

Jeanelle Augustin
September 18, 2016

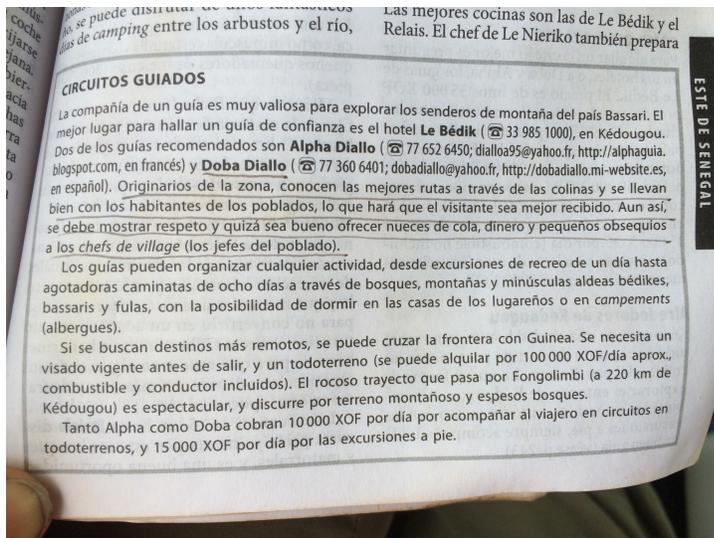
AIA Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship 2016
Senegal: Bandafassi

Thanks to the generous contribution of the Archaeological Institute of America's New York Society and the Jane C. Waldbaum Fund, I was able to attend to Institute for Field Research's summer program in Senegal. Under the direction of Dr. Cameron Gokee and Dr. Matthew Kroot, my team and I worked in the Southeastern town of Kédougou near the borders of Mali, Guinea, and the Gambia River. I am fascinated by the practice of archeology as an enactment of our theoretical navigations of authenticity and value. Material culture may be reified or thrown into a shard bag. What does it mean to discover as opposed to uncover? Why and how is knowledge buried or obscured?



At Île de Gorée's (Gorée Island) Maison des Esclaves (House of Slaves), the tourguide switched between three different languages to explain the island's role as a Westernmost African outpost in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. In English, the guide used the word "genocide", but in French the guide described the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade as "la destruction totale de la famille noire." He had code switched in a magnificent way. I found myself most intrigued by the local tour guides, fixers, and drivers who surrounded us and made our fieldwork possible, so I began interviewing them.

Sitting in imported jeeps or sleeping under baobab trees for hours on end while we dug ditches in the middle of the bush, I wondered what our guides thought of us. What were we looking for? It was a delicate balance of power: a mix of money, knowledge, and boundaries. Guides such as Doba Diallo and Marc Keita granted scholars and tourists access through language, passage, our beloved chaises anglaise, and wifi sticks. Doba



and Marc depended on us financially, yet held executive curatorial power. Between the two men, they spoke 15 languages and knew the Fuuta Djallon inside out. Furthermore, we were at the total mercy of their wives who made our thieboudienne and maffé. Marc

showed me around the chronically closed UNESCO Bandafassi Cultural Center, "We all thought jobs would come." Cleaning ladies in blue uniforms mopped steaming tiled walkways. It was 10 am, well over a hundred degrees Fahrenheit in the middle of Ramadan. The slopping water evaporated into the open blue sky. The gates were padlocked closed. It was a perfect picture of West African bureaucracy in()action. Over the course of my time in field school, I worked to better understand our impulse, both scholarly and personal, to delineate, excavate, and publicly claim a particular history. To situate oneself in an acknowledged historical narrative, the freedom to or from history. To paraphrase a Sudanese proverb, we aspire to give our children two gifts: the gift of roots and the gift of wings. Archeological fieldwork provides students the tangible opportunity to move away from armchair anthropology and romanticized ahistoricity. As we unearth artifacts, we unearth the present. We hold remnants of lives lived.