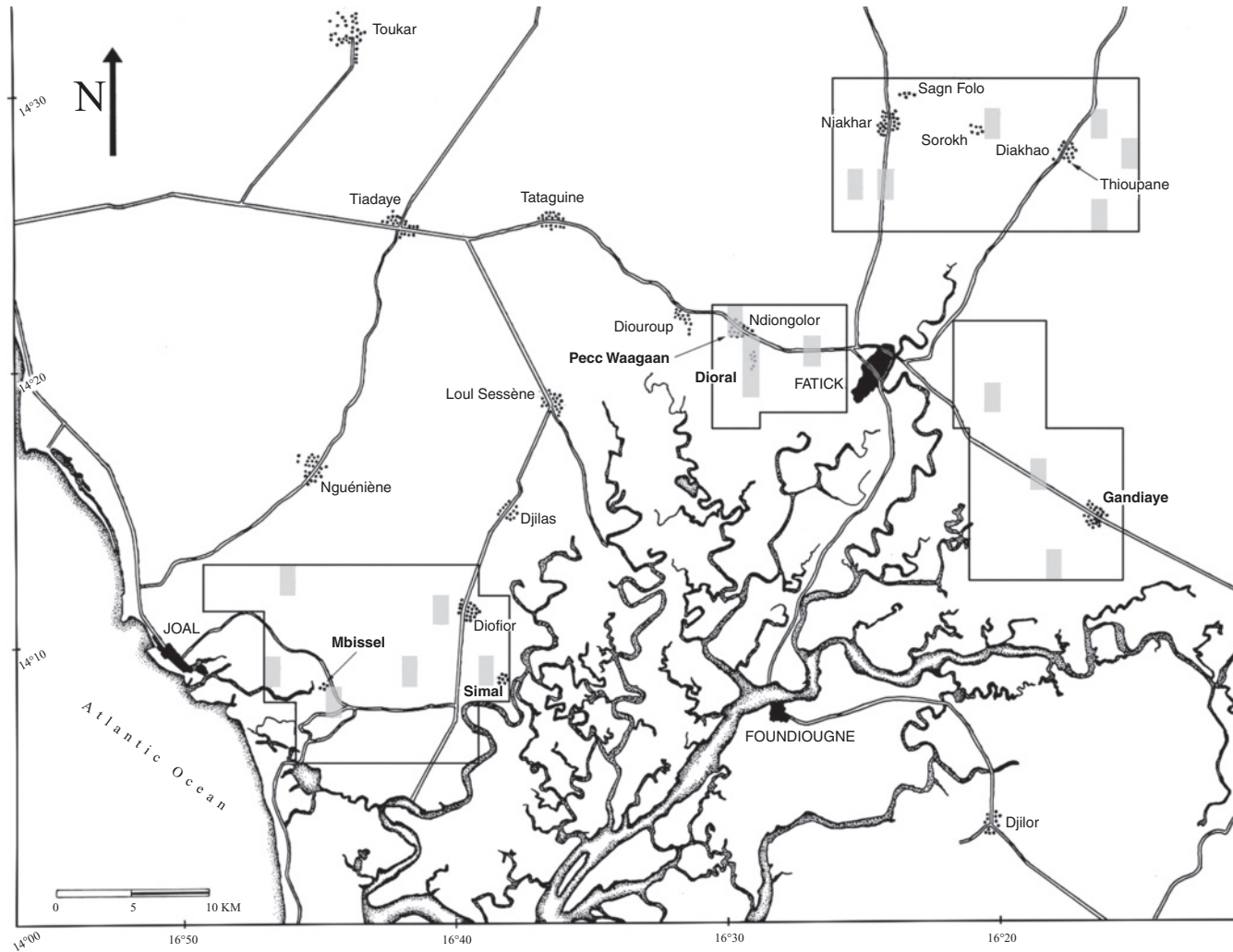


Figure 3.3

Siin Landscape Archaeology Project: 2003 fieldwork. The polygons represent survey regions; the grey rectangles refer to survey quadrats; the place names in bold typeface indicate excavated sites.

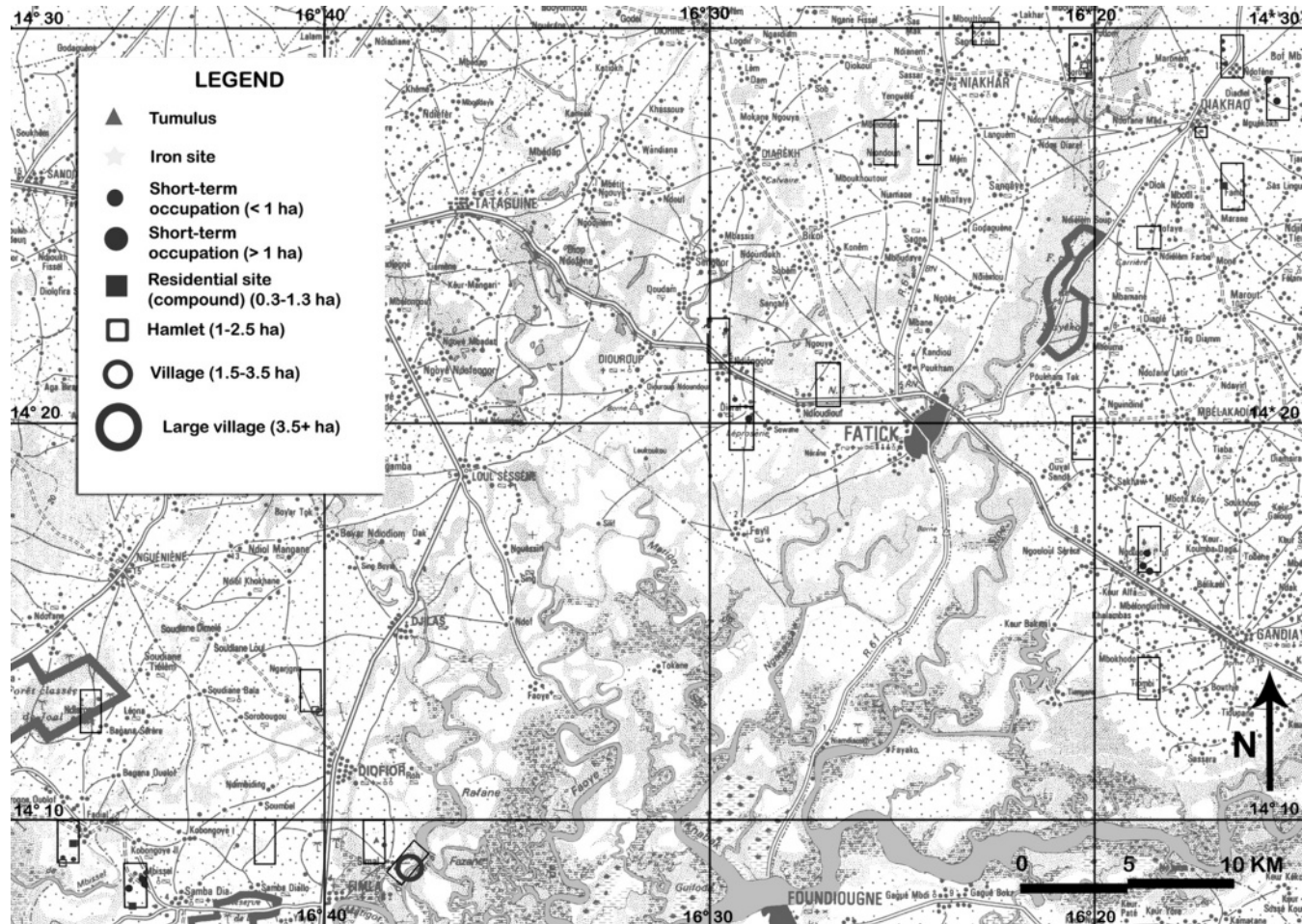


Figure 3.4
Siin settlement map (mid-first to mid-second millennium A.D.).

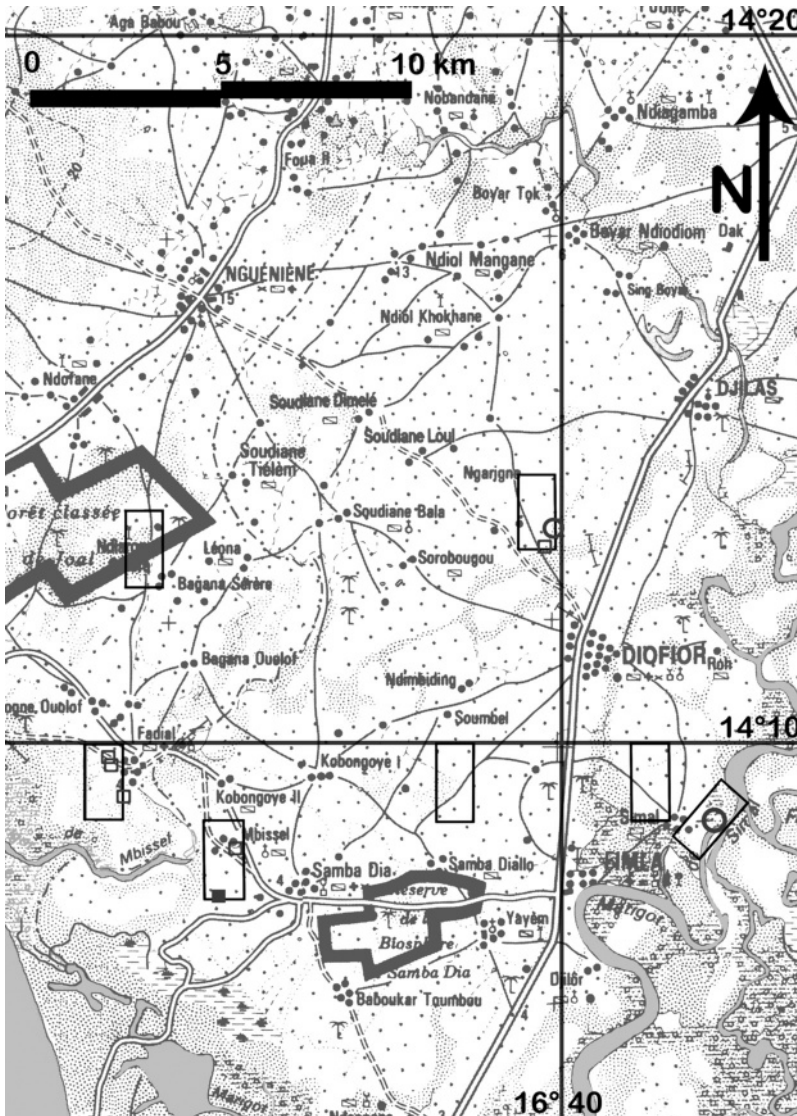


Figure 3.5
Petite Côte: Settlement
map, ca. fifteenth (?) to
seventeenth century.
Legend follows that
of Figure 3.4, namely
dot (short-term occu-
pation); solid square
(residential site, probably
compound size); empty
square (hamlet); circle
(village). The size of the
symbols is commen-
surate with actual site
size.

relation to the organization of the Siin kingdom and the growth of the Atlantic slave trade. Oral traditions associate this period with a wave of demographic shifts that accompanied the migration of the kingdom's political center towards the interior after the fifteenth century, when Diakhao became the capital (e.g., Becker and Mbodj 1999; Diouf 1972). At the same time, no major urban center or rigid settlement hierarchies stand out from the archaeological landscape. The few European testimonies we have on the capitals of coastal kingdoms lend support to this picture because they describe small villages that departed from neighboring settlements only in their

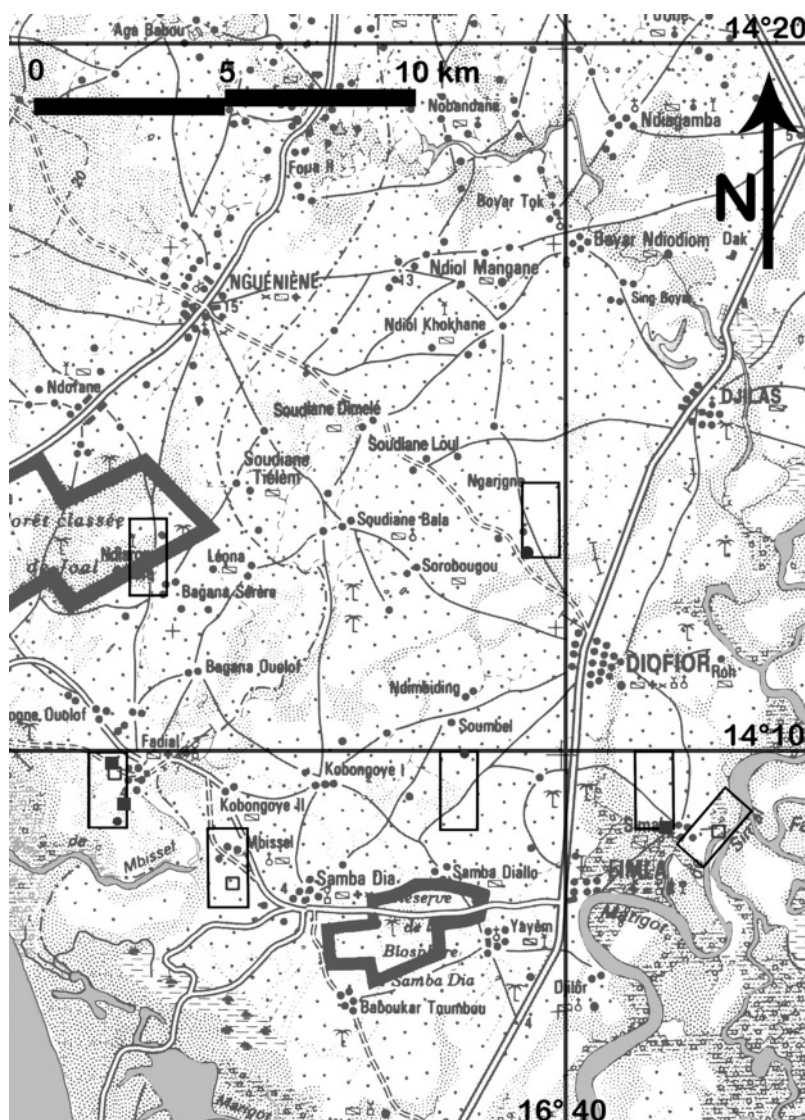
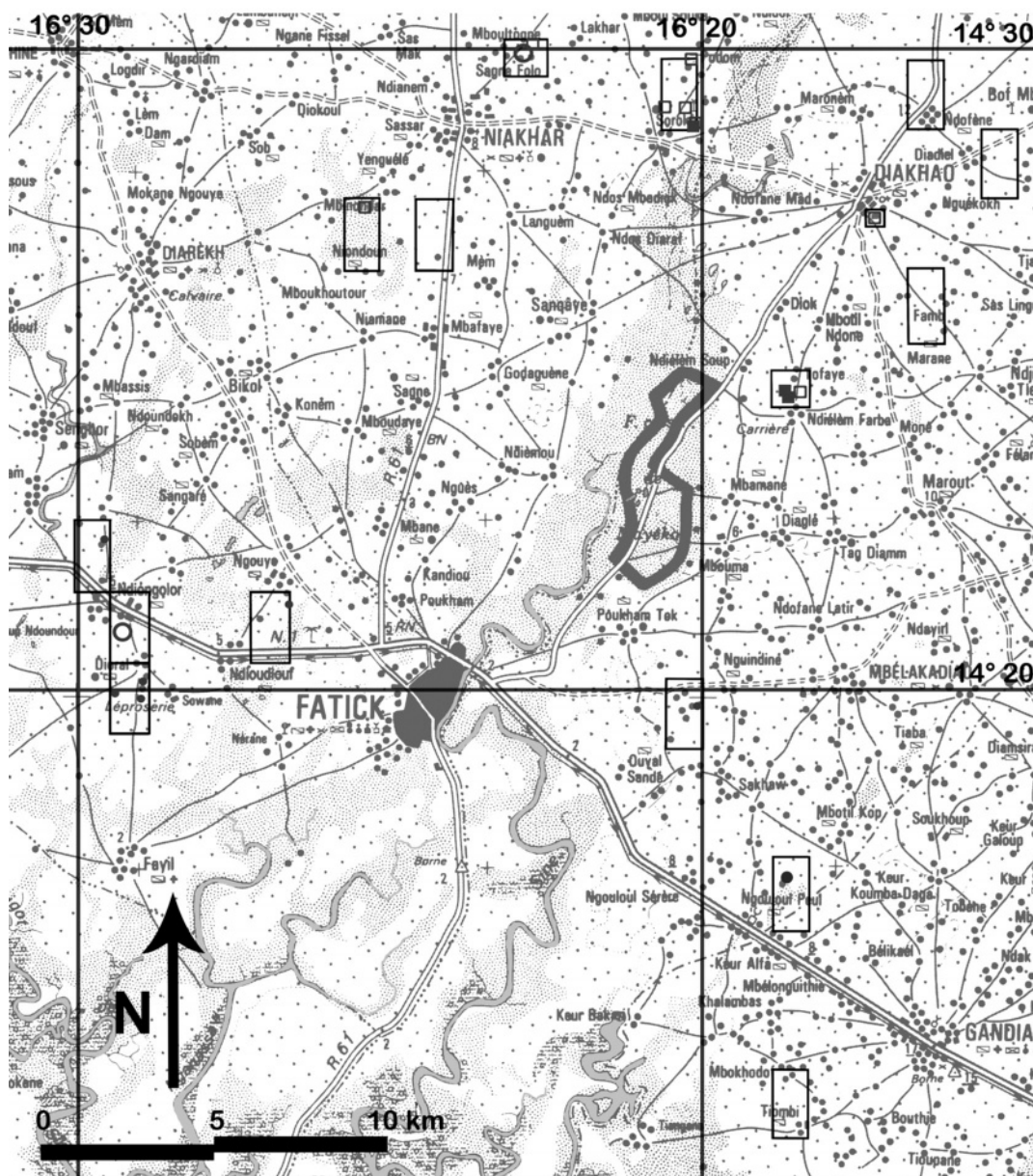


Figure 3.6
Petite Côte: Settlement
map (eighteenth to nine-
teenth century).

more defensive and partitioned internal organization (Boilat 1984 [1853]:143–45; Cadamosto 1937 [1456]; Desmenager 1766; Diouf 1879:349; Durand 1802:56; de Repentigny 1785 and Sauvigny 1822, in Marty (n.d.):11–12, 43–44; Mollien 1967 [1818]:40–2; Noirot 1890).

Settlement organization in Siin experienced another change during the eighteenth century. Between 1500 and the early 1700s, sites on average were larger, more concentrated, and occupied for longer periods of time. Although the eighteenth century brought another demographic increase, habitations normally were smaller and formed



a more dispersed landscape (Figures 3.7, 3.8). This subtle change may have coincided with the intensification of Atlantic exchanges, a period generally portrayed in European accounts as struck by famines, rising military conflict, and subsistence crises. The European correspondence between Gorée and Joal suggests frequent conflicts and skirmishes between Siin and its powerful neighbor in Kajoor and alludes to frequent but low-intensity military violence along

Figure 3.7
Siin interior (Fatick and Diakhao): Settlement map, c. fifteenth (?) to seventeenth century.

border villages (Clarkson 1789, in Thèse 1988; Dapper 1971:541; Labat 1728:4:243; Lamiral 1789; Loyer 1714:134–35). Exactions by slave warriors on farming communities also appear to have intensified, particularly during the nineteenth century (Boilat 1853).³

The constellated spatial arrangement could reflect responses to the escalation of instability, in particular a move away from border areas exposed to political conflict and towards the more insulated center. Small-scale skirmishes appear to have been frequent on political frontiers, turning interstitial areas into desolate no-man's lands marking fluctuating borders between the warring kingdoms (Doumet 1974:60–61; Mateo de Anguiano 1646–1647, in de Moraes 1995:352; de Saint-Lô 1637). The virtual absence of surface archaeological evidence from fringe areas examined during the survey seems to support documentary mentions. Archaeological patterns of disaggregation seem to indicate that new settlements splintered away from earlier villages and resettled a short distance away. The larger habitation sites of the fifteenth and sixteenth century may have represented obvious targets for raidings; spatial dispersal may have offered a viable defensive strategy or may have been a product of the rising political economy of violence.

This pattern stands in sharp contrast to previous arguments that the rise of the Atlantic slave trade caused massive depopulation and site abandonment in coastal kingdoms (Diop 1997, 2000). Instead, we observe a demographic increase involving smaller, hamlet-sized sites, a pattern documented archaeologically in the Falemme region of Senegal (Thiaw 1999). Also striking is the near absence of overt signs of militarization, such as gunflints or fortified sites, while these frequently turn up in neighboring regions (Lawson 2003; Thiaw 1999). Although the presence or absence of evidence offers meager insight into the materialization of violence, it is tempting to see this trend as supporting the suggestion that political instability in Siin never approached the disruptive proportions reached in neighboring polities (Barry 1998:88; Klein 1968:26).

More interestingly, these changes in settlement landscape suggest that the dispersed habitat, which reminded one colonial observer of the “immense *communes* [municipalities] rounding up an infinity of minuscule hamlets, not to mention isolated habitations, that one still encounters in many parts of France” (Reynier 1933:2–3) and which is believed to be an intrinsic long-term feature of Serer cultural repertoires, may actually be a fairly recent phenomenon associated with

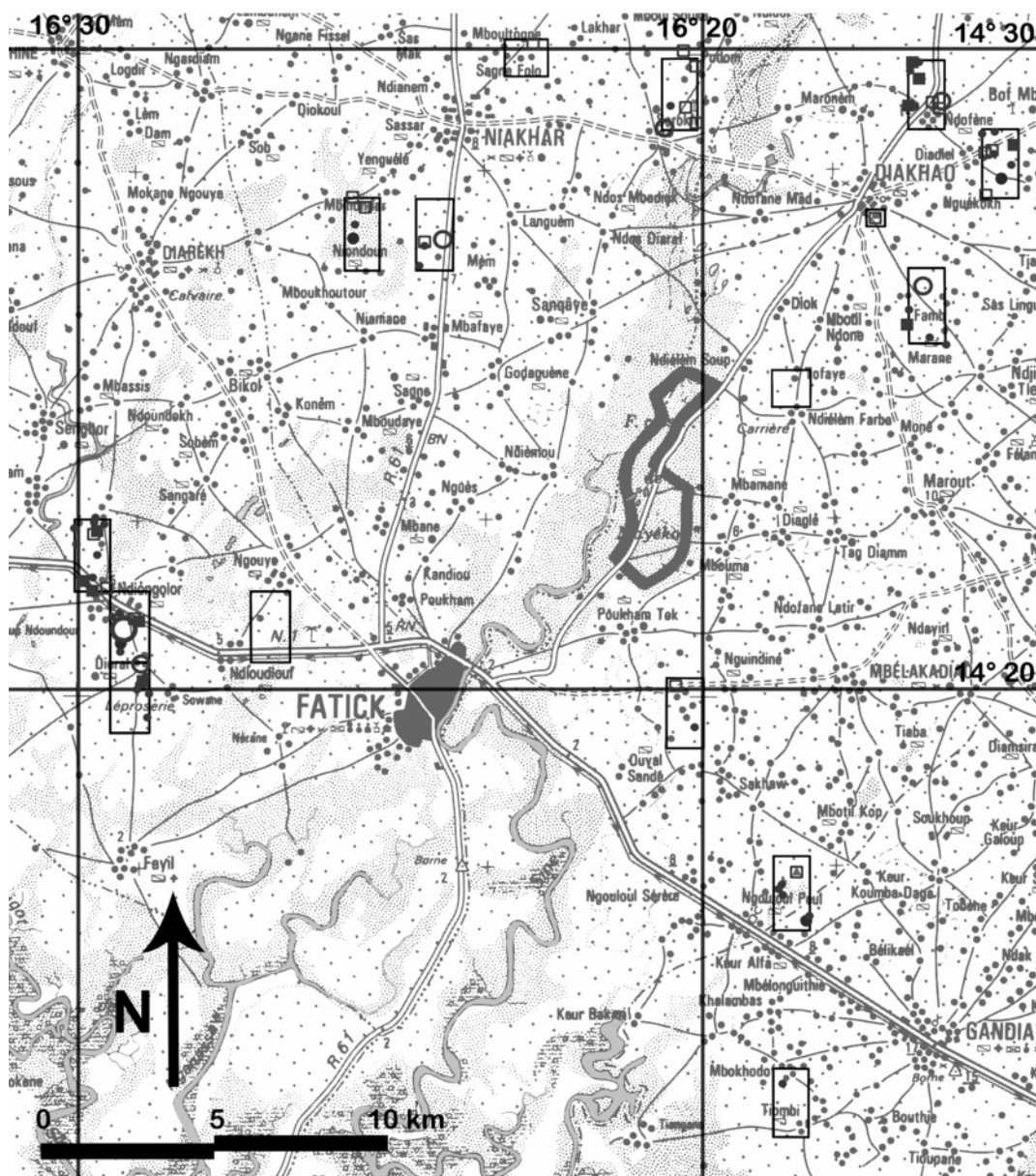


Figure 3.8
Siin interior (Fatick and Diakhao): Settlement map (eighteenth to nineteenth century).

political degradation and social violence (Anonymous 1936:9; Noirot 1892:168; Rousseau 1928:38–39). By extension, it is quite possible that other features of the Serer social landscape long thought to be “traditional” – the system of land tenure, agro-pastoral management, or residential mobility expressed in the documented practice of moving to a new piece of lineage-controlled land when the soils under cultivation became exhausted (Guigou 1992) – took shape during this period.

Settlement transformations also appear to reflect changes in social organization. The new habitation sites largely gravitate towards the orbit of political centers at Ndiongolor and Diakhao and could represent small satellite settlements associated with retainers and craft specialists working for the monarchy (M. Faye 2002:48–75). These spatial reconfigurations can be read in part as material echoes of an increasing concentration of authority and power in the hands of the monarch documented by contemporary observers (Doumet 1974; Le Brasseur 1776). More broadly, however, material landscapes present few if any signatures of political centralization, spatial hierarchy, or strategies of economic accumulation. Indeed, the maintenance of a scattered, relatively undifferentiated rural habitat, with consistent artifact inventories across the region, invokes the possibility that a more subtle power arrangement might have been at play.

Similar ambiguity arises from documentary records in the form of an uneasy dialogue between the hints and passing mentions given by traders and coastal visitors and the narratives espoused in official correspondence. There, we can discern a more nuanced picture involving variations in political power, with central authority contracting or expanding depending on the individual king's age, ability, kin relations, social networks, and political alliances. Historically, royal armies appear to have kept relatively firm control over the hinterland, but villagers along the Petite Côte seem to have enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy at various periods in time. In the mid-fifteenth century, for instance, Cadamosto (1937:54–55) observed that the Siin possessed no formal structure of government – a puzzling admission to many historians, since the Siin kingdom supposedly had been in existence for at least a century. Similar allusions to the sovereignty of coastal populations intermittently recur in European writings (Golberry 1802:2:111; Paris 1976:25), culminating in Aumont's description in 1850 of Joal as an independent republic on the eve of colonial penetration (Aumont 1850). By contrast, other accounts portray local monarchs as strong, centralizing figures holding a tight grip over the whole kingdom (Barbot 1992; Dapper 1971:533, 541;) and whose most faithful and docile subjects were the very coastal populations that appear so rebellious in other descriptions (Demanet 1767:111).

This cycling between control and autonomy seems to suggest a fundamental dynamism built into the cultural logic of the Siin state

(Richard 2007: chap. 6 and 10). The juxtaposition of an ideology of centralized rule at the regional level over a more dispersed authority at the local level created a certain imbalance in political power in which concentration and decentralization were at once mutually reinforcing, integrative, and destabilizing. The changing configuration of events and political economic conjectures could tilt the system either one way or the other while reshaping the conditions of power and autonomy of the state in the process.

The endurance of a relatively unstratified village landscape throughout the Atlantic Era could indicate that royal power did, indeed, work through, or parallel to, local social structures and spatial forms, even as monarchies and their enslaved warriors were becoming more consolidated and politically centralized. However, because Siin's settlement patterns lend themselves to a variety of possible interpretations, more robust material correlates are needed to pin down convincingly the dynamics and anatomies of political power during the Atlantic Era and define their enmeshment with past social landscapes (e.g., Smith 2003).

The limited diversity in trade imports and the homogeneity in material distributions during this period perhaps suggest Siin's ancillary position in European commercial circuits and regional trading networks, though the concrete traces of certain pivotal items of exchange (cloth, gunpowder, paper) unfortunately remain beyond archaeological reach. Regional distribution of spindle whorls appears to show some specialization of activities, particularly as these concentrate in "satellite" villages surrounding former capitals or in coastal settlements. A number of early documentary references signal that local cloth may have embodied forms of social differentiation in the seventeenth century (Barbot 1992:85; De Marees 1602, in de Moraes 1993:54; Fr. Gaspar de Sevilla 1647, in de Moraes 1995:363; Villault de Bellefond 1666–1671, in Thilmans and de Moraes 1976), raising the possibility that ideas of social distinction in Siin were reframed by the introduction of imported textiles (Hendrickson 1996; Stahl 2001). Regional variation in classes of prestige items may indicate uneven access to trade imports and differentiated consumption patterns – certain objects tend to turn up in political centers or land concessions controlled by ruling classes, though they never do so exclusively. Higher concentrations of toiletry and cosmetic glass were found in the surface and in excavated assemblages of two aristocratic residences (Thioupane and Pecc Waagaan), for instance, and these

sites also revealed a much richer variety and quantity of beads and European ceramics.

Overall, however, the same objects – beads, glass, and tobacco pipes – largely turn up on sites across the region, and no major disparities in wealth emerge in the regional settlement system. A letter by Le Brasseur (1776) suggests one possible reason for this homogeneity, namely the opening of commodity circuits to peasants and commoners. He observed, “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 quantity of millet without being obliged to give in exchange all the necessary merchandise?” (Le Brasseur 1776). Earlier European descriptions of women villagers’ bead paraphernalia hint that the sphere of Atlantic commodities was not a *de facto* royal monopoly but also could encompass Serer commoners (see DeCorse et al. 2003:79–80). The congruence of documentary and material patterns lends credence to Searing’s (1993:90) suggestion that Senegambia’s engagement with the Atlantic economy was structured by a “dual seller’s market, one dominated by consumption goods valued by the peasants, the other by aristocratic prestige goods.” French trading posts relied heavily on coastal kingdoms for provisioning, an economic domain that remained in peasants’ control and lay beyond royal regulation (Desmenager 1765; Dubellay 1723, 1724; Le Brasseur 1776; Searing 1988). While the realities of political violence in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are inescapable, the convertibility between peasant goods and foodstuffs and commodities acquired through the sale of slaves ensured the widespread circulation of trade imports in the local economies and the participation of peasants in external exchange on an unprecedented scale (Klein 1992; Mbodj 1978).

The threat posed by the creation of new consumer markets to traditional spheres of sumptuary consumption may have prompted uneven patterns of response on the part of notables and other elites. One such strategy may have involved the political manipulation of imported objects to reshape and retrench old spheres of social distinction. It is interesting to note that the bulk of the bottle glass assemblage (close to 80%) in Siin consists of fragments of gin and brandy bottles (*alcool de traite*), which are found in great numbers all over the region. Excavations at Pecc Waagaan, an early capital which apparently was reused periodically as such over the centuries (Almada 1984; Diouf 1972), stumbled upon a feasting pit that

contained a large glass assemblage. Unlike the expected high numbers of gin and liquor bottles, the pit yielded a majority of wine bottles, which are associated directly with aristocratic practices of conspicuous consumption. Perhaps we can see here an instance of “diacritical feasting” (Dietler 2001), in which the display and consumption of selected valuables serve to mark and refashion social distance (Lesure 1999; Stahl 2002). It is possible that as local access to Atlantic circuits became more porous and less circumscribed, political elites gradually appropriated wine as an emblem of distinction, publicly singling out elite consumption practices from those of commoners (see also Dietler 1990; Hamilakis 1999).

This being said, European trade goods (e.g., bottle glass and ceramics) do not become a significant material presence until the second half of the eighteenth century and more generally during the nineteenth century – which raises questions regarding the extent and timing of European impact on local cultural practices (Thiaw 2003). This suggests that local societies retained considerable initiative during that period and remained relatively peripheral to the Atlantic economy. Tobacco pipes combine local forms and the red-slipped, molded elbow bend pipes mass produced by the French in the late nineteenth century. Bead assemblages are dominated by Venetian beads and nineteenth-century Czech beads, but they also include a few local clay specimens. Glass is seen mostly in wine and gin bottles, joined in the 1870s by *alcool de menthe* flacons and mineral-water bottles.

We should be careful, however, not to homogenize the influence of Atlantic processes on local regimes of production, exchange, and consumption. Different classes of artifact in Siin have different social histories (Appadurai 1986; Myers 2001) entailing different entanglements with various spheres of domestic and political economies (Richard 2010; Thomas 1991). Here again, homogeneity at one scale may conceal finer nuances at more intimate levels of existence, affording partial glimpses of the manifold trajectories intentionally or accidentally caught in the ambit of Atlantic history.

It is only in the late nineteenth century that colonial imposition truly began to be felt in local consumption patterns and the restructuring of social space towards French commercial outposts (Galvan 2004; Guigou 1992). For instance, we note a palpable increase of post-1870s deposits in the Fatick region, which seems to support isolated archival references to rural migrations as the town became an important colonial commercial crossroads in the last quarter of the

nineteenth century (Rabourdin 1888a, 1888b; “Letter . . . to the Governor” 1889). However, even in the second half of the nineteenth century, European ceramics remain few in number and are generally limited to utilitarian earthenwares or stonewares and white-bodied earthenware plate fragments. By contrast, the sheer abundance of liquor bottles recovered during the survey offers a potent memento of the role of alcohol in processes of Atlantic and colonial entanglements (cf. Dietler 2006:237–41; Dietler and Herbich 2001) and provides undeniable support for the portrait of the rampant alcoholism that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century documents paint for the region.

“ROOTED IN THE SOIL”: MAKING ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES OF SENEGAMBIA’S PAST?

My first visit to the Siin in May 2001 highlighted very salient issues in the production of local history. Upon our arrival in Diakhao (the former capital), we were greeted with undisguised animosity by one of the village elders who was defiantly brandishing an old issue of Senegal’s iconic scholarly journal, the *Bulletin de l’IFAN*. With fiery animus, the man launched into a passionate condemnation of “those” historians who practice history from the comfort of their urban offices without ever setting foot in the regions whose past they purport to study. Siin’s real past, he contended, did not flow from the pens of Dakar academics; instead, it was “rooted in the soil” and declaimed by the sons of the land and heirs of tradition.⁴ We defused the tension by mentioning that we were interested in the more remote past, before the Gelwaar royals, and managed to walk away from the confrontation.

Many other anecdotes could be parsed out from memory that provide many illustrations of the intersection of past and present in the making of Siin’s past and the layers of power plays framing this process. All, however, would be linked by the same underlying message – the salience of the past in the present and the role of the landscape as the contested terrain where this dialectic plays itself out (Bender 2002; Dietler 1994; Shackel 2003). Designed as a short reconnaissance, my initial visit to the Siin transcended the requisite exposure to field conditions and archaeological remains. More unexpectedly, this trip and subsequent ones brought me face to face with the “underside” of Siin’s history – its social context, politics, and hidden economy (Roseberry 1991:22). In this light, the ethnographic

vignette we experienced condenses a number of critical themes in the making of Serer history.

First, local inhabitants, whatever their stations, often care deeply about their history. The past flashes in and out of sight in a variety of social contexts, giving shape and meaning to political interactions. Second, the production of history is not a democratic or an innocent business – it is a complex machinery of struggles over who owns and makes the past. Multiple versions compete, histories are reworked to suit the political moods du jour, and the geometry of power influences what is known of Siin's past and how it is told and remembered. Last, archaeological research is not immune to the play of political forces. As we set out to study the history of a landscape, we also become part of that landscape as subjects and architects caught in the web of social processes, power relations, and multiple levels of discourse framing the production of the past. Clearly, how history is made and remade matters a great deal. Material realities and historical discourses cannot be understood in isolation from each other.

I began this chapter with a brief excursus into the ideological architecture of historical discourse in Senegal, particularly as it has affected the perception of cultural minorities, such as those inhabiting the Siin. Scholars, unwillingly or not, have at times been complicit with these images and have relied on unquestioned assumptions in their narratives of the Serer past. These dynamics provide a powerful reminder that the past is a power-laden process blending reality and narration and that successful historical understanding must address the silences, mentions, and incongruities produced in the encounter between social experiences and representations (Hall 2000; Reid and Lane 2004; Schmidt 2006; Stahl 2001; Trouillot 1995, 2003).

The labor of African history is complicated by the partiality of sources and the ideological fields in which they were produced and used. Yet, as Jane Guyer recently reminded us (in Stahl 2004:258, 268), it is also haunted by the specter of those innumerable social strategies that fell prey to the process of "turbulence and loss" unleashed by the Atlantic trade. While a widening political economical field introduced new possibilities, it also foreclosed others and erased still more that have left no presence in the ethnographic or ethno-historic records. Using preliminary information on settlements and artifacts from the Siin, I have tried to show that a landscape-minded archaeology can combine with more traditional sources to reveal alternative histories that can shed fresh light on local historicities and their linkages to regional and global political economic fields. Such

research aims to promote fairer portrayals of the past that do justice to local historical expressions, or at least to those once-cardinal dispositions and tempos of change, social possibilities, and limitations embodied in material culture. It also encourages us to be accountable for the pasts we write and to be relevant in the present by being alert to how our writings are shaped by broader forces and how they impact our host communities.

While the nascent archaeological record of Siin raises many more questions than it answers, initial outcomes from the survey and excavations quickly dispel assumptions of direct continuities between the ethnographic past of the region and its more remote periods and help us ward off historical accounts written in the idiom of cultural inertia. At the same time, though there is indisputable evidence that the Atlantic Era ushered in a period of social turbulence, the archaeological record brings many shades of nuance to earlier scenarios of catastrophic devolution and political-economic subordination. More saliently, it underscores the need to recast our conventional assumptions of change and continuity in the African past – not as antinomial processes but as inseparable moments of a dialectic. Sometimes change serves the interests of stability and continuity, and aspirations of permanence or tradition can be powerful vehicles of transformation and hybridity (e.g., Pauketat 2001; Silliman 2005). Preliminary results point to tensions between and within our various archives and generate new questions and paths of inquiry. These considerations in turn can orient future research and guide our steps into more nuanced and complex visions of the African past, its political landscapes, and their entanglement with the broader world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research reported in this chapter received financial support from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, National Science Foundation, Syracuse University Graduate School, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Patrick Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, and Bremen Stiftung für Sozialanthropologie. The ideas presented here developed as part of my doctoral work, and I am indebted to Christopher DeCorse, Martin Klein, Doug Armstrong, and Theresa Singleton for their help and suggestions at various stages of the project. I also wish to thank J. Cameron Monroe and Akin Ogundiran for inviting me to contribute to this volume and the other participants for their

comments. Naturally, I am responsible for the errors that may have escaped their careful scrutiny or those left in place by my own stubbornness. Final words of thanks must go to the team of students, led by Mor Faye, who expertly carried out the fieldwork, and to the friends, families, and municipalities in Dakar, Ndiongolor, Diakhao, Fatick, and Diofior that supported our stay in 2002–04.

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NOTES

1. The state has a long history of involvement in the construction of national culture and history in Senegal dating at least back to the days of President Léopold Sédar Senghor. Senghor fancied himself a bit of a mythmaker and crafted a “symbolic” genealogy, which combined African and European elements rather than drawing on specific ethnic pasts, to serve as the “historical” foundation for the Senegalese nation-state. Subsequent presidents have moved away from Senghor’s vision towards a less consistent national project, a more decentralized and performative yet no less authoritative cultural politics articulated on the figure of the *griot* (Diop and Diouf 1990; Thioub 2002). This project has increasingly gravitated around Wolof heritage and historical memory. More recently, the government of Abdoulaye Wade has taken more direct and controversial steps in

favor of a Wolof- and Islam-centric politics (M. Diouf 2000). Witness, for instance, the ill-fated – and largely unpopular – attempt to redefine the country's administrative subdivisions in the image of putative “historical provinces,” or the effort to “alphabetize” governmental bureaucrats and functionaries in Wolof, one of the six national languages (Sèye 2001). For a more general examination of the power of statist narratives in shaping history and memory, see Roberts (2000).

2. It would be impossible to draw a comprehensive list of this vast literature. For a short selection of historical and anthropological analyses grounded in Africa, see Bayart (2006), Comaroff (1998), Guyer (1993, 2004,) Guyer and Eno Belinga (1995), Mbembe (2001), McCaskie (1995), Moore (2005), Piot (1999), and Shaw (2002). For important examples in African archaeology, see Chouin and DeCorse (2010), Kus and Raharijaona (1998, 2000, 2006), Mitchell (2005), R. J. McIntosh (2005), S. K. McIntosh (1999), Monroe (2007), Norman and Kelly (2004), and Stahl (2004a).
3. Official correspondence between the military post in Joal and Gorée, and between the governor and metropolis during the 1860–1890 period, contains numerous documents lamenting the escalation of violence and tensions between commoners and the military aristocracy. See, in particular, archival series ANS 4 B 51; 4 B 63; 13 G 23; 13 G 314; 13 G 319; 13 G 321; and 13 G 329.
4. As became clear during the conversation, this resentment had been triggered by a short article from a historian at the University of Dakar that presented a somewhat unflattering portrait of king of Siin Koumba Ndofeen and his victorious military campaign against jihadist Maba in 1867 (M. Guèye 1999). Our interlocutor found much to disagree with in Guèye's interpretations and repeatedly urged us to refer to Niokhobaye Diouf's (1972) seminal synopsis of Serer traditions, featured in the journal he was carrying. There, he implied, we would find Siin's “authentic” history. In effect, unlike Guèye – an urban, Wolof outsider – Diouf has impeccable credentials – not only is he Serer and a relative of our interlocutor, but he is also a member of the royal family and thus close to what can be seen as the “dominant” or “official” ideological strand of historical memory. In other words, our host equated a particular kind of pedigree – *both* grass-roots *and* royal, namely – as the condition of true knowledge. Such forms of strategic maneuvering have gained much purchase among Siin's royal family as it seeks to stake out the ground of its legitimacy in a historical arena where local pasts are increasingly contested and encroached upon, from within and without (e.g., Sud Quotidien 2000; Galvan 2004).