



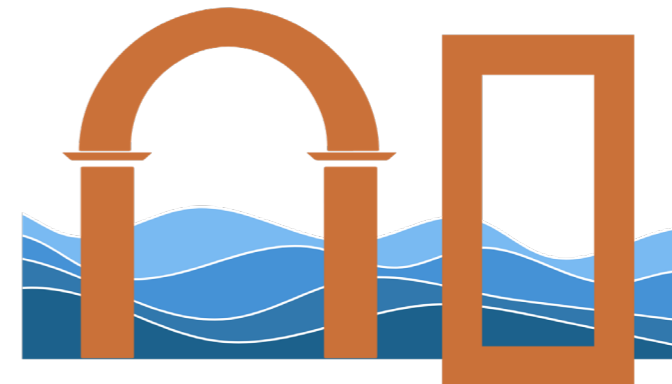
MAY 2024

GOREE

MEMORY PALACE

GOREE

MEMORY PALACE



REVITALIZING THE ROUME PALACE RUIN ON GOREE ISLAND



LUND
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Goree island view of the main harbour from the ferry, 2019



ABSTRACT

Gorée is a small island 2 kilometres off the coast of Dakar, Senegal, known as a significant location of the Transatlantic slave trade, and a destination for locals and tourists interested in the subject. From French colonial cultural policies to post-independence national discourses, several buildings on Gorée became places where memory was crystalised and publicised.

The most prominent being the House of Slaves, responsible for amplifying the symbolic discourse of African slaves transiting through the “Door of No Return” onto the international stage. Archaeological and historical findings point to a different history, but the narrative predominates to this day and sustains the tourist economy.

This thesis focuses on another significant heritage site in Gorée: the Governor’s Palace ruin. Its oceanfront location and good condition provide an opportunity to complement existing cultural structures by creating a different kind of Commemorative space - a Memory Palace dedicated to the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Different from a Museum or a Heritage site, the Memory Palace is turned towards an understanding of the past to enrich and inform contemporary culture. The approach consists of using the

responsibility of Memory as an interactive substance: material to encounter, stories to experience and heritage to immerse ourselves in.

The outcome is for Memory to become a fuel for creative expression, a common ground for artists of different backgrounds to discuss, explore and struggle with a painful and oppressive past productively. Redefining the colonial Roume Palace as a Gorean cultural icon aims to be a gesture towards opening up the stage to different narratives, allowing visitors to travel through a Memory Palace bridging the space between the past and contemporary Senegalese culture.

AUTHOR’S NOTES

1. This thesis is the outcome of a personal history of multiple visits on the island of Gorée throughout 18 years of residency in Senegal as a French-Korean expatriate. Though my lineage is not African by blood, it has been impregnated with the experience of living within Senegalese culture, both in rural and urban settings. With this privileged position of an accustomed outsider, I make my proposition, hopefully you will find, with awareness and care.

2. The drawings in this book were all made by the author, and the pictures taken by the author’s relatives, unless attributed to another person.

1. A CLASH OF MEMORIES



INTRODUCING GOREE AND THE STUGGLE FOR MEMORY

Gorée is a small island 2 kilometres off the coast of Dakar, known as a significant location of the Transatlantic slave trade, and a destination for locals and tourists interested in the subject. The House of Slaves, with the infamous Door of No Return, has gained renown for the moving oral tale of imprisoned slaves waiting to be shipped overseas performed by its curator Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye. Though scholars have debunked this story on several occasions, the generated economic activity continues to this day and sus-

tains a local community of artisans, and restaurant and hotel owners.

The island has however truthfully been a link in the chain of slavery and therefore carries a memory that is worth keeping and making visible for the public to participate in. Though several attempts have been made to embody this significant history, such as the Castel-Almadies memorial or the IFAN museum, there seems to be a surprising lack of investment in the architectural expression of these objects, and further comments can be made on their poor upkeep. Visitors and pilgrims to the “memory island” have no significant place to connect with the heritage of slavery in Goree outside of the controversial House of Slaves.

Classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978, Goree can and somehow should place Senegal on the map internationally, and within the African diaspora in particular. It is both a quiet 1600-people-strong pedestrian island with colourful townhouses and a symbol of no less than the whole transatlantic slave trade in universal consciousness.

This thesis aims to consider the weight of this role by looking into the physical remnants of this painful history and the narratives which have been conveniently wrapped around certain buildings.

Others, such as the Governor’s Palace, are falling into ruins, though they carry many untapped architectural potentials.

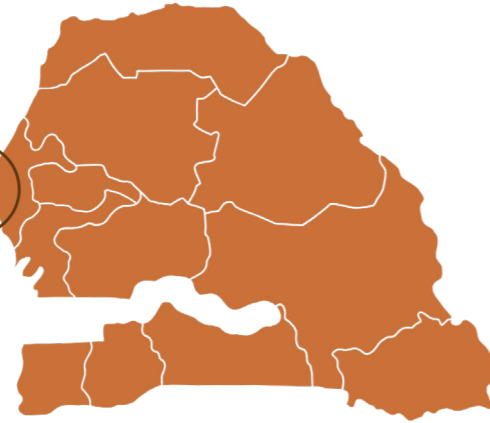
This worn yet sound stone construction had previously found ways to reinvent itself into multiple institutions, including a school, printing house and hotel, but is now partly squatted by furniture builders and mostly in a state of disuse. The Governor’s Palace benefits from a striking location, with its courtyard like a terrace onto the sea, and its arcades giving a lookout from the front entrance through the ground floor and onto the waves on the coastal side. One can even

draw a parallel between this visual effect, and the Door of no Return, as an attempt to propose an alternative to the House of Slaves in creating a place of more culturally-grounded and evidence-based memory.



GOREE

DAKAR MUNICIPALITY



Republic of Senegal



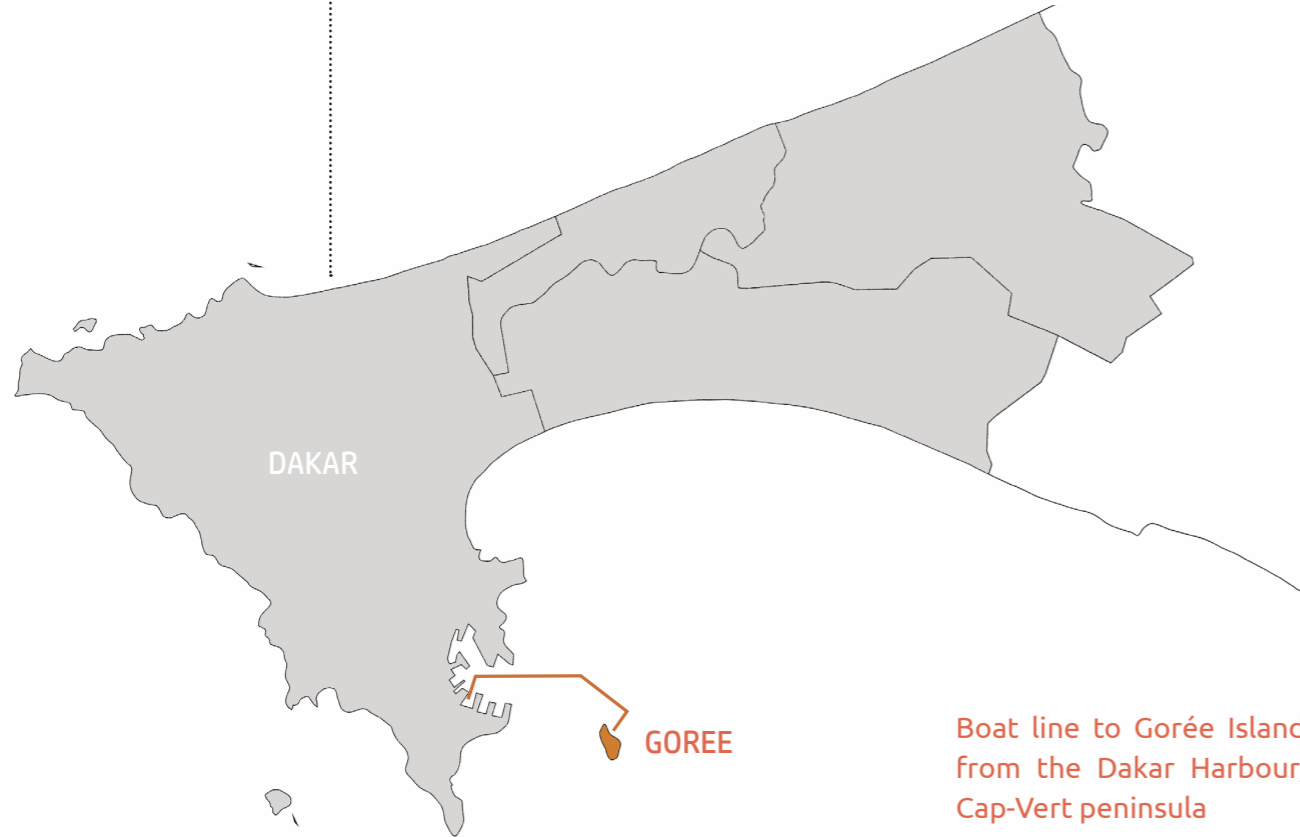
196,722 km²



18,384,660



French-Wolof-Serer
Diola-Hassaniya Arabic
Pulaar-Soninke
Mandinka



Boat line to Gorée Island
from the Dakar Harbour,
Cap-Vert peninsula



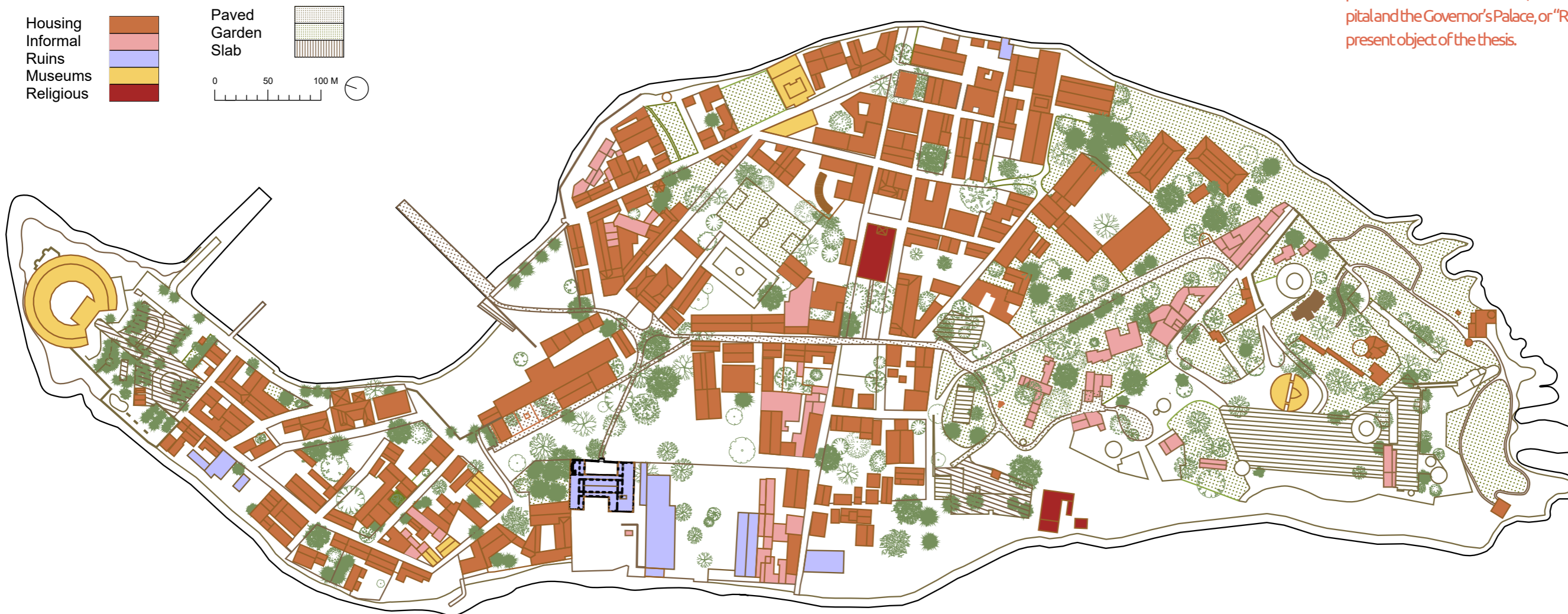
Gorée in the Transatlantic Slave Trade - 15th to 17th centuries, based on "Slave Trade and Slavery Routes" UNESCO 2006 Map

2. TOURIST ISLAND

A STUDY OF THE SITE AND CULTURAL ATTRactions

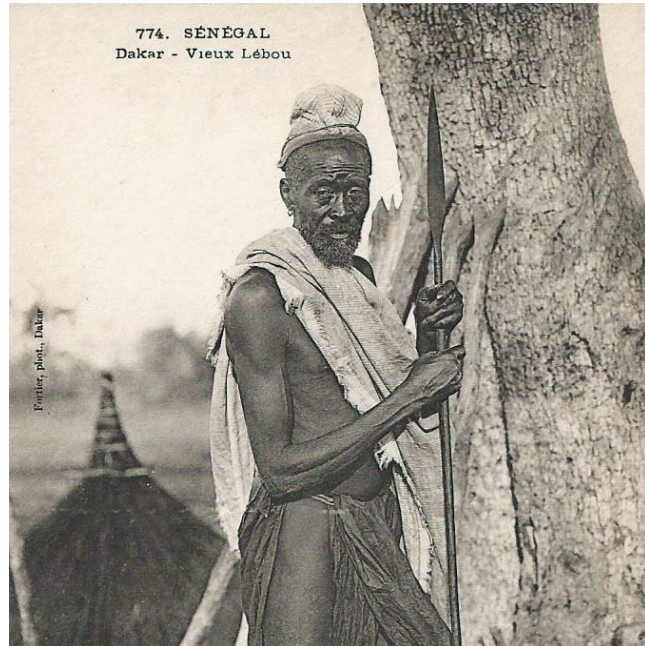
Gorée is an 18.2-hectare island of the Atlantic Ocean located in the Bay of Dakar, the Capital of Senegal, and constituting one of its 19 city districts. Around eighteen hundred (2018) people inhabit the island today, mostly in the central part of the island as the North and South ends are occupied by public installations. The Castel, the name given to the old Southern Fort, is the most vegetated part of the island and the least populated, though it harbours some informal dwellings.

Part of these are occupied by artists who have turned the main path to the top of the hill into an open-air gallery of paintings and various local crafts and souvenirs. Apart from the main paved road to the Castel summit, most of the narrow streets on this car-free sea town are simple sand paths, with a fair amount of public and private greenery along them. At the foot of the Castel, a Church and a Mosque represent the two religious institutions on Gorée. Lastly, some ruins are also present on the western coast, including the former Navy Hospital and the Governor's Palace, or 'Roume Palace' which is the present object of the thesis.



3. SLAVE ISLAND

HISTORY OF THE OCCUPATION OF GOREE



"Dakar - Old Lébou" François-Edmond Fortier, early 1900s

Free from the strong currents that made it difficult for ships to anchor all along the West African coast, Gorée Island was a strategic link in the Transatlantic slave trade for over 500 years. From a Euro-centric perspective, the volcanic island was easily defensible as it was protected from local chiefs by the sea and from sea attacks by rocks on three of its sides (Seck 56). However, Gorée is but the third name given to the island, originally known as "Ber", and many storylines have a claim to its material heritage.

In "Digging on Contested Grounds: Archaeology and the Commemoration of Slavery on Gorée Island, Senegal," Ibrahima Thiaw (Okamura and Matsuda 2011, 127) aims to untangle some of the popular beliefs and discourses held about the memory island. Archaeological findings provide a relatively objective ground to define a timeline of the occupation of Goree and have placed it among the earliest Afro-European settlements on the West African shores.

The first inhabitants were fishing communities who probably moved from the Cap Vert peninsula (Senegal) to the island. This was historically the territory of the Lebu ethnic group, whose villages preceded the city of Dakar. The Portuguese recorded their arrival in Gorée in 1445, to an inhabited island where they built a small church to bury their dead. The termite nests found in the deposits belonging to this period could explain the abandonment of the island by its original settlers. Another theory suggested by Thiaw is that the arrival of the Europeans could have also unsettled the island community, which had strong spiritual beliefs regarding the ocean, and pushed it to leave after sighting the first ships.

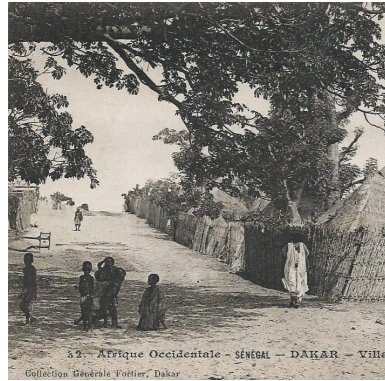
This was followed by a period of rival occupation by the Portuguese and Dutch, before being taken over by the English and French. The French had been present in Saint Louis in the north of Senegalese territory since 1638. They established themselves on Gorée in 1677, disputing the island with the English before gaining definitive control of it at the beginning of the 19th century until Senegal's independence in 1960.

Professor Searing (Searing 2009, 93) describes the emergence of "slave societies" of mixed origins established on the Atlantic islands of Saint-Louis and Goree throughout the 18th century. Serving the interests of the Atlantic trade, they were yet tied to African culture mainly through the signares, local women who gained social standing and commercial power by marrying European merchants. Signares and their mulatto descendants formed a class of "favoured middlemen," called "habitants" between the colonial power and the mainland. Over time, signare households gained dominance over the provision market on Goree, arranging for fresh water, food and other goods to supply the ships and the people involved in all hierarchies of the trade. Most of this labour was undertaken by slaves, women for the most part, owned by the Euro-African elite.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the House of Slaves was constructed (between 1780 and 1784) by Nicolas Pépin, heir to the famous Signare Catherine Baudet. Ibrahima Thiaw reflects on the lack of evidence related to large-scale transatlantic trading in slaves, which could make this particular house more suited to the remembrance of domestic slavery (Okamura and Matsuda 2011, 136).

GOREE

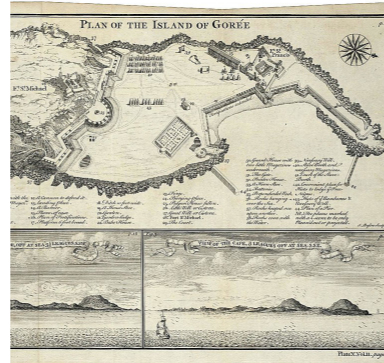
OCCUPATION TIMELINE



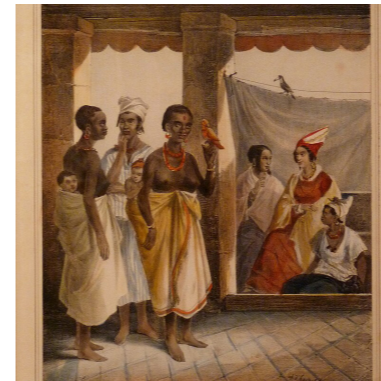
"Dakar-Lébou village" François-Edmond Fortier, early 1900s



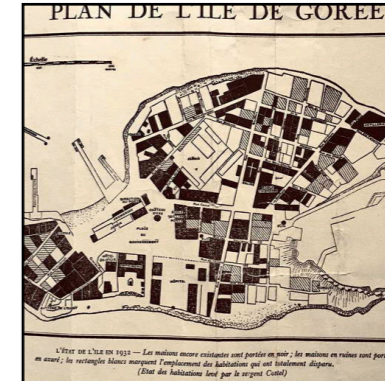
Cantino planisphere, 1502



Map of the island of Goeree and two views of Cape Verde. I. Basire Sculpt. 1745



"The Signare of Gorée with her slaves" d'Hastrel, 1840



Plan of Gorée, Gaffiot, 1933



House of Slaves, Quadri Adejumo, 2023

312 years of Slavery

500 years of colonization

Creation of African Diasporas in Gorée and the Americas

1000

1445

1536

1617

1677

1848

1960

1978

FIRST AFRICAN SETTLERS
"Ber"

Arrival of Lébou fishing communities from the Cap Verde Peninsula

Abandonment due possibly to termite invasion



Main archeological findings

PORTUGUESE ERA
"Ila de Palma"

Church built to bury companions who died in West Africa



DUTCH SETTLEMENT
"Gorée"

First European settlement
Forts Nassau and Orange built in North and on Castel.



BRITISH COLONY
FRENCH COLONY

Gorée island is a disputed location for the slave trade

Slave society of mixed race and cultures ruled by Europeans and signares



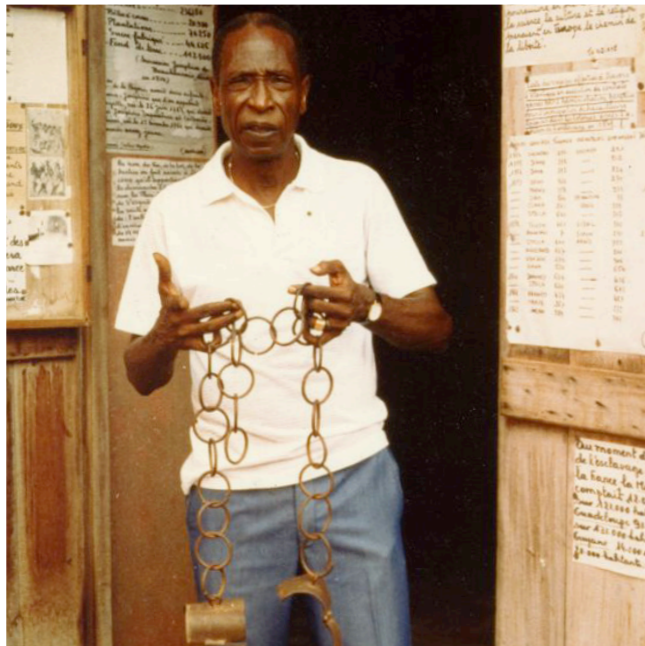
GOREE MUNICIPALITY

Independence of Senegal and growth of Dakar as capital

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE
"L'île aux esclaves"

First site on the list
Economic crisis of the 1980s
The heritage was not taken care of
Multiplied popular storytelling but lack of funding for archeological and historical research

4. CONFLICTING NARRATIVES



Joseph Ndiaye in the House of Slaves, Robert Brown, 2015

THE MAKING OF HERITAGE

Englobed in French West Africa (AOF), Senegal and Gorée left the Slave trade era to enter colonial rule when the French abolished slavery in 1794 and once again in 1815. Legitimate commerce grew as Senegal became a major worldwide peanut exporter, a trade based on the mainland in Rufisque and Dakar where large quantities of goods could be handled. Gorée henceforth lost its importance in the domain of trade, gaining notoriety as a heritage site instead.

Starting in the 1930s, the French colonial administration began to organize and advertise the island for a cultural form of tourism focusing on the transatlantic slave trade through the IFAN (Institut Français d'Afrique Noire), the French Institute for Black Africa. This approach capitalised on the historical interest in the "era of shame" and the appeal of travelling to "France's exotic suburbs."

In "The Making of Heritage - the Example of Gorée," Hamady Bocoum and Bernard Toulhier (Bocoum and Toulhier 2021, 1-38) describe the process by which the present narratives were constructed over time. From colonial cultural policies to post-independence national discourses, several buildings on Gorée became places where memory was crystalized and shared by multiple actors with various interests.

The most prominent being Joseph Ndiaye, curator of the House of Slaves, responsible for amplifying the symbolic discourse of slaves transiting through the "Door of No Return" promoted by several figures of the colonial era onto the international stage. As mentioned earlier, archaeological and historical research attributes a different yet equally significant heritage to the House of Ana Colas, that of domestic slavery and Signare society.





House of Slaves,
Quadri Adejumo,
2023



Rume Palace
2023

NARRATIVE	FRENCH COLONIAL	ARCHAEOLOGICAL	HOUSE OF SLAVES
FOCUS	Civilising mission of European power after the abolition of Slavery	Material evidence of Gorée’s human occupation	The experience of slaves bound for the New World through the Door of No Return
AIM	Capitalising on historical and exotic appeal of Gorée	Offering a “middle-ground” historical perspective based on material findings	Capitalising on the emotional and symbolic value of heritage
MEANS	Guided tours, museums, patrimonial listing	Archaeological digging Academic output	Oral tale, guided tours, Diaspora Festival, State visits, UNESCO listing

PUBLICIZED HERITAGE SITES

The authors also evaluate and compare the other museums created in significant material remains on the island, which include the Historic Museum, the currently closed Museum of the Sea, and the Henriette-Bathily Museum on the daily lives of African women in the Victoria Albis villa. Housed in the Estrées Fort since 1995, the History Museum displays the history of Senegal from prehistoric times and comprises a fairly accurate account of the Atlantic trade. A national museum in Dakar would be more suited for such a vast programme, and a refreshed and more detailed scenography on slavery in Gorée specifically could help bring this deserted museum back to life. As for the Museum of African Women, Boucoum and Toulhier deplore the lack of emphasis and content regarding the lives of women during the slave trade, whether slave or free, mixed-race or African.

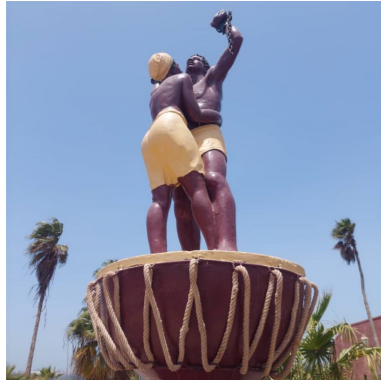
Apart from Museums, other official attempts at channelling the heritage of Gorée include Festivals and exhibitions, such as the World Negro Art Festival (inaugurated in 1966) and the more recent Diaspora Festival (2005). A major memorial project has also occupied several Senegalese presidents, though the absence of funding has halted the endeavour. UNESCO, however, deplores the replica of the 1997 winning entry by Italian architect Ottavio Di Blasi, built on

the Castel of Gorée since 1999, as an “example of what to avoid” to preserve such a site. Since the classification of Gorée to the World Heritage List, studies of the built heritage and conservation proposals have regularly been released in collaboration with UNESCO, with some limited resulting actions. Several restoration projects have been carried out without necessarily being well-documented, and layers of political and patrimonial agendas thus constitute the present Gorée memorial and cultural landscape.



COMMEMORATING SLAVERY

COLONIAL POLICIES AND NATIONAL ATTEMPTS



Statue for the abolition of Slavery



Blaise Diagne, Roger Viollet



William Ponty school, Barthès&Lesleur



Brid's eye view of Gorée, Y. Delacourt, 2013



Town Hall, Pierre Laborde, 2023



Gorée-Almadies Memorial
Ottavio di Blasi, 2014

1848

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

Senegal is part of French West Africa

1872

FRENCH COMMUNE

Citizens of Gorée were given civic franchise

1914

Blaise Diagne, first African deputy in the French National Assembly

1940

COMMUNE OF DAKAR

Gorée was annexed to the municipality of Dakar

1913-1938

William Ponty, a government teachers school for the Senegalese elite was housed on Gorée

1960

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE
"L'île aux esclaves"

First site on the list
Economic crisis of the 1980s
The heritage was not taken care of
Multiplied popular storytelling but lack of funding for archeological and historical research

1978

1996

COMMUNE OF GOREE

Resurrection of the commune and reinvestment of the old town hall

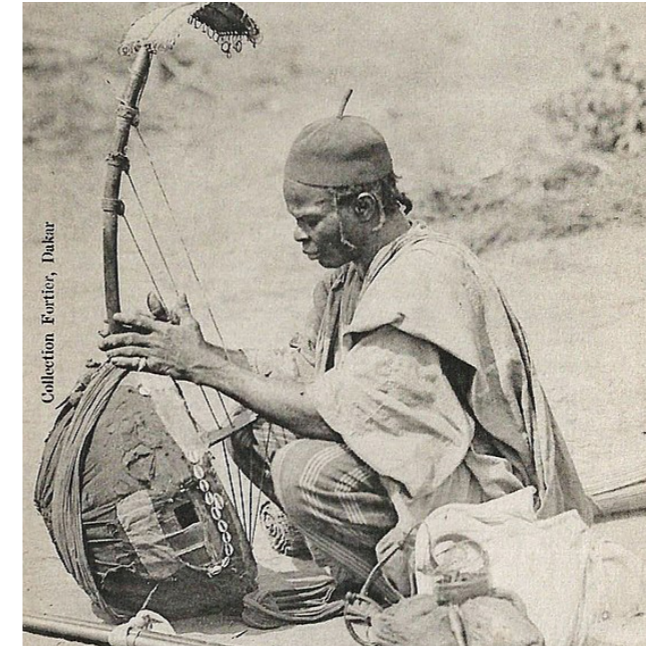
1997

GOREE MEMORIAL

Memorial competition won by Ottavio di Blasi

5. MEMORY KEEPERS

ORAL MEMORY AND THE GRIOTS OF SENEGAMBIA



Soussou Griot, François-Edmond Fortier, 1905

Moving away from Euro-centric understandings of historical records and memory, this thesis briefly considers the role of the Griots of Senegambia (Senegal and the Gambia). Griots are the traditional storytellers of West Africa. From generation to generation, the epic tales of heroes and genealogy of kings have been passed down in specific bloodlines across the former Mali Empire. For centuries, the spoken word has been the most important vehicle and record of these tales and the moral and cultural values carried within.

Griots are known to use musical instruments such as the Kora and Balafon, expressing oral history as songs, myths, proverbs and poems which were adapted by each performer to their own specific context and audience (Abdul 2020). Compared to the static nature of written records, a griot's tale is a malleable, evolving and even participatory entity.

These Oral Historians remain important figures in day-to-day instances such as ceremonies (weddings and baptisms) and many individuals from Griot families choose to pursue musical and artistic careers. Though contemporary Senegal lacks the royal patronage traditionally supporting their function, modern-day Griots have adapted their practices to maintain their livelihoods in a connected and urbanised society. Providing a space for the expression of Senegalese oral memory on Gorée Island is a way to acknowledge its value and legitimacy today (King 2012).

6. A NARRATIVE STRATEGY

HOW CAN DIFFERENT MEMORIES BE BROUGHT FORWARD ON EACH HERITAGE SITE?

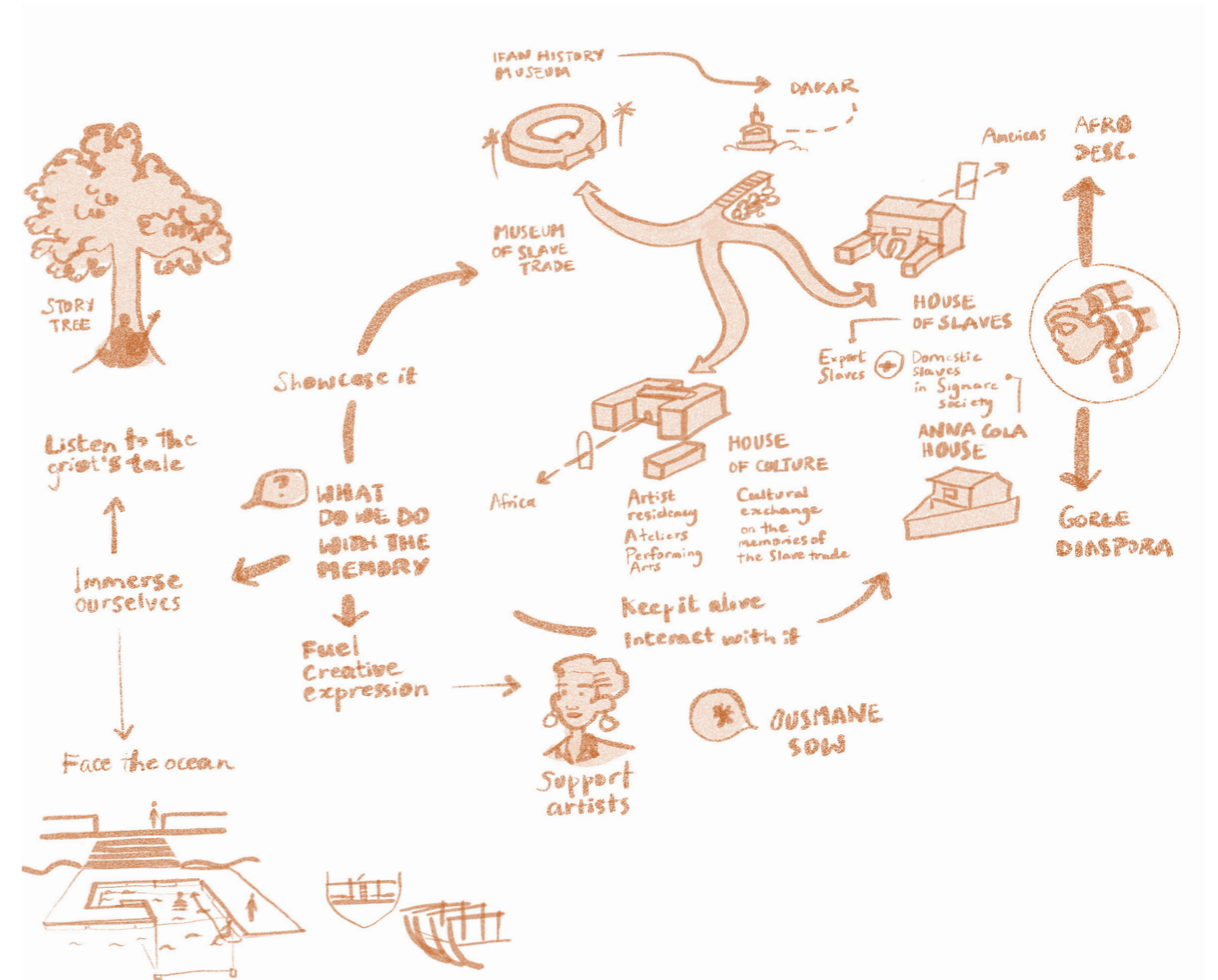
This thesis is a propositive endeavour rather than a theoretical paper. Understanding the timeline of human settlement and the influence of large-scale power systems on the small island of Gorée was the first step. Next came the analysis of different narratives attached to significant sites and the political interests they stemmed from. In a developing context such as Senegal, the resources allocated to maintaining heritage and pursuing research are limited. Despite the international attention and expertise drawn by the UNESCO listing, there is much room for improvement in the care, renovation and development of all the material heritage on Gorée.

The following proposal aims to complement existing structures by creating a different kind of Commemorative space dedicated to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The tragic events which took place throughout the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries are considered from the perspective of present-day international dialogue. The people of Senegal have been forcefully connected with many other ethnicities converging in Gorée before the journey to the Americas or Europe. African Diasporas were created overseas, playing a major role in the cultural diversity of many current nations. One of these was the Diaspora of

Gorée, just 2 kilometres offshore of the African continent. The key questions which led to the design project are the following:

How can different memories of the Slave Island be brought forward and which places are most fitting for them to be shared with the public?

What stance should be adopted, in respect of this body of memories, to design a space that is both evocative and productive?



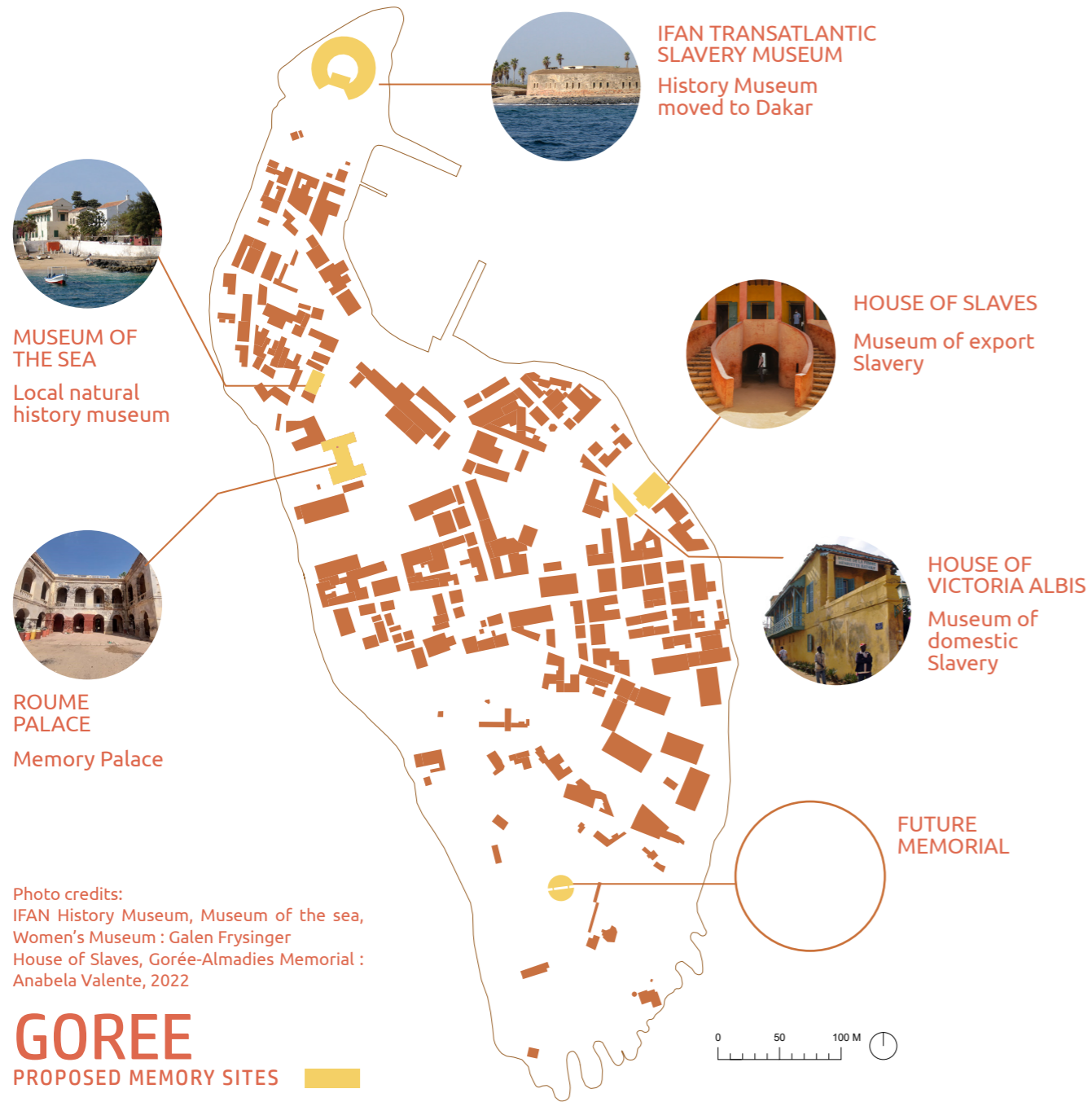


Photo credits:
 IFAN History Museum, Museum of the sea,
 Women's Museum : Galen Frysingier
 House of Slaves, Gorée-Almadies Memorial :
 Anabela Valente, 2022

A narrative strategy across the island, comprising complementary discourses, exhibitions and activities is hereby proposed. Historical and archaeological research suggests that domestic slavery was a major part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Gorée. The House of Slaves narrative focusing on export slavery will therefore be paired with a Museum of Domestic Slavery based across the street in the House of Victoria Albis. This former slave house once harboured the Henriette Bathily Museum of Women, and it seems that the transition would be fitting as a majority of domestic slaves were women. This Houses of Slaves tandem would allow visitors to interact directly with material heritage while hearing the oral tales of the lives of the enslaved people on Gorée.

In addition to this, the IFAN History Museum will be moved to Dakar, and replaced with the Gorée Museum of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The Estrées Fort will showcase a more detailed exhibition of this period while a larger museum in Dakar would do better credit to the task of displaying the history of Senegal from prehistoric to contemporary times. As for the memorial perched on the Castel hill: a strong recommendation to dismantle the present replica and to commission a local artist for the task is hereby issued. The culmination of the journey up to this privileged viewpoint and the overall significance of the memorial must be done justice.

7. DECOLONIZED?

REDEFINING THE HERITAGE OF THE ABANDONED COLONIAL PALACE

What of the Governor's Palace ruin? Completed in 1864, the former Roume Palace lived several lives before falling into disuse, including a print house and a hotel: "Le Relais de l'Espadon" in French. Awaiting a restoration campaign, it is nowadays a popular tourist location as a visitable ruin. It is also used as a storage area for various objects, sheepkeepers and a carpenter's workshop also occupy part of the ground floor.

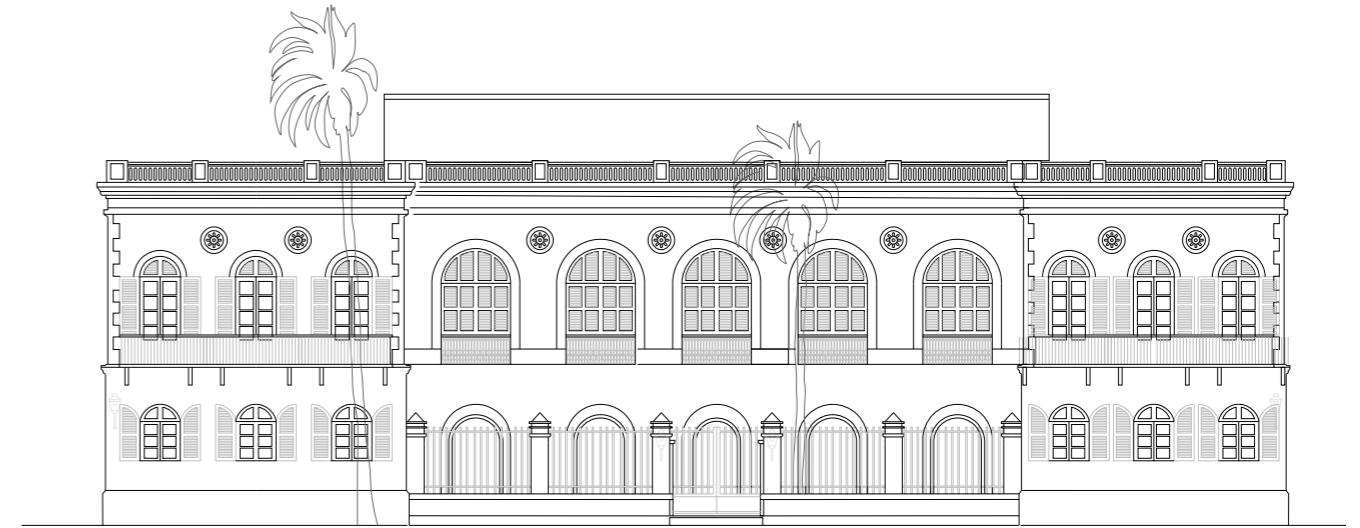
Based on the assumption that the building is possible to renovate and that the enterprise would be worthwhile both historically and architecturally, the following proposal aims to be realistic in its spatial design. The author has visited the ground floor on multiple occasions during her childhood and studies as a former resident of Senegal for 18 years. Moreover, two site visits were made by the author's relatives in the duration of this thesis, which have shed light on various unknown areas of the site such as the upper floor of the Palace, the annexe building and the tunnel which connects the site to the neighbouring plot in the South.

A large part of analysing the site consisted of creating architectural drawings of all the buildings

from the material thus collected. The colonial architectural language is embraced in a manner which acknowledges the injustice and horrors perpetrated by the power which employed it while recognising its spatial, esthetic and climatic qualities.

With its thick stone walls, generous ceiling heights and exterior arcade circulations, the Roume Palace is well-adapted to the sub-saharan temperatures and captures the advantageous breeze and views from the seafront. Its location and condition provide an opportunity to add a qualitative cultural space to the island - a Memory Palace dedicated to commemorating the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Different from a Museum and a heritage site, the Memory Palace is turned towards an understanding of the past to enrich and inform contemporary culture. The approach consists of using the responsibility of memory as an interactive substance: material to encounter, stories to experience and heritage to immerse ourselves in.



East facade from a sketch of the original state (UNESCO)



East facade facing the Government square, Anabela Valente, 2022



CURRENT STATE - FIRST FLOOR 1.500





A COLLECTION OF ARCADES



Left
Upstairs gallery
and room
Roume Palace

Right
West gallery
Annex building

ALL EYES TO THE OCEAN



First floor arcade
Roume Palace



Sight line view from
the Palace ground
floor to the ocean

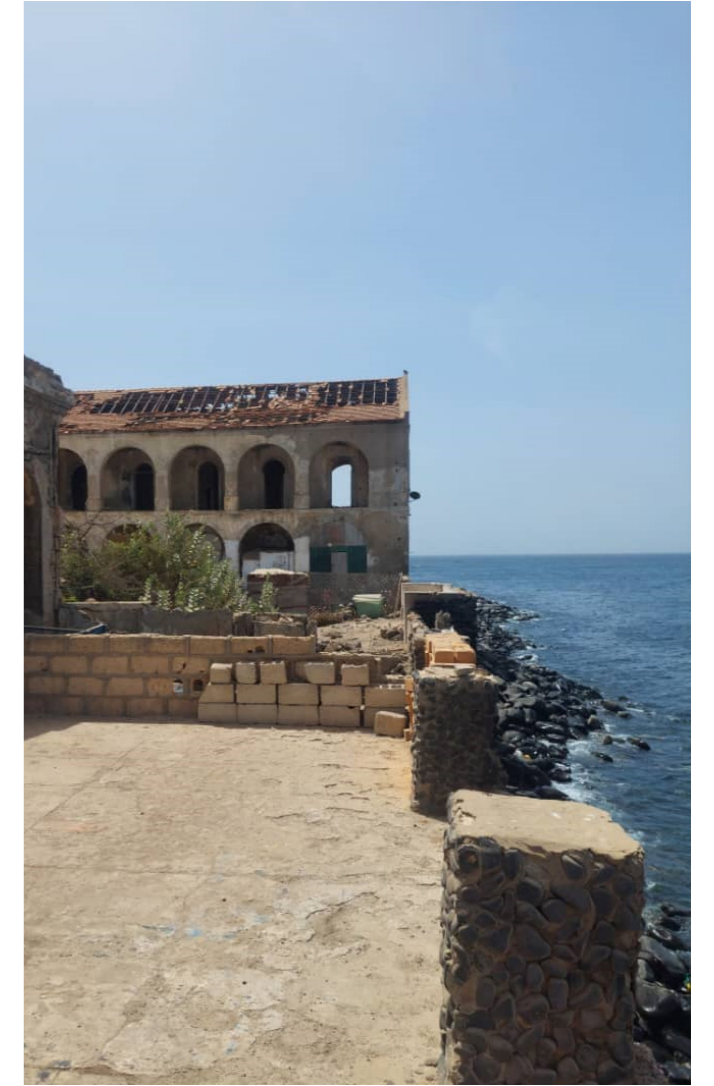
THE TERRACE COURTYARD



THE FUTURE RESTAURANT AND ARTIST RESIDENCY



Annex building
stairs to the terrace



Annex building
Tunnel to the former
hospital courtyard
under the terrace

8. MEMORY PALACE

CREATING A COMMEMORATIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

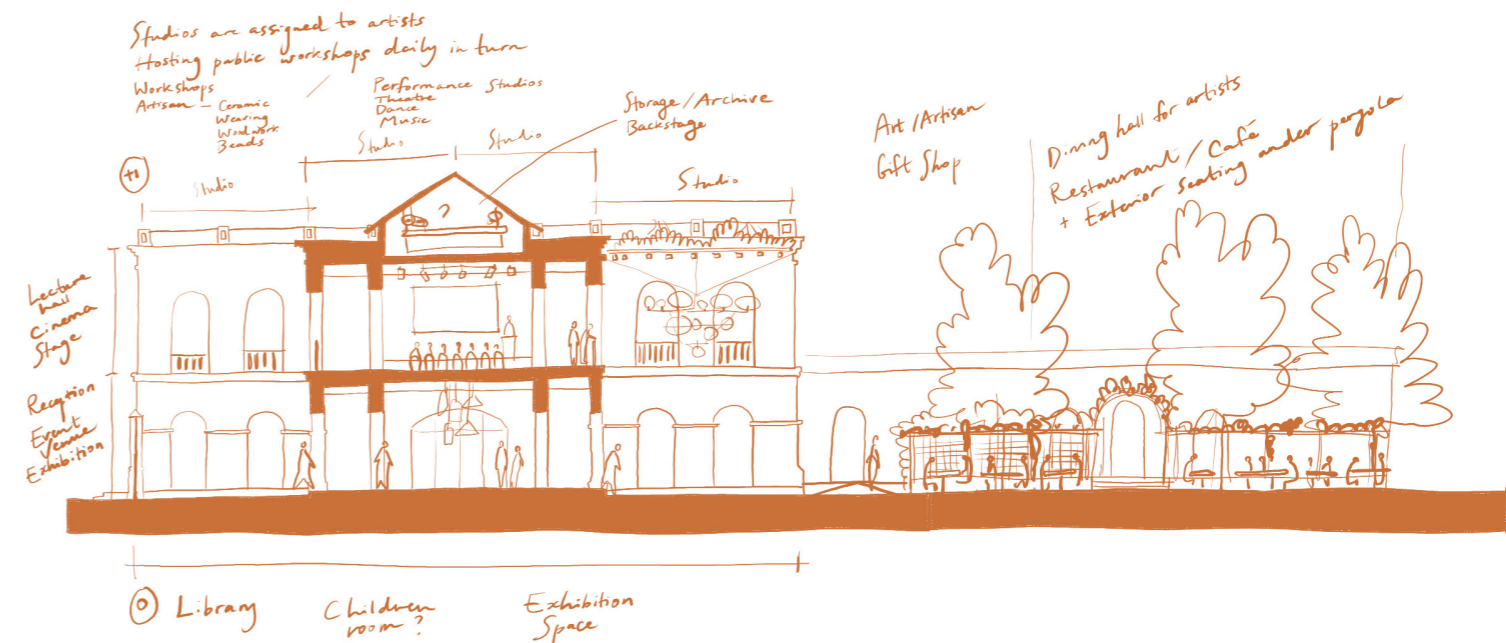
The outcome is for Memory to become a fuel for creative expression, a common ground for artists of different backgrounds to discuss, explore and struggle with a painful and oppressive past productively. The title “Memory Palace” refers to the method of loci, a mnemonic device first used in Antique Rome and Greece which associates information with spatial environments. The Roume Palace symbolically plays the role of the familiar physical space which allows the recall of the Transatlantic slave trade in Gorée. Redefining the colonial Roume Palace as a Gorean cultural icon aims to be a gesture towards opening up the stage to different narratives, allowing visitors to travel through a Memory Palace bridging the space between the past and contemporary Senegalese culture.

Studios on the first floor of the palace wings welcome local and international artists invested in the themes surrounding Gorée. While being a permanent workplace for artists, the renovated Roume Palace is a public building on the ground floor: visitors are invited to participate in exhibitions, workshops and events and to sit at the café’s terrace. Part of the courtyard space on the waterfront is dedicated to the performance of

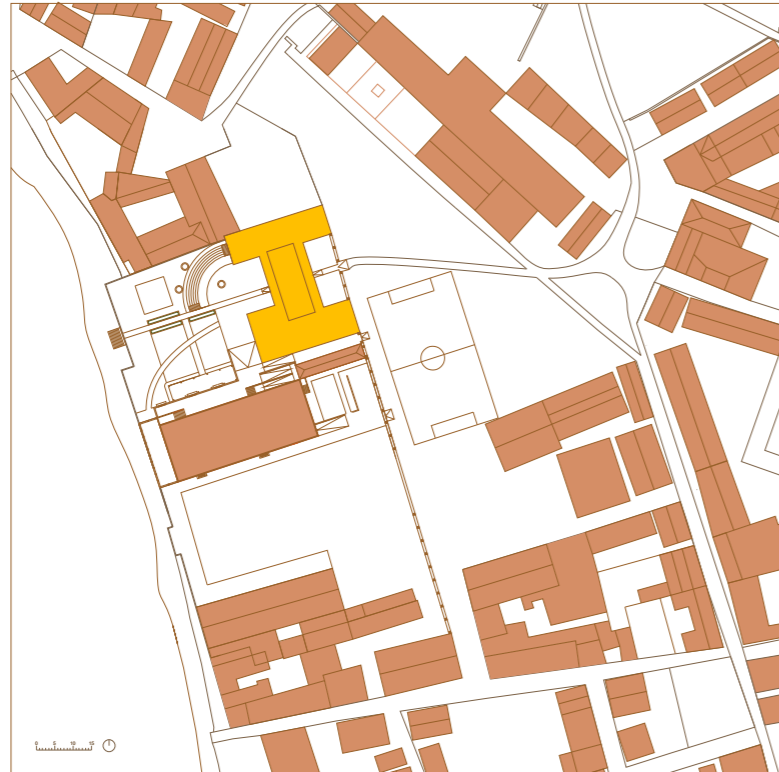
tales of oral memory, music, dance and theatre. A small amphitheatre faces a “storytelling tree”, beneath which it is a tradition for griots to perform their tales. It is also a garden to enjoy the view and the breeze. The neighbouring building hosts both the cafe, which is a dining hall for the artists, and a Gift Shop where their works can be featured.

Immediately South of the Roume Palace, the narrow building with the walled courtyard is transformed into an administrative area where all offices have access to a planted private patio. A secondary entrance allows for separate access for the Memory Palace staff, and a third entrance point is dedicated to supplies for the restaurant and shop.

The Navy hospital situated on the adjacent plot will in a second phase be renovated into an artists’ residency to build on the exchange and inspiration created by the studio space.



RENOVATION PHASING



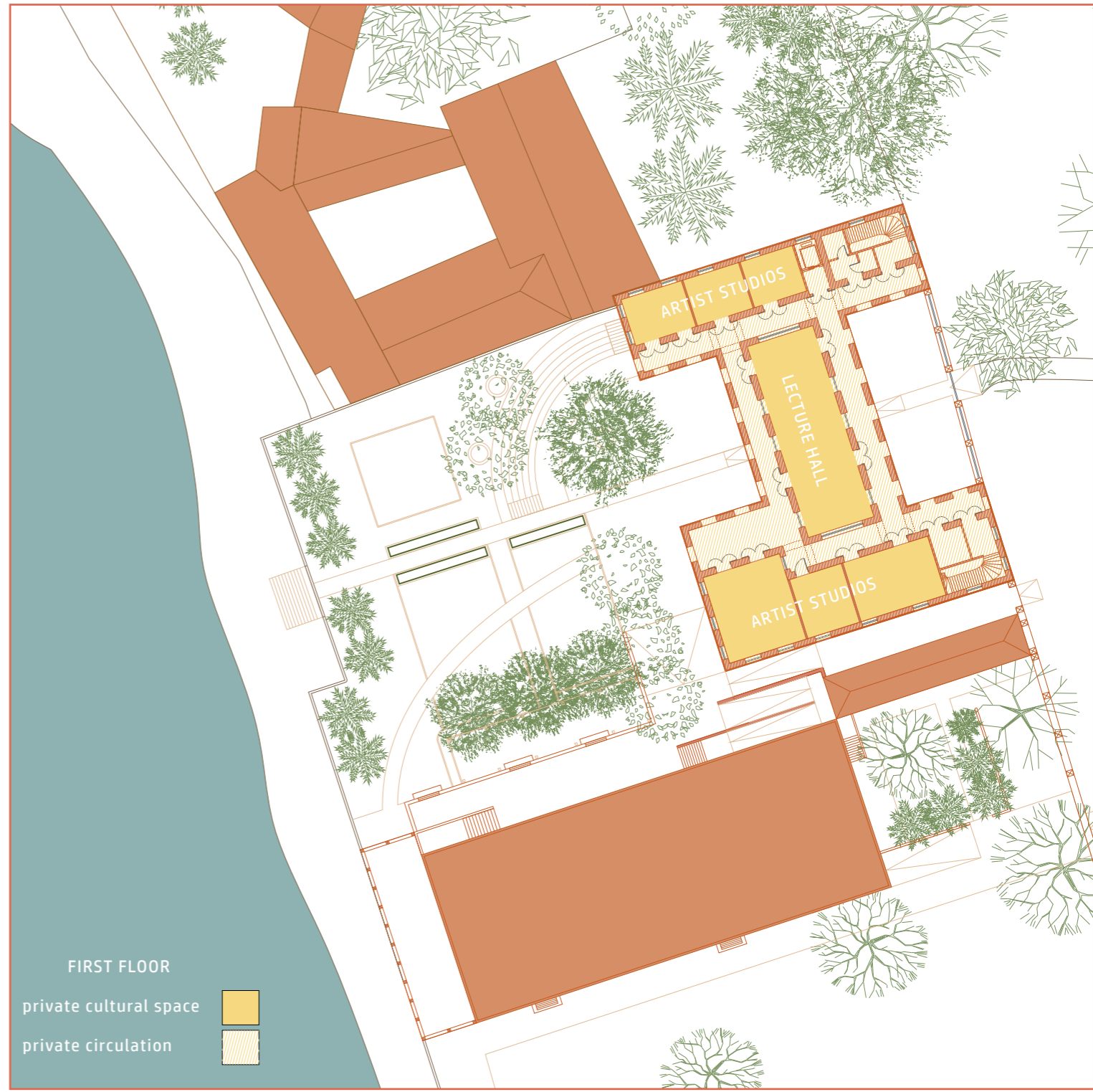
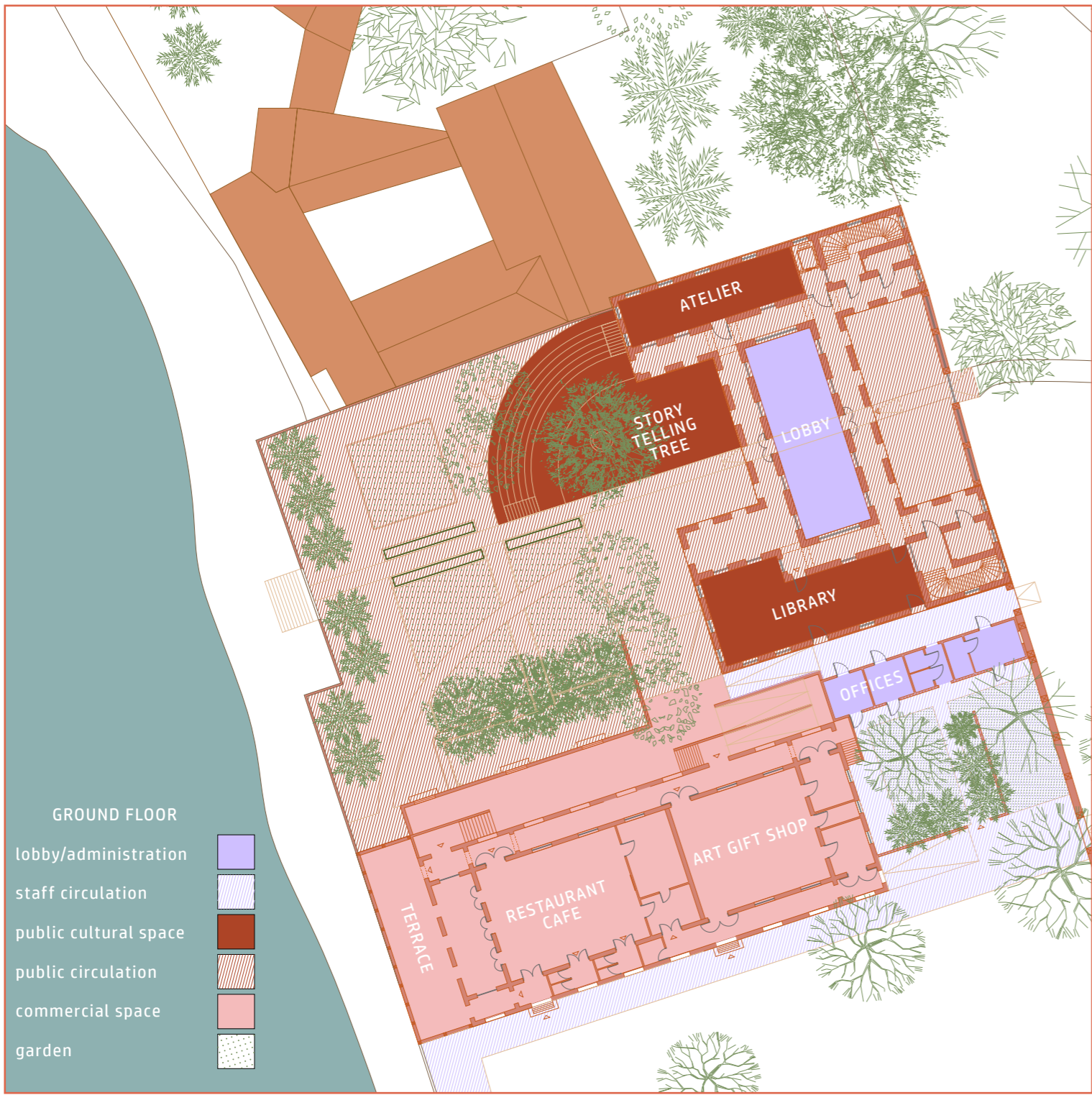
PHASE 1
Rouse Palace



PHASE 2
Restaurant
Administration



PHASE 3
Artist Residency







FIRST FLOOR 1.500

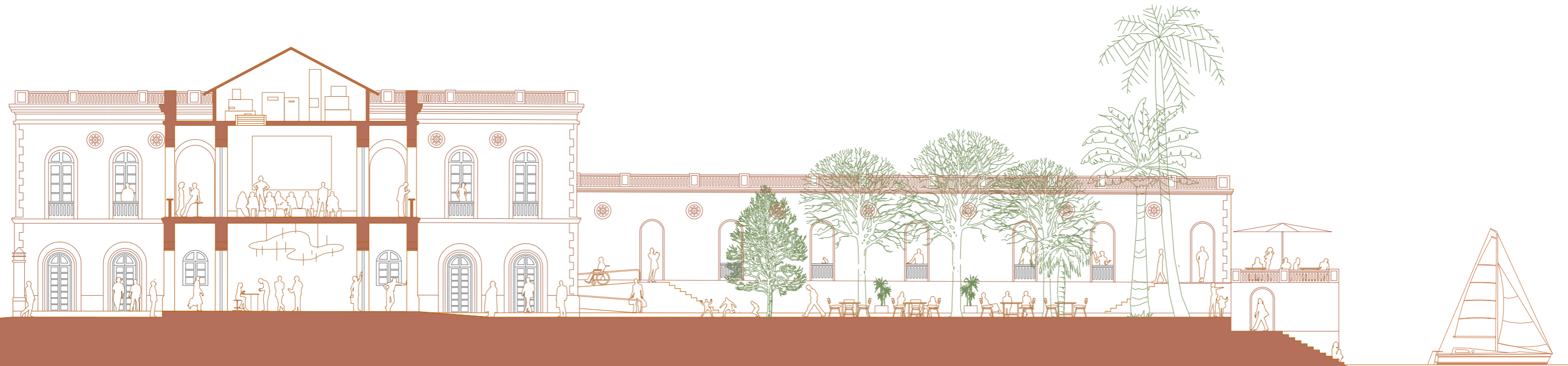


THE ART STUDIOS | A workspace within a cultural building



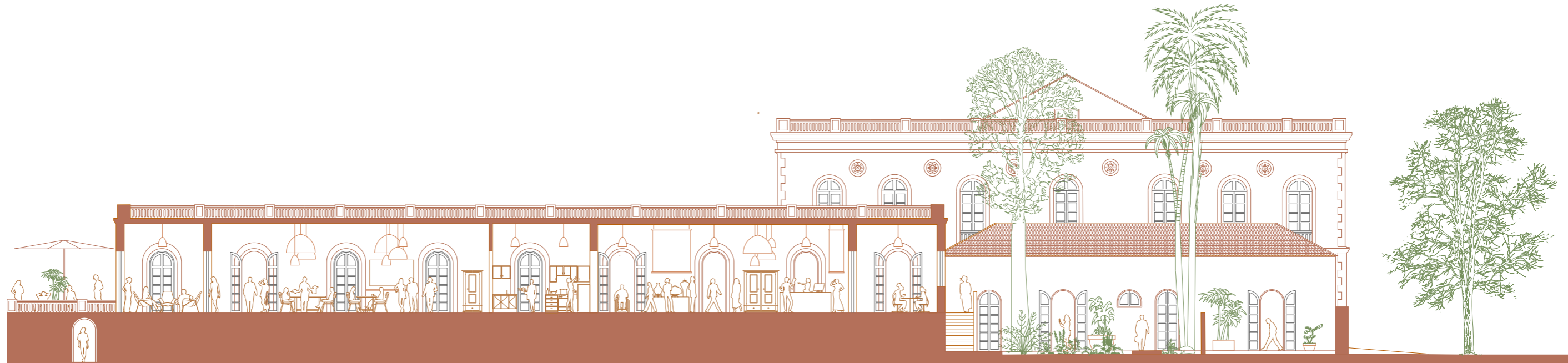
NORTH SOUTH SECTION 1.200

THE SIGHTLINE | Guiding the public towards the ocean view



EAST WEST SECTION 1.200

THE COMMERCIAL WING | A restaurant cafe and gift store in support of the artists



EAST WEST SECTION 1.200

RESTAURANT ARCADE
FACING THE OCEAN

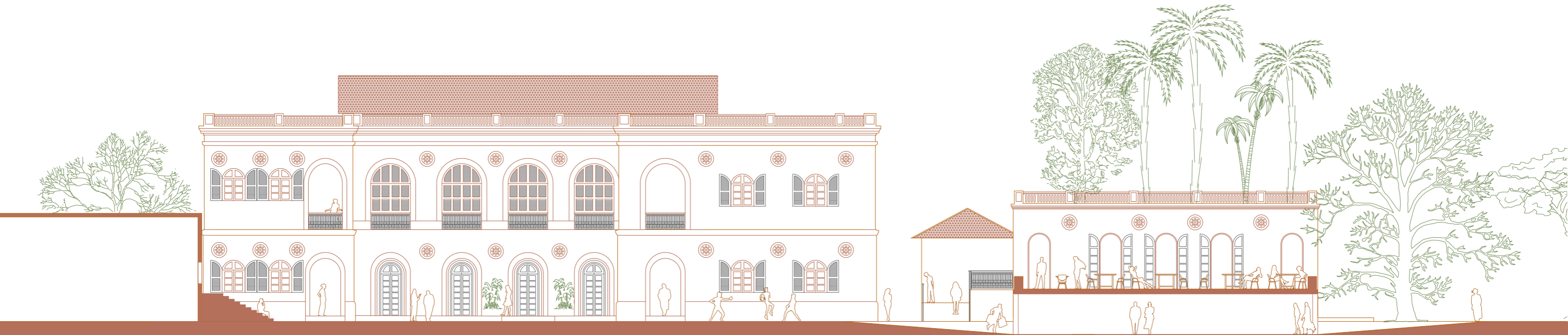


GOVERNMENT SQUARE | Restoring the eastern facade to its original state



EAST FACADE 1.200

THE SEAFRONT COURTYARD | A large terrace onto the Atlantic and the mainland

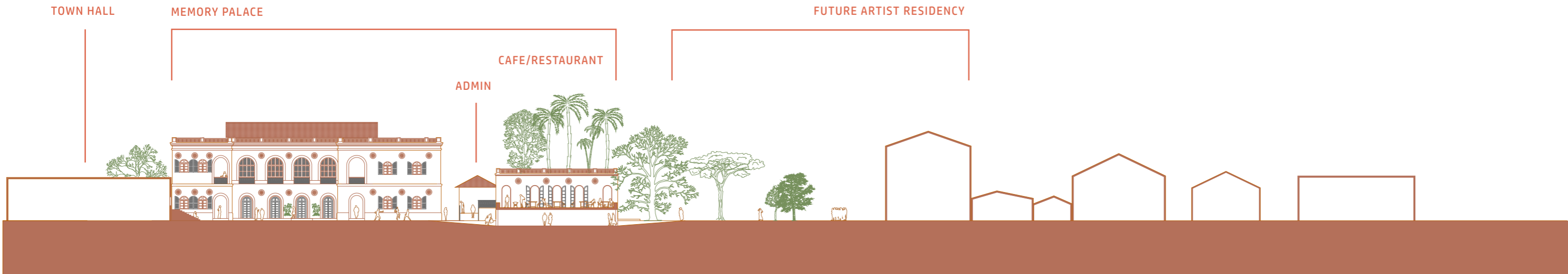


WEST FACADE AND TUNNEL SECTION 1.200

GARDEN COURTYARD WITH
STORYTELLING TREE



FUTURE EXPANSION | A CONCEPT FOR THE ABANDONED NAVY HOSPITAL NEXTDOOR



NEIGHBOURING BUILDINGS AND TUNNEL SECTION 1.500

9. A HOUSE OF CULTURE

COLONIAL HERITAGE AS A PLACE OF MEMORY AND CELEBRATION



Gorée Diaspora Festival, Manfred Schweda, 2005

Commemoration, “remembering together”, consists of gathering people around a specific memory. It is a ceremony or a deed carried out to “remember officially and give respect to a great person or event” (Cambridge University Press 1999). The stance adopted in this thesis is to create a symbolic place where commemorative and cultural activities can overlap and inform each other.

The Gorée Memory Palace straddles the solemnity of the Roume Palace and the recreational aspect of the restaurant and courtyard spaces. In a setting where tourism is the principal source of income for many, the hope of the House of Culture is to express, discuss, and channel the painful history of Gorée into a means of sustainable economic development for the island. Therefore, as business-oriented as it may sound, it is essential for tourists to be invited and attracted to this place.

Although some may come because of their historical and cultural interest, the first incentive for a foreign or Senegalese tourist to visit the Memory Palace may very well be the cafe terrace. However by walking through the lobby and arcades, facing the sightline in the courtyard and sitting in the cafe, one’s curiosity will eventually be piqued as to why this renovated colonial palace and who are the people working there. The griot’s song is another compelling invitation to take part in the spirit of the Memory Palace, not to mention the presence and activity of the artists themselves.

The sum of these happenings is thought of as a positive trigger for guests to engage on different scales of participation: from simply learning about Gorée’s history through observation to engaging in specifically designed commemorative activities (exhibitions, performances, lectures, workshops, etc).

When it comes to the restoration of this Colonial palace to its original state, this thesis is positioned against the erasure of heritage, however problematic its roots. Built by local masons under French colonial rule, the Roume Palace is one of the very rare physical witnesses to the history of the oppression of the Senegalese people. The building has been placed on Gorée Island as a representation of the colonial power, and it is up to Senegal to reclaim it as an independent, forward-looking nation.

Neither French nor traditionally Senegalese in its language, the unique grandeur of this Creole architecture must be taken care of rather than left in ruins to decay and forgetfulness. I believe that this approach would be a form of denial and demonstrates a shame that is not meant to be carried by the present generations.

Being projected as a lively and cheerful public space, the Gorée Memory Palace is meant to help people face an uncomfortable past and hopeful-

ly pave a path to collective healing. Generations of visitors will have a space to learn how to recall the pain and horror of the Transatlantic Slave Trade without causing an outburst of negative emotions, in a meaningful manner and location.

Gorée Island is well-known today for its bright and warm colour palette. Paintings and historical postcards show that most of the buildings were in fact white and painted over recently. A fun and powerful contrast achieved through the choice of restoration is the cream-coloured colonial palace acting as a canvas for the awareness-raising, evocative and reflective artwork produced by the artists.

After an era of standards being set by the colonial power and the dismantling of local traditions, it seems urgent and crucial to actively open up the stage to African forms of collecting, documenting and sharing histories. The topics concerning the Slave Trade will inhabit and invade the symbolic space of the palace as a visual and physical revendication, reclaiming and celebration of Senegalese history and culture.

May 28th 2024

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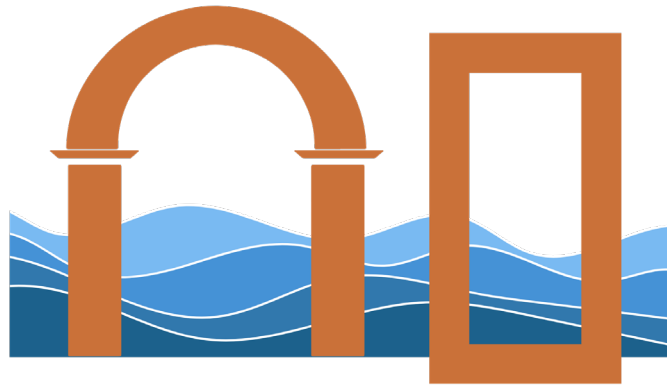
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