MOBILE LOITERING:

A response to public space needs in Niger's post-colonial, highly gendered urban context

MARIAM KAMARA

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Committee
Elizabeth Golden, co-chair
Vikramāditya Prakāsh, co-chair
Rick Mohler

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Abstract

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A response to public space needs in Niger's post-colonial, highly gendered urban context

Mariam Kamara

Chair of the Supervisory Committee: Elizabeth Golden
Department of Architecture

By their very nature, city streets provide opportunities to create life "in-between" the more strongly defined entities of home, school, office, and markets. In this space, one can easily appear to be on his or her way to somewhere, but never actually be going anywhere. The act of "mobile loitering" is a tactic that is commonly employed by young girls in Niger's capital of Niamey, in order to socialize with one another. In the context of a Muslim city situated in a predominantly Muslim (albeit secular) country, women's presence in the public realm–for purposes other than running errands, conducting business or going to school–is easily questioned by society. In their free time, young girls often pay social calls to each other, using their itinerary as a journey to and fro during which they can see and be seen, interact with known acquaintances, while enjoying relative privacy in their interactions with each other simply through movement.

This thesis proposes a new type of public space that is adapted to the cultural norms of some Muslim cities. It takes the form of an activity circuit that links major public spaces currently used by the youth of the city, while adding program components along a defined route to augment them. The proposal shapes neighborhood streets to give girls destinations and justifications for being outside, offering them a right to a city that has becoming less accessible, within a society that is growing increasingly conservative.

"It is a practice of being attuned to faint signals, flashes of important creativity in otherwise desperate maneuvers, small eruptions in the social fabric that provide new texture, small but important platforms from which to access new views."

AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Remaking Urban Life in Africa*

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CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Figure 1. Geopolitical context

The Republic of Niger, is a landlocked former French colony in Western Africa, named after the Niger River. It borders Nigeria and Benin to the south, Burkina Faso and Mali to the west, Algeria and Libya to the north and Chad to the east. With a population of 16 million, it is one of the least populated countries on the African continent with the highest fertility rate in the world (7.01 child per woman according to the World Bank). As a result, the country has one of the youngest population in the world.

Niger is part of the Sahel belt, a climatic zone between the Sahara desert and the tropical zone of Central Africa, resulting in mostly arid conditions. The majority of the population lives along the more agriculturally fertile southern border, while the north is home to the Uranium and Coal mining industries.

HISTORY

The current country borders are a direct result of the French colonization of the early 20th century. The area that became Niger sit in a geographical and historical intersection of cultures and ethnicities. The region has been settled for other 5 thousand years with Neolithic remains and artifacts littering it's northern territory in the Sahara desert. Many kingdoms and Empires have left their imprint
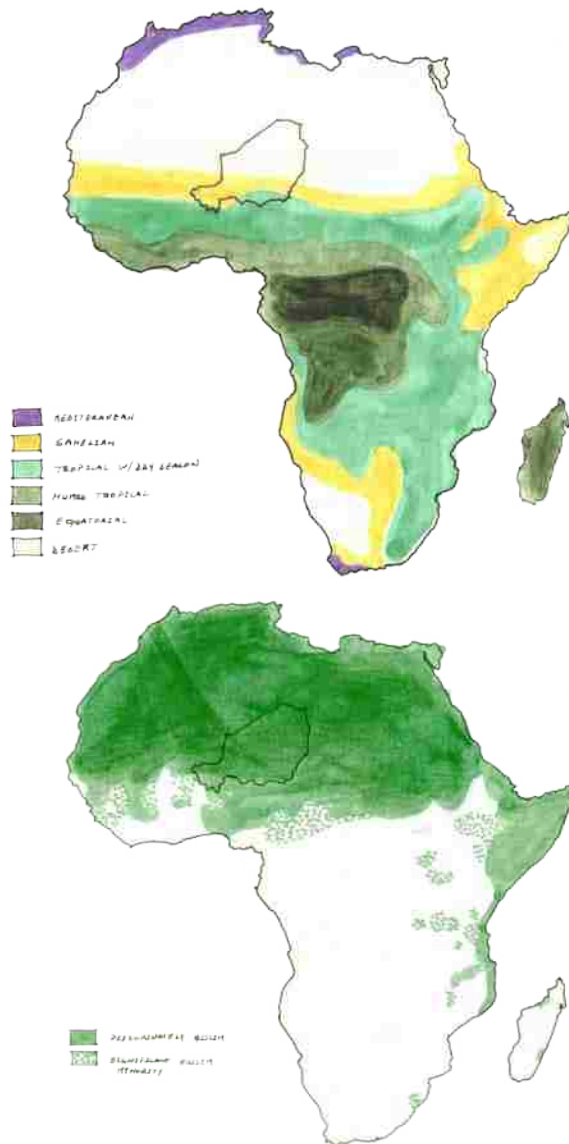
Figure 2. Top right - Climate zones

Figure 3. Bottom right - Muslim Africa. Countries with a majority Muslim population

starting with the Kanem-Bornu empire in its eastern parts in 600CE and the Hausa states to the South. The West saw a succession of dynasties from 1230 to 1810 with the Mali and Songhai Empires successively. The North was subject to Moroccan invasions in the 15th century and became the home of Berber and Tuareg people. The French captured the entire western and northern portion of Africa in the 19th century giving birth to the current country borders. Niger became an independent republic in 1960.

DEMOGRAPHY

The country's population is extremely young with nearly 50% of the population being 15 years old or under. With its extremely high natality rate and despite a relatively high infant mortality rate, Niger's under 25 years old represent 67% of the total population. Finally, the 25-39 age group constitutes 21% of the population, which means that the country has 85% of its population being under 40 years old.[1]

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1   Adamou, Abdoulaye. *Parcours migratoire des citadins et problème du logement à Niamey* - Master's Thesis. University Abdou Moumouni, Niamey (2005)
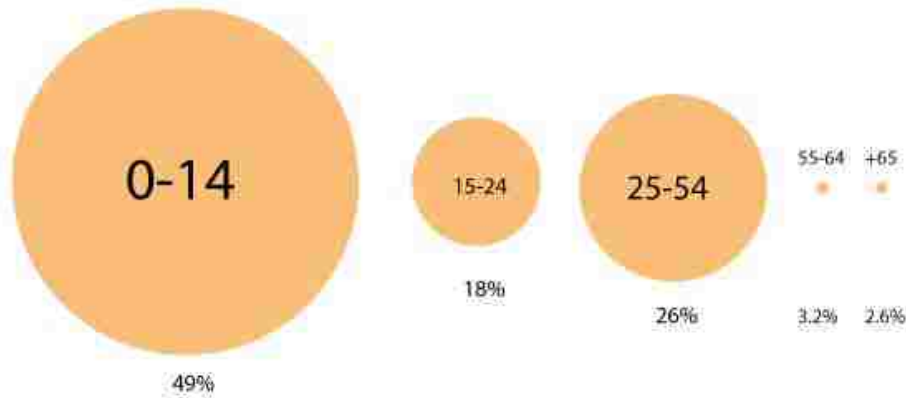
AGE DISTRIBUTION

LITERACY RATES

Figure 4. Population age distribution

Figure 5. Literacy rates by gender
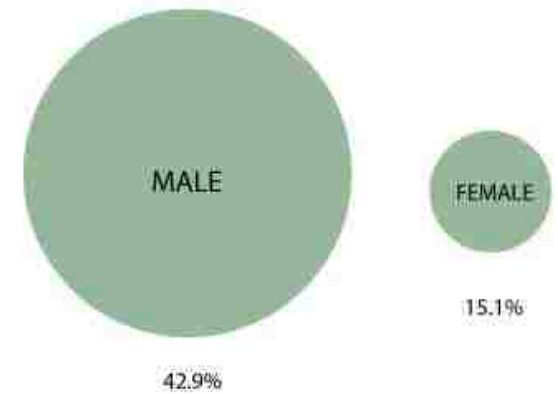
As is the case in many African countries with arbitrary borders born of colonization, Niger's population is multi-ethnic. The country counts seven ethnic groups and as many languages with 55% of the population being Hausa, the linguistically and culturally dominant group. 21% of the population is Zarma/Songhai, 9.3% is Tuareg and 8.5% is Fulani. The main ethnic minorities are the Kanuri, Kanembou, Gourmantché and Arabs from Algeria, Lybia and Morocco. There is a strong Lebanese immigrant population in the capital city of Niamey.

95% of Nigeriens are Suni and Sufi Muslims. The religion spread from North Africa around the 10th century, taking a strong foothold in the region in the 15th century. Islam has greatly shaped the mores of the country. Divorce and polygamy are not uncommon, women are not secluded, and head-coverings are not mandatory. Alcohol, such as the locally produced Bière Niger, is sold openly in most of the country. However, over the past three decades, small pockets of Salafists/fundamentalists have appeared first along the borders with Nigeria and more recently in the capital Niamey. This has resulted in a slow but progressing radicalization of cultural norms. Despite this, Niger holds on to its identity as a secular nation, maintaining a separation of mosque and state. Interfaith relations are deemed very good, and the forms of Islam traditionally practiced in most of the country is marked by tolerance of other faiths and a lower level of restrictions on personal freedoms.

ZARMA
21%

TUAREG
9.3%

FULA
8.5%

HAUSA
55.4%

KANURI
4.7%

ARAB
< 1%

KANEMBU, GOURMANTCHE, ETC
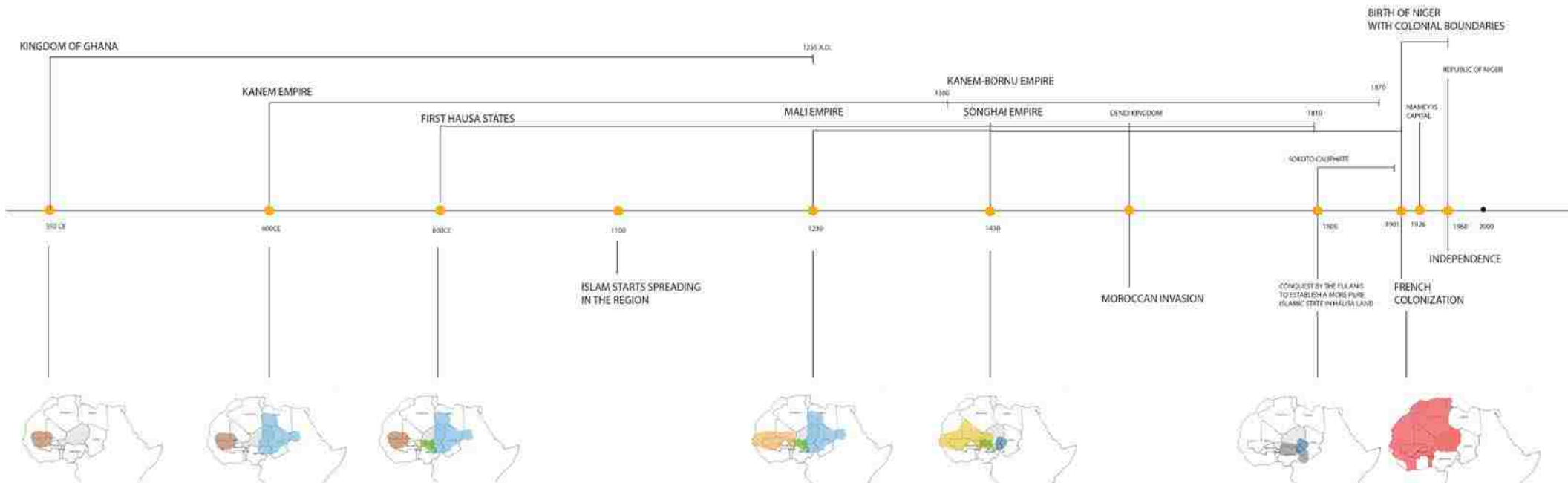< 1%

Figure 6. Niger's ethnic groups

Figure 7. *Niger's Historical Time line*

PUBLIC SPACE IN WEST AFRICA

In many parts of Africa, the non-private realm cannot always be called "public" in the Western sense, as it is often segregated along class, gender or age lines in subtle ways. Jessie Kabwila Kapasula in fact argues that in African urban centers, "such spaces are fraught with social constraints that discriminate against access at class and gender levels, just to mention a few. Language and education are another barrier that prevent the poor and women from accessing legal and entertainment in public spaces for example."[1] She considers that the commonly accepted definition of public space is profoundly "west-ocentric" and cannot/must not be applied to the African context. This is however a somewhat narrow view that bases the concept of public space on the analysis of modern European states' history and practices. As a result, African theoreticians have long insisted on the difficulty of transposing such a concept on African societies, ignoring the fact that the latter have historically always included spaces for public discourse and political deliberation[2].

We can agree, however, that it is the particular expression of western public spaces, in the form of

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[1]   Jessie Kabwila Kapasula, "The African Public Space of Dangarembga's Neria: A Site for Autochthonous Feminist Agency," *Africa Development, Vol. XXXV, Nos1&2* (2010), 95-115

[2]   Tarik Dahou, "L'espace public face aux apories des études africaines ("Public Space" and Contradictions in African Studies)" *Cahiers d'Études Africaines , Vol. 45, Cahier 178, Le retour du politique* (2005), 327-349

parks, waterfront amenities, skateboard rinks, etc, that is a purely western and essentially capital driven incarnation of the public realm. It points to specific cultural patterns and expressions that have their roots in the West. The problem arises when cities like Niamey are conceived using concepts and forms of public spaces as used in the global North. The mixture of arguably misguided urban strategies and the religio-socio-economic challenges of a country like Niger prompts for creative ways of using the spaces that are in the public realm. Spaces like sidewalks and streets tend to become leftover areas once the homes, businesses, markets, schools have been carved out. Because their primary intended function is to provide public circulation, they at once belong to everyone and to no one. They are therefore a commodity up for grabs in economic survival tactics and struggles to maintain a communal social life as well as navigate societal constraints.

Figure 8. Women preparing a communal meal in a house courtyard

WHERE YOU CAN AND CAN'T GO: THE CODIFICATION OF PUBLIC SPACE IN NIGER

THE TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SPACE

Public behaviors in Niger's traditional context are extremely codified by gender, age, class and education level. For instance, a specifically female space has traditionally been the village well located some distance away from a settlement. The early morning journey to it was the opportunity for women to see and be seen as well as socialize with each other. The family courtyard is another female realm that often serves as a congregation space for women, their friends and neighbors. Figure 8 shows a group of women as customary in Niger, likely preparing a celebration meal. They are seated in informal groups that are typically organized by task but also by age so that older women might be mostly socializing and engaged in lighter tasks, while younger women do the more involved chores.[3] As the image shows, women with small children are often given a pass on the work as they sit an enjoy everyone's company. This small scene is the perfect example of how layered interactions are in Niger and how even a shared, semi-private space can have a complex hierarchy that governs each person's behavior.

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3   It is unthinkable for a younger person to let someone elder to them do work requiring any physical effort in their presence in Niger's culture. In a setting such as the one being described, older women typically take charge of organizing tasks for everyone, making sure things are done properly while they catch up with their friends.

Other categories of people also traditionally had their designated spaces. One example is the village Baobab tree underneath which elder men gathered all day. It also doubled as a story-telling theater at night for the children.[4] Weddings, baptisms and other important life ceremonies often took place in the central neighborhood or village square, while the mosque concentrated religious life and education of men and boys. The market was the only gender, class and age neutral space where the whole town or village met, perhaps making it the one truly public and inclusive space.

EDUCATION LIMITATIONS:

Haven initially been established as a military territory that later became a colony by France[5] from 1900 to 1960, Niger adopted French as its official language upon Independence. With a literacy rate of 25% however, the majority of the population does not fluently speak, let alone read or write it.

Figure 9. Top right - Elder of the house lounging in front of family compound

Figure 10. Top Left - Group of girls on their way to a wedding - © taphawane (panoramio.com)

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4   African Urbanism Blog. *Exploring Traditional African Architecture & Urban Design.* African urbanism.com. Web. 22 Jan. 2013. http://africanurbanism.wordpress.com/2012/03/31/traditional-igbo-design/

5   The territory that is Niger was created as a result of colonial partition from the French and has no real historical basis. As a result, multiple ethnic groups that used to be part of separate empires ended up finding themselves members of the same nation practically overnight upon independence. This is typical for almost all African countries that were either French or British colonies.

From this educational gap is born a class gap in the way people use public spaces. Public amenities such as pools and libraries tend to be the territory of the educated high income class

AGE LIMITATIONS: BEING APPROPRIATELY VISIBLE

Age can also be a determinant of who can go where. Children have unlimited freedom. They come and go as they please, they play in the streets, hopping from house to house and going on neighborhood adventures together. The least fortunate also do odd jobs for small business owners for to contribute to their family's income.

Teenagers and young adults are also fairly visible, but in a more specific way. This is the age where gender comes in consideration and teenagers start being publicly seen only with someone of their own gender. This is also the age where they are the most visible in the sense that their lives are much more layered: they go to school on foot for the majority, they are sent on multiple errands throughout the day, they visit each other and they meet for study groups. Those who have already dropped out of school are the most visible as street hawkers, selling cellphones and other electronics at busy intersections.

For adults, being out and about is limited to weddings or naming ceremonies as well as running household errands. It is extremely rare to see adults, particularly women in public spaces unless they depend on commerce for their livelihood or occasionally take their children to places like the Niamey's National Museum for example.

The elderly have a very special place in African communities. Very much like the children, they can come and go as they please, sit in front of their houses with friends, be anywhere they like. For women, this is definitely the case because past a certain age, no one can be suspicious of their comings and goings. Mot importantly, the elderly draw a tremendous amount of respect and there is an understanding that they can do no wrong.

GENDER LIMITATIONS: THE CHALLENGE FOR WOMEN

In Subsaharan Muslim societies, gender is probably the biggest determinant of who gets to go where and what they get to do there. Most religious communities are also fairly patriarchal even when the expression of said patriarchy differs from one religion to the next and, within that, from one culture to the next. In many Muslim cultures, this often takes the form of women being limited in their daily movement and in what types of places they can be seen. Though historically moderate in their practice of Islam, West African countries like Niger have had ups and downs in the level of freedom women have enjoyed through their history.

Unlike their male counterparts, women in Niamey don't engage in "public display" of themselves. I speak of public display because, from a feminist theory point of view, one could argue that once in the public realm, women become an object subjected to the male gaze as "women are meant to be looked at and men are meant to look."[6] This condition is further exacerbated in Niamey, a Muslim

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6   Vikramāditya Prakāsh, "The Interests of Desire: Feminism and Aesthetic Pleasure in Architecture," *Architecture + Design* (Mar-Apr 1992)

city in a Muslim country where, although women are rarely subjected to the confinement typical of middle-eastern Muslim cultures, their presence outside their homes for purposes other than running errands, conducting business or going to school is easily questioned. For instance, one would be hard-pressed to find young women sitting leisurely at a café or, since homes don't have porches or stoops in Niger, sitting in front of their compound entrance chatting with friends.

Colonization and its Consequences

During colonization, the Muslim patriarchal streak in Niger was exacerbated by the perceived need to protect women from the colonizers that had left wife and child behind and lived bachelor lives.[7] City women often stayed at home to limit the risk of attracting unwanted attention. The only ones who were seen in public pursuing leisure activities were prostitutes in the company of colonizers. This fact has even generated a cultural stigma against young girls being seen in the company of young men in cafés and restaurants in the cities, a stigma that is enduring to this day. Post-colonization saw a renewed freedom for women in terms of what they could do and their visibility. Because many post-colonial regimes were communists in Africa, they drafted constitutions that strive to establish their new nations as secular, staying clear of any official gender discrimination or segregation in schools and the workplace. Contrary to many Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran or Afghanistan, Subsaharan African schools are always co-ed and many of them go as far as making sure girls to systematically share desks with boys. This official state position has recently started coming up against increasingly conservative cultural norms from Niamey's citizens thanks to a rise in fundamentalist religious practice.

The rise of Salafism in Niger

Salafism is a movement among Sunni Muslims that looks to the earliest Muslims as the sole and only true examples of Islamic practice. It first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century as a spiritual reac-

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7   Ousseina D. Alidou, *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and the Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger,* The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison (2005)

tion against Western colonial dominance and an attempt to capture a true Muslim identity.[8] In the early 1980's however, a Jihadist branch of Salafism saw the light in Afghanistan as a tool for armed resistance against the soviets, gradually taking root in other countries such as Algeria or Nigeria.[9] Niger being geographically "sandwiched" between these two nations became a transit route from one to the other. Because the southern border of Niger and Northern Nigeria are ethnically and linguistically brethren, Salafism started taking ground through cultural exchanges at first, then through economic dealings with Nigerian traders as well as import activities with Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and other Middle Eastern nations. Historically, trade in the region as strongly re-enforced by religious commonalities, creating a sense of brotherhood that brought greater trust in business dealings.[10] What used to be Sufi-based practices of Islam are now increasingly for reasons that vary in the Middle east and in Subsaharan Africa. Trade deals between Nigerien traders and Middle Eastern countries have increasingly had to satisfy the condition that partners also be "true Muslims", untainted by what is viewed as Western cultural corruption. A direct consequence of these expectations can be seen in Niamey's historic neighborhoods, home to the majority of the trans-national traders: they are the most conservative ones in the city. These are also the neighborhoods that produced the first girls and women who wore the *Hijab* head covering, a practice completely alien to Niger and its wider region even though it first converted to Islam in the between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Those are also the neighborhoods where the practice of *kublé* (seclusion of women) has become more frequent.[11] Understandably, the recent rise of Salafism in Niamey has also meant higher scrutiny towards young girls and women in the public sphere.

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8   Reza Aslan. *No God But God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*. Random House Trade PaperBack Editions, New York (2006)

9   Algerian Salafists were seeking to oust what they viewed as a morally corrupt regime, pupetiered by the previous French colonizer and install a true Muslim state in its stead. Northern Nigeria, the Muslim part of that country and home of the Hausa ethnic group, was historically more conservative in their practice of Islam. The region became radicalized in the late 1980's, providing a breeding ground for the now infamous *Boko Haram* Jihadist group that has obtained training assistance from groups in Algeria.

10   Paul M. Lubeck, "Nigeria: Mapping a Shari'a Restorationist Movement," *Shari`a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World,* Edited by Robert W. Hefner, Indiana University Press, Bloomington (2011), 244-279

11   Alidou, 38

The new fundamentalist appetite in Niger has been further enhanced by the American "War on Terror" post 9-11, which sought to paint America against the entire Muslim world. The rhetoric used was so un-nuanced that it had the remarkable result of turning a country like Niger whose population was strongly pro-American[12] to a nation that felt unjustly attacked to its core and felt a renewed sense of brotherhood with Muslims around the world. This was fertile ground for Salafists that were already transiting through the country and were now finding an attentive audience. Once again, this state of things impacts women the most as the most staunchly applied tenets invariably have to do with their mode of dress and behavior, putting the burden on them to uphold male and family honor.

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12   In Niger, being pro-American was very popular as it also meant turning one's back to France which colonized the nation and was seen as an agent of Neo-colonialism, an image that could readily be pitted against the American rhetorics of "freedom".

THE CITY THAT IS:
INFORMAL PUBLIC
INFRASTRUCTURE NIAMEY

Figure 12. Fruit sellers occupying the Central Market's sidewalks. They are very useful to shopper as this particular market doesn't offer produce but rather fabrics, household items, etc. Without these street hawkers, they have to go to the produce market in the adjacent neighborhood. © theepochtimes.com

While public behavior is codified and segregated, the public realm is also co-opted by economic imperatives that cause the cities in the Developing World to be used perhaps differently than intended by their initial designers. In the face of adversity, people have had to create new ways of providing for their needs. Thus it is that "across Africa, a new urban infrastructure is being built with the very bodies and life stories of city residents"[13] as AbdouMaliq Simone states in his essay *Remaking Urban Life in Africa*. These occurrences, actions and those who partake in them create a temporal network where people, events, situations intersect with one another in subtle ways. Simone asserts that people and their "bodies", in the way they move, cross and create networks, eventually define the actual fabric and culture of the city. This human infrastructure inscribes itself in the use and movement of people through the city lanes to accomplish economic projects but also as ways to get around the lack of spaces that can accommodate their social needs. So is it that the streets, and this is true of Niamey, have become a mega-public space, a source of infinite loopholes exploited by its inhabitants in imaginative ways.

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13 AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*, Duke University Press, Durham and London (2004)

www.manaraa.com

Figure 13. Top right - The street at commercial infrastructure: A woman is frying up and selling "beignets" in front of her home.

Figure 15. Top left - The street as leisure space.
© ourcitiesourselves.org

Figure 14. Bottom right - The street as home: A typical reed mat home on a sidewalk provides a shelter to a homeless family. The structure even has a makeshift veranda where the inhabitants spend the day and the warmest nights, a traditional feature in Nigerien homes.

The most obvious use of the street-scape is as an economic infrastructure, which is plain to see trough the presence of street hawkers along all high traffic streets and corners, selling everything from fruits to rubber shoes, and of course, cell-phone recharge cards. As outlined earlier, Niamey as a city doesn't provide dedicated spaces in neighborhoods where life events can be celebrated. Here too the street is the answer. Weddings and baptisms systematically spill over to the street with women within the walls of the compound and men and younger people sitting in conversational groups under mounted tents outside. This behavior is born from both a economic need (not being able to pay for one of the few private venues in town) and cultural imperatives. Personal life events are really community events and keeping them in one's neighborhood, on one's street, maintains an intimate connection with ones neighbors and family. Neighboring houses are routinely used for storage and food preparation while the main event is taking place. The streets of Niamey also provide unusual lodging opportunities when entire families fleeing poverty and droughts, seeking a better life in the city, find they have no choice but to squat leftover street corners and large unpaved sidewalks in residential neighborhoods.

The streets are also the main infrastructure in the lives of the city's youth. Small children use it to play soccer and other games with each other for example. However, as they reach puberty, a fundamental difference surfaces in the way young men and young women use the streets to socialize. The most

prevalent activity for teenage boys and young men involves sitting in front of their house, playing cards and drinking strong mint tea (called *Shayi* or *Attaya*) while swapping stories. These assemblies (called *Faada*) can go on until very late at night and represent an important part of their lives. *Faadas* have become such established social institutions that the larger ones have names, membership rules, and compete against each other in poker, foosball, ping-pong and other contests. Though satellite televisions and video games have eroded their numbers in the city, *Faadas* remain the main way most young men socialize and relate to the city.

Young women on the other hand will rarely be found in a *Faada*, except for a few brave ones. In Niamey's Muslim society, hanging about is interpreted as a sign of a loose character and moral depravation in a woman. That is not to say that women are banned from the streets altogether however. They participate in the street's informal economy by conducting commerce, they can sit alongside everyone else in front of homes during celebratory events, and go about their day running errands. Being idle in the street is what causes trouble and attracts judgment. So while girls are seldom subjected to house confinement, this puts them in the paradoxical situation of being able to come and go as they please but having few places that will tolerate their idle presence. They occupy much of their free time paying social calls to each other, using their itinerary as a journey through the streets of their neighborhood. This allows them to see and be seen, to interact briefly with known

Figure 16. Top right - A wedding in Niamey. The men sit outside in the morning during the religious ceremony. They are replaced by young people (male and female) in the afternoon for the dancing portion of the wedding. The celebration typically lasts until night. © louizb (flikr.com)

Figure 17. Top left - A Faada of young men in Niger.

Figure 18. Two young women chatting in the street in Goré Island, Senegal. © Carol Kiecker

acquaintances, to take the pulse of their neighborhood while providing them complete privacy in their interaction with each other.

Walking circuitously has the advantage of falling in the category of "street motion", which gives onlookers the impression that the girls are on their way somewhere, when in reality they are participating in an act of "mobile loitering". Walking endlessly in neighborhood streets in the context of Niamey is the ultimate escape and represents a loophole in behavioral rules for the girls. In a city where the overall poverty, in the capitalistic sense, often means little state or private initiatives towards providing public spaces of leisure or education, the walks provide an endless source of entertainment and sometimes even education. For the streets are where tailors display their latest and most desirable creations, it is where one might witness a weaver in front of his compound tirelessly repeating age old gestures that produce beauty and function. It is also where women dyers process and hang their freshly hand-died *bazins*[14] to dry, displaying their latest designs but also revealing a complex, labor intensive process. The walks also provide an opportunity for endless commentary on the built environment, be it the latest mansion that has materialized recently which has become the envy of the entire neighborhood, or complaining about the non-existing gutters that have allowed gigantic puddles in the streets during the last rain, or coming upon contracted masons laying bricks along the sidewalk for a home addition or repair. Perhaps more powerfully however, walking with friends provides the valuable space for young girls to exchange and share each other's thoughts, dreams and aspirations without fear of judgment.

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14   Bazin is one of the richest and most expensive fabric used for formal clothing in many parts of West Africa by both men and women.

UNCOVERING NEW POSSIBILITIES

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Our previous discussion about where people can and can't go as well as how public space, especially streets, are used, brings up the question of Right to the City in the Developing World. The city is often an economic entity that attracts people from various areas in search of employment and a better life. Its social life is governed by strong cultural and religious norms, however, that determine what that right is for its inhabitants. Because the youth and young adults are the age group that are the most consistently visible, these norms affect their public behavior the most. They are also an indication of the types of spaces that are needed and of how the city might be better designed to accommodate its inhabitants and create spaces that are relevant and useful to them.

As mentioned earlier, young girls are the most affected by these norms and restrictions on their level of public visibility, perhaps leaving them yearning for "the individual liberty to access urban resources, a right to change themselves by changing the city".[15] But AbouMaliq Simone offers a more nuanced suggestion of what the Right to the City might mean in African cities for all involved, linking it to the right "to be engaged, to be the object of requests, to be re-settled or re-aligned - to

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15 Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, Edited and translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA (1996) 158

thrive in unanticipated ways."[16] It would therefore seem necessary in the context of Niamey to seek new ways of creating collective experiences, crossroads and intersections, the combination of which might produce new possibilities for the city's youth. This might also lead to a public space where age, education and most importantly gender cease to be barriers and means of segregation, and become fruitful conditions for a richer more layered space with new ways of using and moving through non-private space.

NEW SPATIAL POSSIBILITIES

Streets are uniquely appropriate in providing venues for disparate categories of city dwellers, allowing them to intersect without necessarily having to conform to one another or change for one another. By their very nature, streets provide the opportunity to create a life "in-between" the more strongly defined entities of home, school, office, market.[17] It is a space where one can appear to be on their way somewhere but really never go anywhere, a behavior previously examined in young girls in Niamey. Essentially, the circuit that is created through such informal uses becomes a metaphorically confined space where the rules of school, home or office don't apply but new norms and behaviors can be created. It points to a spatial typology whose elements are not all tangible and visible, but a mixture of real or imaginary boundaries, virtual connections and the physical spaces that make these possible. Ultimately, it could be as simple as providing the opportunity to do many things at once in order to achieve staying in place within a circuit while moving around.[18] This type of approach would be advantageous when thinking about how girls can navigate the streets in a useful and enriching way given the unspoken hindrances to their movements through the city.

Needless to say, the youth, especially young women are subjected to a communal gaze that turns

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16   AbdouMaliq Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads,* Routledge, New York (2010)

17   Simone, *City Life,* 220

18   Simone, *City Life,* 213

them into objects that must be "governed" or controlled in some way. However, there is an opportunity of creating spaces that provide "gently subversive" possibilities that in time allow changes in behavior and norms to occur. And since "place is produced by a practice that adheres to ideological beliefs about what is the appropriate thing to do"[19], new and appropriate things to do might lead to new beliefs that allow wider uses of public places. Instead of the usual public/private dichotomy, a second typology of space might be thought of in a "both-and" relationship rather than an "either-or". It therefore seems important to dig deeper in the lives of the youth, understand how they use public spaces, how they more through streets, how they socialize and what are the hindrances they experience. Female points of view would be especially valuable as they might provide a deeper understanding of the types of activities girls desire in partaking in as well as the types of spaces they feel comfortable passing through.

Figure 19. Top right - The Movement Café, London, UK - Studio Myerscough

Figure 20. Top middle - Guinean students studying under street lamps in public places © BBC Focus On Africa

Figure 21. Top left - Houston Pavilion, Chongqing, China, Morris Architects

19   Tim Cresswell, *In Place / Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression.* University of Minnesota Press, Madison (1996)

INTERPRETING DESIRE LINES: TALKING AND DRAWING WITH YOUTH IN NIAMEY

Figure 22. Students drawing at College Banizoumbou

During my research, I took a trip to Niger during which I organized a drawing charrette with middle school students ages thirteen to sixteen. This age range was deliberate for many reasons. For one, the city's population is extremely young with those under 25 representing 67% of the population. I also consider the ages between twelve and sixteen as ones where the students might have started to pay attention to their surroundings are likely to have started being aware of society's expectations of them, which shapes their behavior.

I met with twenty five students from College Banizoumbou located at the crossroads of five mixed to low-income neighborhoods near the heart of the city. The income level is significant because high income family youth are typically shielded from some of the cultural constraints experienced by the majority of the population. One reason is that they can be less religiously conservative but another is that they live in quiet neighborhoods where one (especially young girls) is subject to less public scrutiny. The neighborhoods the middle school students originate from are some of the oldest in the city and present a rich level of activity, ethnic and cultural mix, which makes them a good sample of the city.

Figure 23. Top right -
College Banizoumbou entrance

Figure 24. Top left - College Banizoumbou
recess area

INQUIRING ABOUT THE STUDENT'S BUILT ENVIRONMENT: A DRAWING EXERCISE

As part of the investigation in the life of the neighborhoods being considered for this project, I spent a few hours with the students and asked them to draw their neighborhood or house. A written paragraph was also requested as part of the exercise. The result was a rich mosaic of representations ranging from simple rooms to chunks of neighborhoods.
The drawings provided a glimpse into the everyday lives of these students from the highlighted characteristics of their homes to what constituted life in the immediate vicinity of their family dwellings.

It is important to note that all the homes pictured showed a compound typology which is traditional to the country. Such typology that would have been entirely different in high income neighborhoods, where houses are based on western models of home layout. The representations often provided insights in the spatial elements that matter most to the students.

Another interesting aspect of the drawings is that very often (though not always), the physical structure of the home itself or collection of rooms that make up the home are seldom detailed. The students often drew the doors and windows of those structures, representing them in elevation and nothing else. The courtyard and the streets seem to get a more detailed treatment. As is customary

Figure 25. Right - Drawing 1: Home vicinity in the Liberté neighborhood
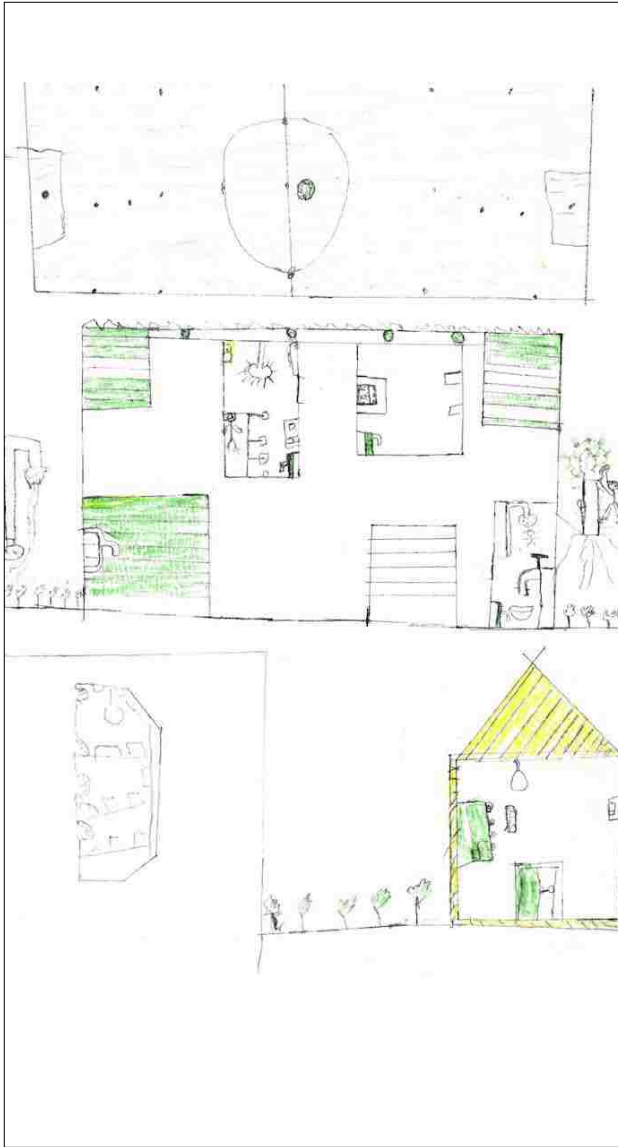
Figure 27. Top middle - Drawing 2: Home vicinity in the Boukoki neighborhood

Figure 26. Top left - Drawing 3: Home vicinity in the Zongo neighborhood
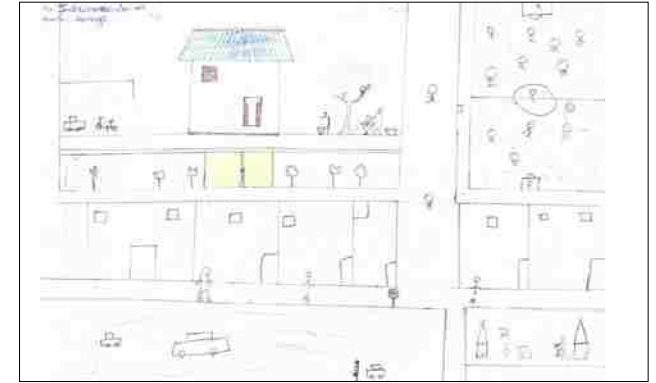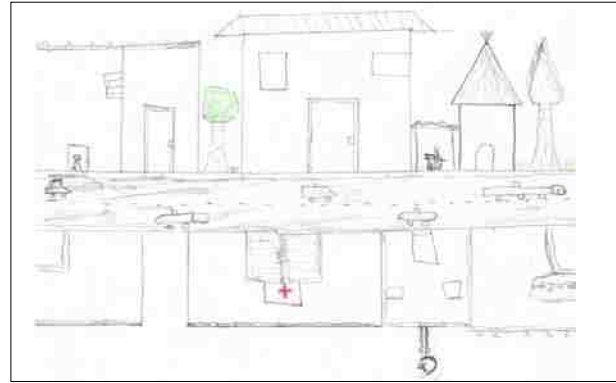
in many Asian, middle-eastern and Muslim cultures, the courtyard holds the life of the house and is both the circulation space that takes one to different parts of the house but also provides a refuge from the indoor heat. It is also in the courtyard that cooking, eating and laundry takes place. That focus on the exterior activity is also visible in the way the streets are depicted as either the links between homes, soccer fields, pharmacies and mosques, or bustling with cars and motorcycles.

In Drawing2, the author focused on neighborhood proximities and omitted details about her own home. The street is highly "mixed-use" with a tailor sitting under a small shaded structure at his sawing table while a small clinic, mosque and a convenience store occupy the opposite side of the street. Cars are zipping by indicating that this might be a busy commercial street. The drawing shows no pedestrian activity, which might be an indication that this particular street isn't teaming with walkers.

In Drawing 3, the author gives us a complex view of his neighborhood life. His home compound has small trees street-side and a bigger one inside the courtyard underneath which a woman is pounding a food ingredient in a large mortar. Water is flowing from a pump next to the tree and the woman cooking, suggesting a poetic reading of that portion of the drawing: the tree that shades the woman who uses the water to wash produce, pots and pans, the runoff of which goes back to nourish the tree… A football field is shown in prominence next to the house, suggesting the level of importance

it might hold for the author. Other houses are shown in elevation with no suggestion of what lies within, but a small one on the right bottom corner shows courtyard activity, suggesting the author's familiarity with it. The home of a friend perhaps... Interestingly, the streets are shown with several people walking in them but only a couple of cars which is consistent with the nature of Niamey as a pedestrian city for the majority of the population. Incomes are fairly low in the Zongo neighborhood the author belongs to, so it would make sense that most people walk everywhere.

I noticed that in twenty one out of twenty five drawings, the water pumps in the courtyards are prominent, sometimes even being showcased alone almost as the life-force of the home, next to shade giving tree. Both the courtyard and the street showed trees in most cases, no mater how small.
Because Niamey's climate is extremely hot and arid and trees aren't particularly leafy or in abundance, one could imagine that the trees are crucial to the daily lives of the students as they make their way to school or as they go out to run errands around the neighborhood.

Finally, several of the drawings showcased neighborhood football fields. These are typically really just a wide dusty empty piece of land that someone has affixed with poles to mark the goal lines, but they probably are an important source of distraction for the neighborhood youth. Boys were the ones who included them in their drawings. The girls on the other hand tended to focus more on amenities such as the pharmacies, clinics, mosques, or even schools present near their homes. This points to differences in the lives of the two sexes at this age, with girls possibly being given caretaker responsibilities early, from fetching medicine at the nearby pharmacy to cooking for an ill relative while boys might have more freedom and time to play and interact with their friends around the neighborhood.

Figure 28. The girls are expressing their views about public space and public behavior in the city
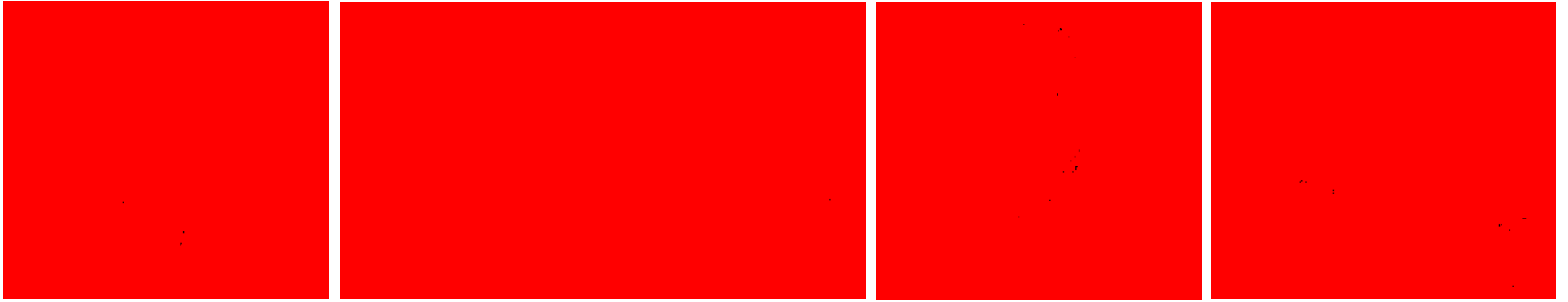
A CONVERSATION WITH THE GIRLS

Haven established a relationship with the students through the drawing exercises, I sought to have a conversation a few days later with the girls alone this time. I was interested in finding out how they viewed themselves in the public realm, how and if they use public spaces and what their concerns are considering the Muslim context they live in. The idea of going out or staying in was central to our conversation. There was a lively debate where some felt that always being out and about was not good for a girl and that they should stay home and help their mothers instead. A larger portion of the girls, however, expressed a strong desire to venture out with their friends, putting an accent on the importance of partaking in activities that increase their knowledge of the world. One student felt that as one is out an about with friends, one would find out about and acquire new understanding of things through conversations with them. The assumption here is that staying at home with the same friends wouldn't yield the same result because of the lack of privacy inherent around the family compound. Many girls also stressed the importance of "seeing things" both in order to learn and to distract themselves. A typical example was the often mentioned desire to watch plays or public dance rehearsals on weekend afternoons with their friends. There was also the appeal of walking around and happening upon something of interest on the way that can capture the imagination or shift one's thinking.

Figure 29. Top right - *The National Stadium in Niamey*

Figure 30. Top middle - *Girls traning on the stadium grounds*

Figure 31. Top left - *A pavilion in the National Museum*

Figure 32. Bottom right - *Couple stroling at the museum*

The appeal of walks in the neighborhood where contrasted by the desire for quiet, safe, gawker-free, well shaded surroundings to enjoy one's walk. One girl mentioned enjoying walks in garden-like surroundings, while another yearned for clean streets because she worried about catching an infection in the many dirty streets. Perhaps this is why the National Museum was mentioned many times as a destination of choice by the girls. Niamey's only museum and zoo is an open-air domain of 60 acres marked by a series of pavilions for the museum collection and a zoo section. The museum is well shaded and lends itself to quiet strolls with the spectacle of animals, recreations of traditional dwellings, dinosaur remains and craft artisans making and selling their best work. It also figured on the list of public spaces the girls felt they could go to without parental objection, as it has long been a popular family destination teaming with children. It is perhaps the types of people (families and their children) that patron the museum that lend its "harmless space" image parents are comfortable with. Furthermore, it is a place that seeks to educate, a desirable attribute for parents in Niamey as most place a tremendous amount of faith and value in education for their children.

The city's main stadium was another top choice the girls mentioned as a safe place their parents approve of. This came as a surprise, but it appears that sports have become important in many Niameyen's lives. When there is no official soccer game, the stadium grounds, which offer tennis and basketball courts along with rooms for martial arts or even Zumba classes, is teaming with high and middle

class women exercising in groups. This has lent the facility an aura of propriety, harmlessness and even "coolness" it certainly didn't possess a couple of decades ago. The girls enjoy organizing dance sessions in one of the many exercise rooms, as well as play basketball and soccer with their friends.

It is also important to note that the young women talked about places for acquiring knowledge as very important to them. One such place was the library at the *Centre Culturel Franco-Nigerien* (CCFN) where they like to study in groups and rent out books to strengthen their French. It was stressed that having spaces for studying outside of school or one's home were very desirable. Education was central for them and many expressed their desire to succeed in their studies so they can provide for their families the same way their parents were trying to ensure their academic success.

I found interesting that, overall, the liked or desired spaces by the girls were the same across the board. The main point of tension was again the notion of taking strolls in the neighborhood, which was extremely desirable for most but religiously problematic for others. But even the minority that felt that one should stay home in order to avoid being labeled as morally loose, expressed a desire for the same educational and sports-related activities.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

After my sessions with the College Banizoumbou students, it quickly became obvious to me that creating the type of experience and public space that addresses their desires and concerns would be a challenge. Rather than conceiving an institutional building that would safely house their activities, the idea is to create an activity circuit that would be designed to offer girls a series of destinations throughout the city in a way that shields them from judgment or harassment by their neighborhoods' conservative tendencies.

Programing the circuit provides the justification they can use to step outside the family compound and do something purposeful. Because there are already activities they enjoy, and that are most importantly accepted by their parents and society, at the National Museum and the National Stadium, there is an opportunity of creating "spin-offs" of them sprinkled along the created route. Taking cues from the conversation I had with the girls, the project creates a route that provides opportunities for fitness activities, studying in groups, access to health education and mentoring programs, people-watching, but also aimless strolling.

ANALYSIS OF PRECEDENTS

Figure 33. Top - Market Shading in Niamey. Simple cloth shading along market lanes allows shoppers to linger.

Figure 34. Bottom - Scaffolding between homes in Marrakesh that allows adaptation of shading material to the circumstances.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SHADE

In most developing countries, the main way of circulating is walking. There is hardly any public transportation and owning a car or motorcycle is out of reach for many and certainly for the youth. Consequently, and in spite of the fact that there is often no designated pedestrian ways, Niamey is pedestrian in practice and by necessity.[1] In hot and arid climates, this self-transportation is often challenged by the lack of shade on a journey to work, school or during social interactions. In many middle eastern countries city lanes and markets, shading structures have been part of the landscape, providing protection but also an infrastructure for social interactions. Figure 34 shows how shading scaffoldings are used in Marrakesh to provide flexibility of purpose for the street. Simple reed mats are put on for daily used, lavish decorated cloth can replace them if there is a wedding on the street or a festival in the city for example. It is important to think about incorporating shade in the project not only for facilitating lingering but also establishing social connections while circulating in the streets of Niamey.

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1   Lourdes Diaz Olvera, Didier Plat, Pascal Pochet, "Etalement Urbain, Situations De Pauvreté Et Accès À La Ville En Afrique Subsaharienne: L'exemple De Niamey," *Démographie et transport : Villes du Nord et villes du Sud*, L'Harmattan, Paris (2002) 147-175

Figure 35. Young girls enjoying the Corniche Ouest circuit

Figure 36. (Next page) Dakar aerial map

CORNICHE OUEST, DAKAR, SENEGAL

As a country, Senegal has many similarities with Niger from a cultural, social and religious point of view. The two countries also share the fact that they are ex-french colonies trying to define themselves in this global era. The city of Dakar, Senegal's capital, has been undergoing a profound transformation of the past decade, modernizing its infrastructure, providing housing and public spaces to its population. One such space is the 6 miles long "Corniche Ouest" sports circuit along the city's main waterfront. This incredibly popular space fully comes to life after 5pm with a dramatic influx of youth from the city but more so from nearby Check Anta Diop university and other higher learning educational facilities and dormitories. The circuit provides fitness classes at regular intervals and body building areas à-la Venice Beach. The water view adds to the charm of the area which is also home to several monuments, sports fields, shopping malls and small markets. The circuit's loose and semi-informal programing provides concrete things to do for the city's youth along the waterfront amidst more commercial and institutional centers that attract a diverse mix of people to the area. On any given day, scores of women of all ages and backgrounds can be seen jogging along the wide asphalt pedestrian pathways or taking advantage of the fitness classes. Many are also simply strolling along catching up with their friends

AFRICAN RENAISSANCE MONUMENT

FIFA BASKETBALL COURT

ENEA

LYCEE GANANDOU DIOP

Ebbets Field - soccer

olympic club

SEA PLAZ

CHEICK ANTA DIOP UNIVERSITY

PLACE DU SOUVEN

ECOLE DES MANGUIERS 2

Fann Beach
Sports Circuit - MIDPOINT

LYCEE M. DELAFOSSE

SPORTS FIELD

ECOLE SUPERIEUR POLYTECHNIQUE

IBA DIOR STADIUM

SEYDOU NOUROU TALL MOSOLEUM

MAGICLAND

ASSANE DIOUF STADIUM

MUSLIM CIMETARY
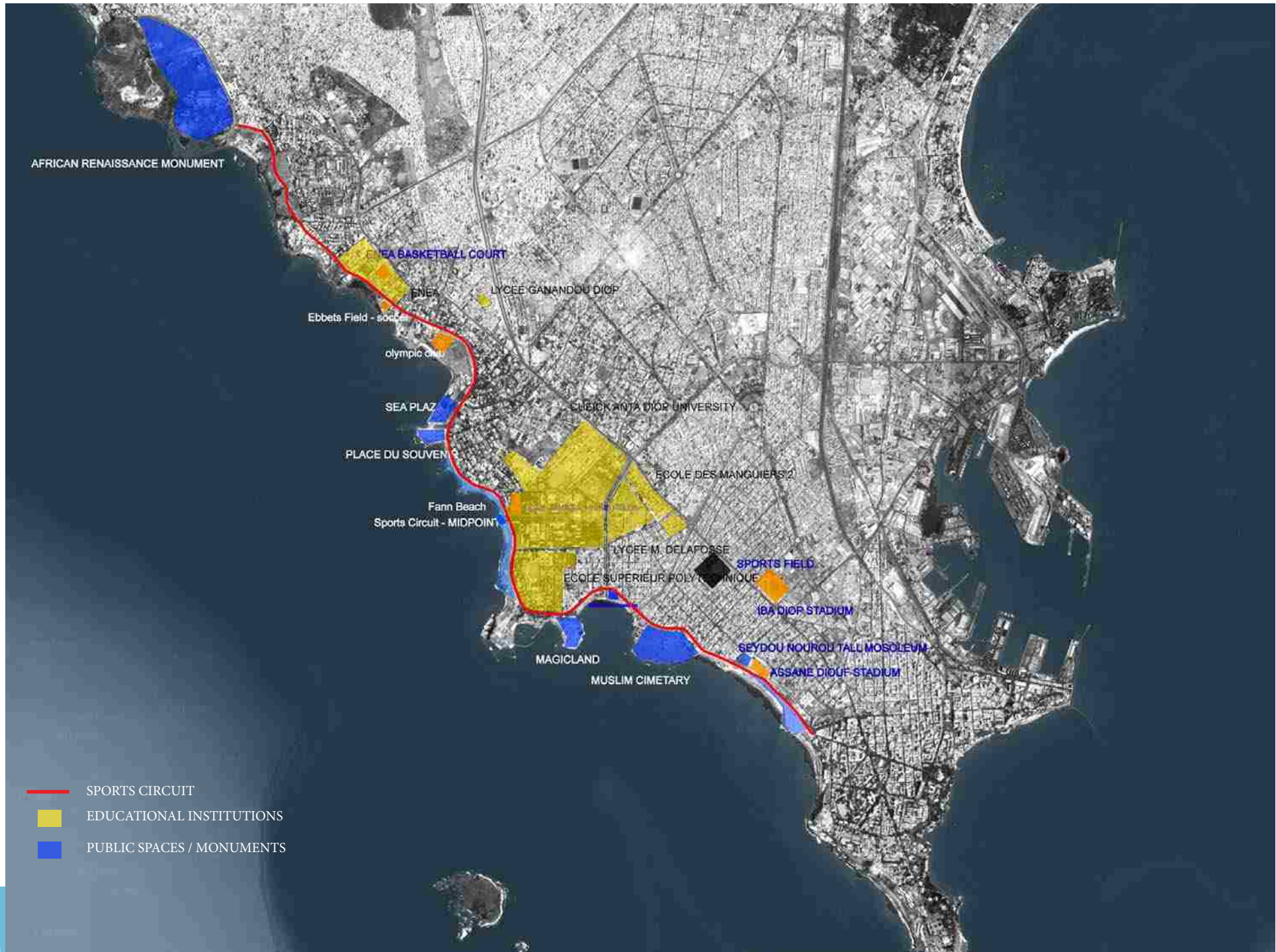
	SPORTS CIRCUIT
	EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
	PUBLIC SPACES / MONUMENTS

GERI ROUTE, CHANDIGARH, INDIA

The Geri route is a set of streets in Chandigarh on which youth, especially young couples, regularly drive in their cars. The word *geri* locally means "rounds", and thus the name derives from the "rounds" that people make endlessly through the route. The "mobile loitering" urban space has been used in this manner since the 1970s, gaining increasing popularity in the 1980s when car ownership became more common among young residents.

The Geri route provides the place for the youth to watch and be seen, show off their latest fashion or cars. It is also a place of great celebration during holidays like the Hindu Holi or Valentine's Day. Although not a pedestrian network, the Geri route is a great example of how streets can be used as a social infrastructure that ends up producing norms, rituals and a language of its own while providing youth with an exclusive space of freedom.

Figure 37. *Young men people-watching along the Geri route*

Figure 38. *Next page - Valentine's day on the Geri route*

VALENTINES DAY (FEBRUARY 14TH)
GERI ROUTE (FESTIVE AREA)

www.manaraa.com

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
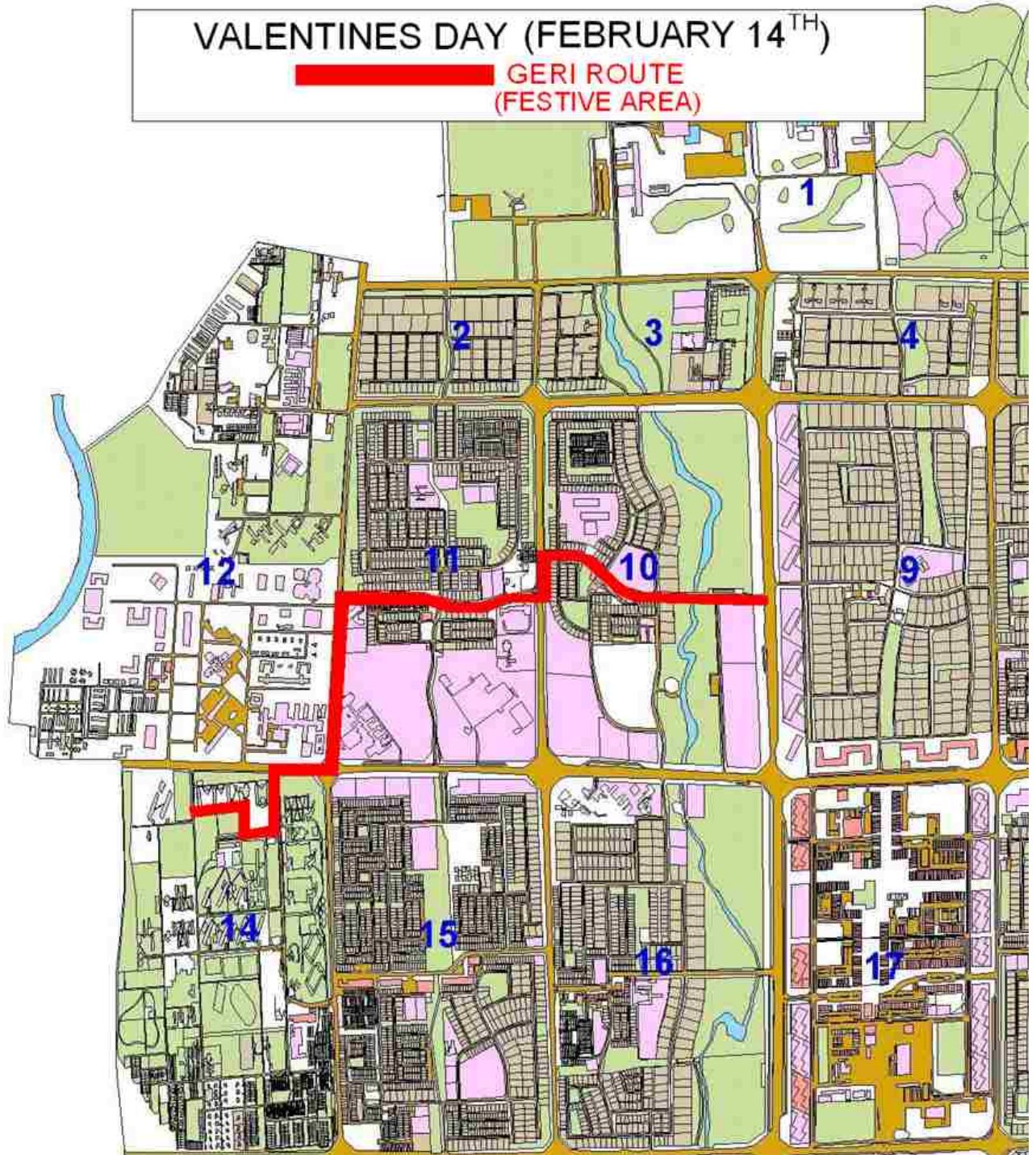
CONTEXT

Figure 39. Niamey

Niamey's first master plan was laid out in 1929 followed by an accelerated population growth from 1947 onward. This growth was accompanied by a vast construction boom spread over a period of ten years. That era saw the construction of today's City Hall, the National Hospital, the Postal office headquarters, several schools as well as affordable housing. This construction program also gave birth to the city's current administrative structure consisting of 99 quarters contained within 5 communes.[1]

Niamey is located at an altitude varying from 590 to 820 feet and is cut off by the Niger River. The northern high plain, towering over the river at an average altitude of 720 feet, is the site of the essential of the city's population and of its first 4 communes. This high plain is cut through by a few thalwegs (river valleys), the most important being *Gounti Yenna*, a valley crossing the city is its entirety from North to South used to develop vegetable and horticulture gardens. The valley was also used as a natural barrier between what was the "European City" and the "Indigenous City" during the colonial era.[2] This division is still visible today as the "white city" is now occupied by the wealthy

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1   Adamou, Abdoulaye. *Parcours migratoire des citadins et problème du logement à Niamey* - Master's Thesis. University Abdou Moumouni, Niamey (2005)

2   Bernus, p.32
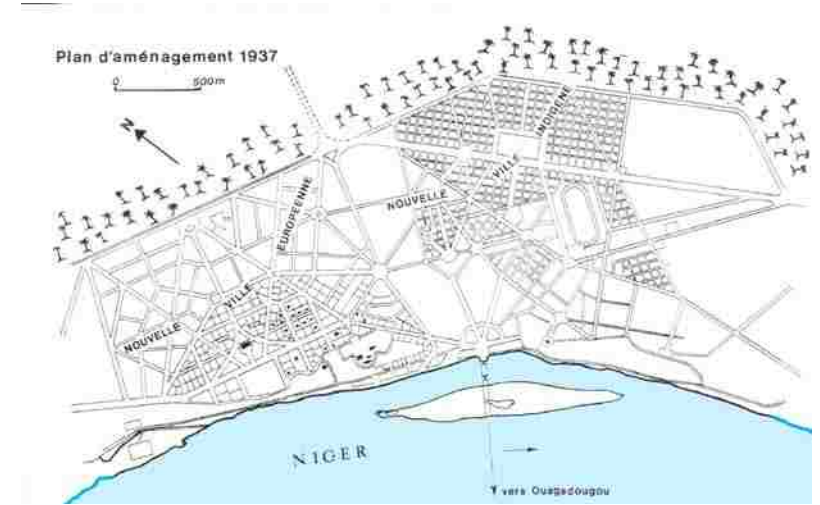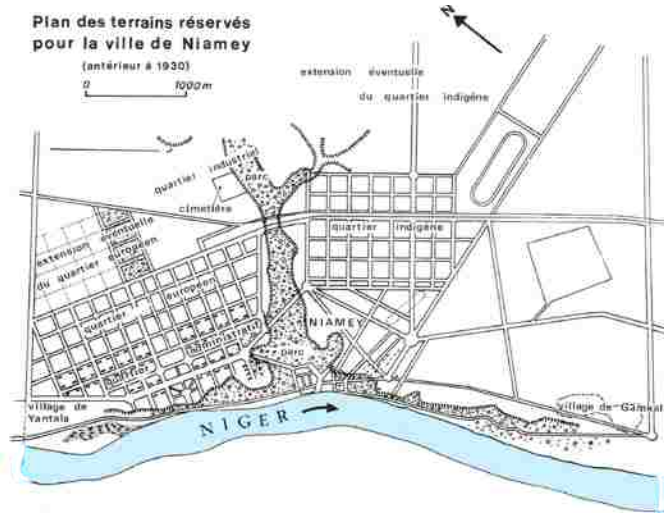
elite of the city while the previously "indigenous city" is home to the middle to low economic class of the population.

Economically, the majority of the city's population is considered poor while a small portion (20 percent) is consider non-poor middle class and above. Among the poor salaried population, the average income is CFA30,000 ($60) per month versus CFA120,00 ($240) for the non-poor. This gap in income is even more dramatic when one looks at the average income for the considered "rich" or upper middle-class, 12% of the non-poor population as it is estimated to be well over CFA200,000 ($400) per month.[3]

Figure 40. 1929 MASTER PLAN. © Suzanne Bernus

Figure 41. 1937 MASTER PLAN. © Suzanne Bernus

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3   Olvera, Plat, and Pochet, 153

THE CITY STREETS

Figure 42. Major streets in Niamey

Creating a programmed route through Niamey necessitates a look at its streets, which vary widely in use, character and reliability. Neighborhoods are roughly carved out by major avenues that are paved in older neighborhoods but consist of compressed earth Laterite in newer ones. Similarly, older neighborhoods have paved, narrow lanes, while newer ones have streets akin to dust roads, much wider and often tree-less. This is true even in relatively newer (less than 25 years) wealthy neighborhoods. The state of streets is a direct result of the deep economic crisis experienced by the city of Niamey as funds are unavailable to finish laying out streets, dig up the necessary infrastructure, provide protection from the sun and dust winds by planting enough trees. Regardless of whether the roads are paved or not however, they are always multi-use with no clear hierarchy as to who goes where. In thoroughfares and more commercial roads cars and motorcycles share the right of way with bicyclists, vendors pushing their carts along and pedestrians alike. In quieter low-income neighborhoods, men sit on the edge of the road in front of their homes chatting with friends or people-watching, while a woman is frying up and selling snacks across from the neighboring house's tenants who are hand-washing their laundry on the side walk (it provides the convenience of a gutter that can be used to dispose of the dirty water.) In wealthier areas, the unpaved inner-neighborhood streets are wide and empty, except for the occasional car or children walking or being driven to school.
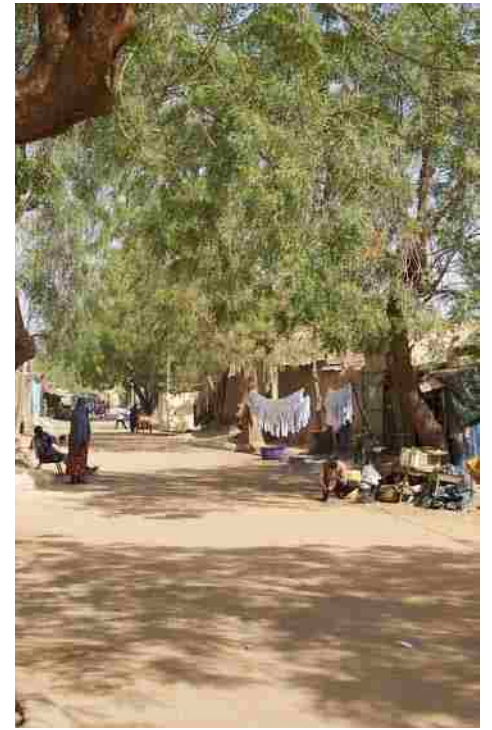
Figure 43. *Top right - Partially paved low income neighborhood street*

Figure 44. *Top middle - High income administrative district street © Jean Rebiffé*

Figure 45. *Middle - Busy commercial street*

Figure 46. *Top left - Quiet low income street*

Figure 47. *Bottom - Quiet unpaved wealthy neighborhood street*

Gounti Yenna Valley

National
Stadium

College Banizoumbu

National
Museum
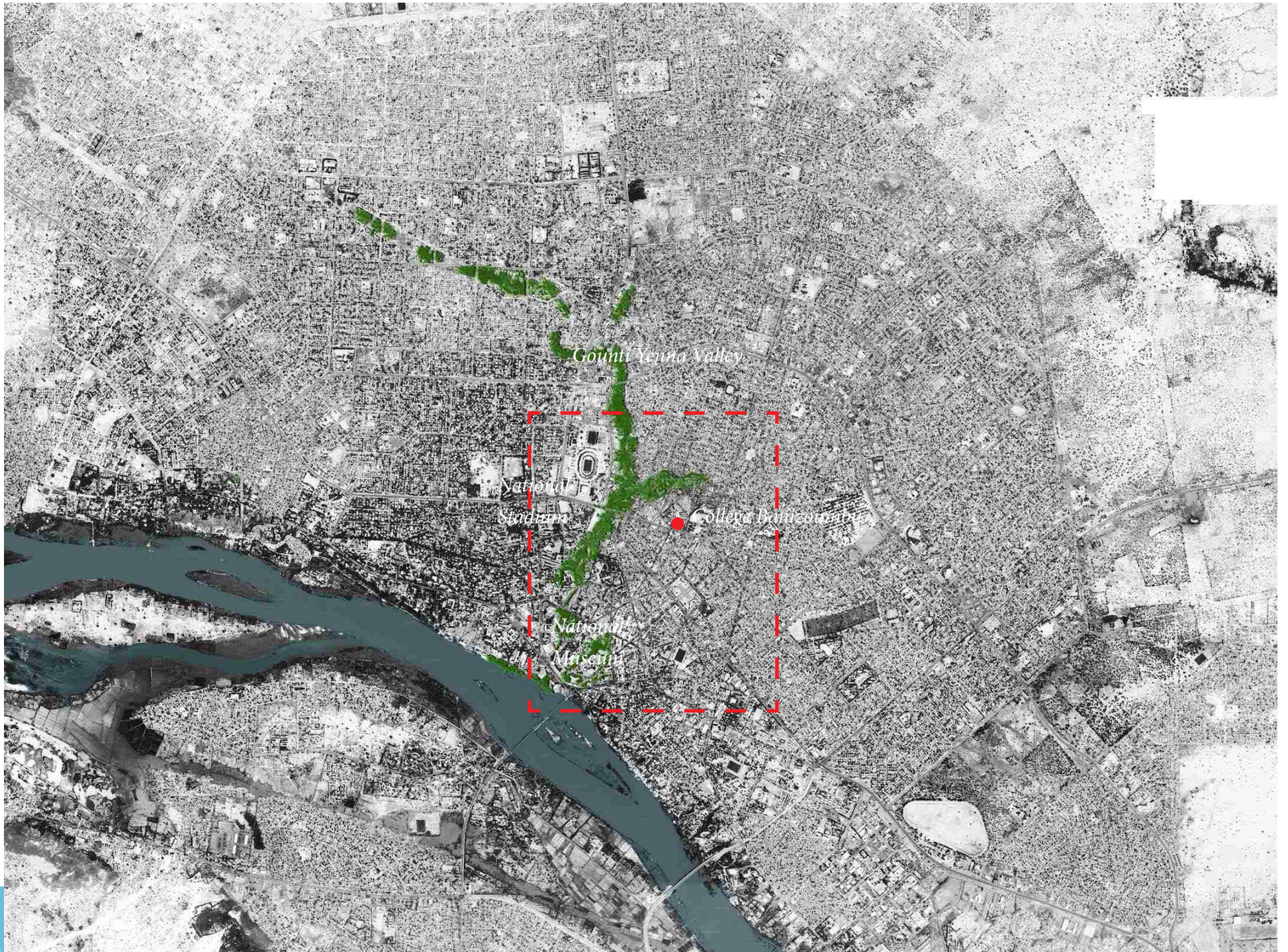
SITE SELECTION

Selecting a site for the women friendly route was strongly determined by my conversation with the young girls from College Banizoumbou and some of the developments currently taking place in the city. The fact that the Museum and Stadium were such important public spaces for them caused me to look at the vicinity of these institutions as a starting point. The second determinant was being aware that the city and its officials were interested in developing the Gounti Yenna valley as a public amenity for the population. As part of a vision called "Niamey Nyala" ("Niamey the Beautiful" in *Zarma*), vast construction is underway, including everything from better roads, to better sanitary infrastructure, to affordable housing, public and commercial spaces. This provided the perfect opportunity for my site selection and a way to narrow down its scale to encompass the main public institutions and a significant portion of the valley as a focus area. The chosen site extents (figure 48) also encompass College Banizoumbou.

Figure 48. *Previous page - Niamey site selection*

GOUNTY YENA VALLEY:
NATURAL BARRIER

HISTORIC EUROPEAN QUARTER

HISTORIC INDIGENOUS QUARTER

HISTORIC CITY LINES
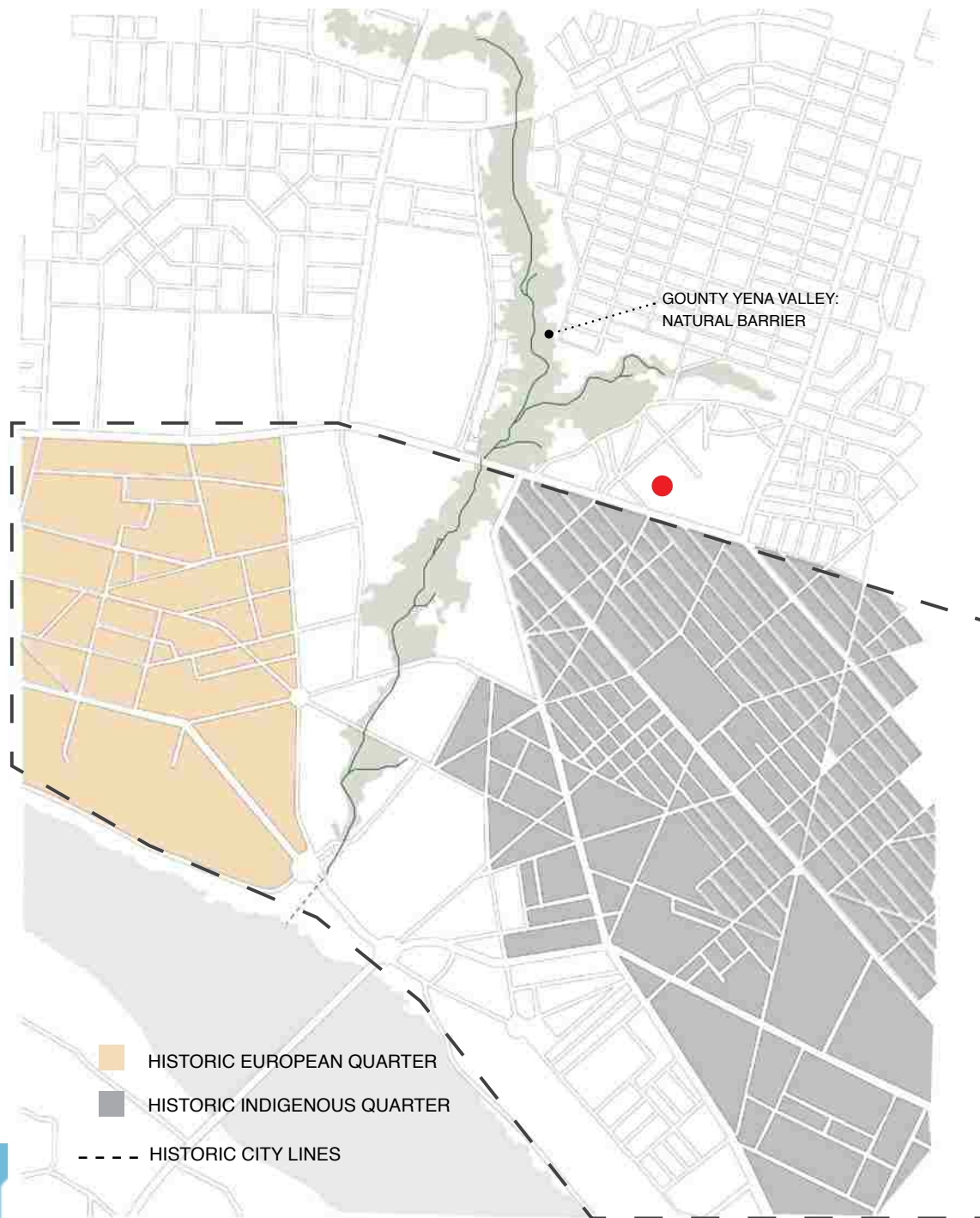
SITE ANALYSIS

The selected site provides a near snapshot of the city as a whole. It literally lies in the middle of the city with *Gounti Yenna* exposing the different dichotomies and divisions inherent to the city. As highlighted earlier, the valley was a natural barrier between the French quarter on the West side and the Indigenous quarter to the East. Fifty years after independence, these historic divisions have morphed into socio-economic divisions.

As visible in the income map (Figure 50), the upper income class population is now located in the historically French part of town, which is home to political dignitaries, CEOs, diplomats, and western expats. Furthermore, there is a correlation between religious conservatism and income level that is visible by comparing the income map to the religious one (Figure 51) as poorer neighborhoods show stronger levels of religious conservatism than better off neighborhoods. As shown earlier in this document, these historic neighborhoods are home to a merchant class that has been instrumental in increasing the level of religious fundamentalism in the city by embracing the way of life and religious outlook of their middle eastern business partners.

Figure 49. Previsou page - Historical division
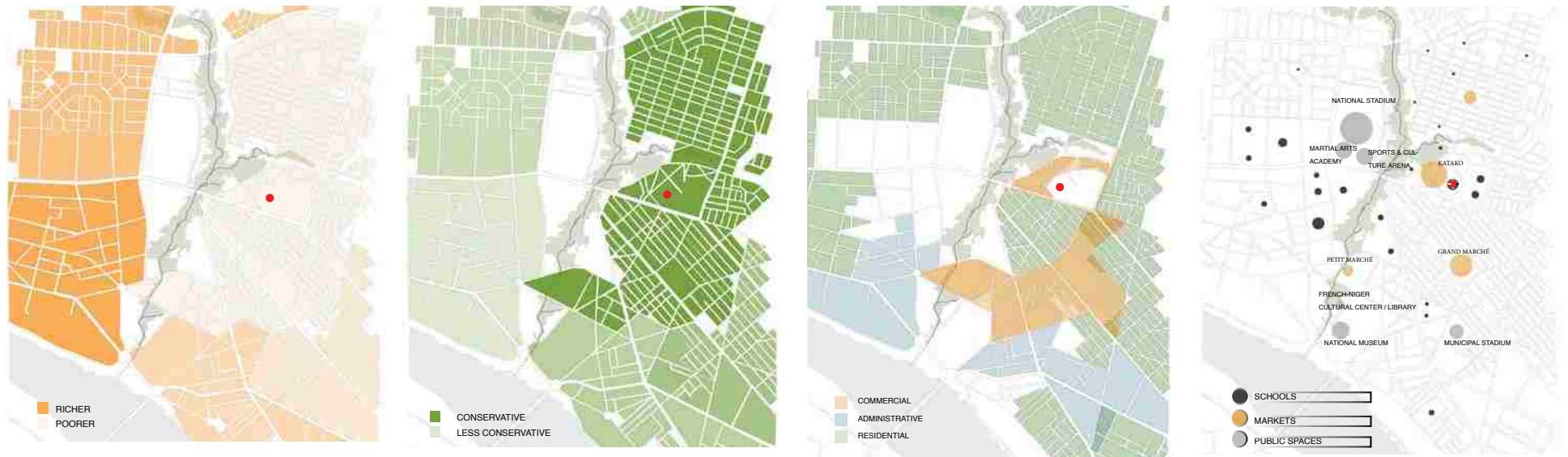
The site is also very particular in terms of its land use and institutions. It is mostly residential in nature but it contains 3 of the main markets in the city: The Grand Marché (the city's main market for clothing, fabric and household items), the Petit Marché(the produce, meat and fish market) and Katako Market. The latter is a sprawling labyrinth where one can find anything from household items, to construction material, recycled materials and furniture. It is also a major recycling area boasting actual foundries used to transform all kinds of metal into toys, or pots and pans. The southern edge of the site is mainly administrative and is home to major state departments as well as some commercial offices for such institutions as the main mining companies.

Finally, in terms of institutions, the site has the highest concentration of schools in the city (figure 53). These range from small elementary schools to middle and high schools, to higher learning institutions. As discussed earlier, one of the motivations of the project is to relate the National museum to the Stadium within the route. They join other institutions such as the French-Nigerien Cultural Center (which houses one of the only libraries on the city) as the major public spaces on the site.

Some physical characteristics of the site have been captured though the images on the next page taken by the young girls in College Banizoumbou as they made their way to and from school.

Figure 50. Top right - Income levels by neighborhoods

Figure 51. Top middle - Religious Conservatism

Figure 52. Top middle - Site Land use

Figure 53. Top left - Site Institutions

Figure 54. Next page - Site photos taken by the College Banizoumbou girls

LINK STADIUM TO MUSEUM

TOUCH A MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SCHOOLS

BIASE ROUTE TOWARD LOWER INCOME
MORE CONSERVATIVE AREAS

CREATING THE ROUTE

Figure 55. Above - Route creation logic
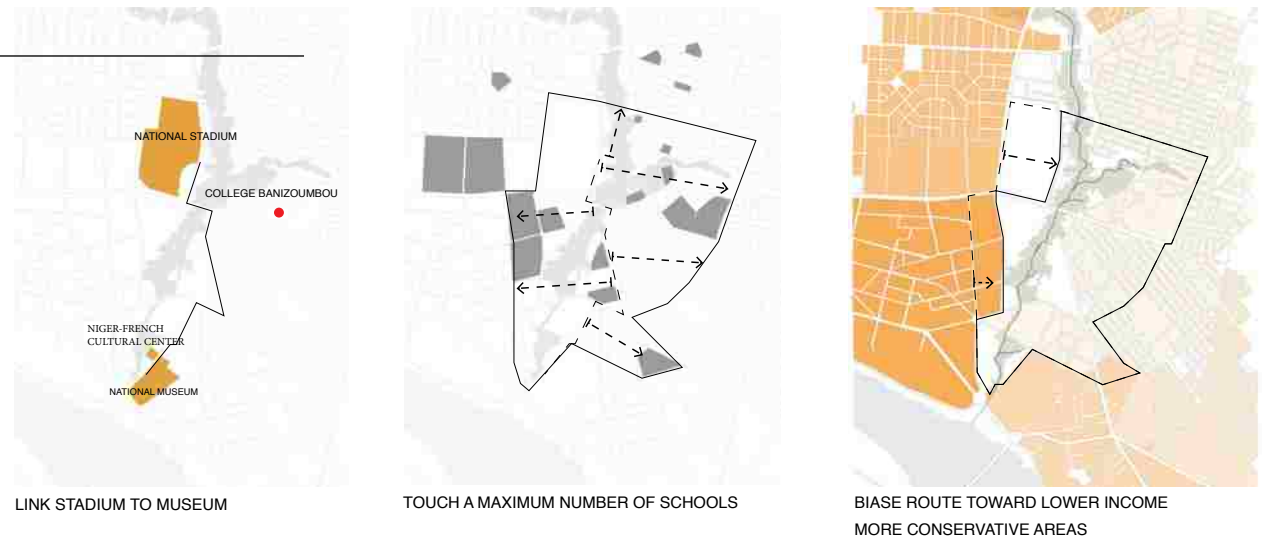
To create a route that would be comfortable to navigate for girls in the city and expose them as little as possible to criticism by the community was exercise in site understanding the nature of the site in all its complexities.

- The first move was to outline a path from the National Stadium to the National museum that would go through the more conservative Eastern side of the city.
- The second consideration was to include as many schools as possible as part of this itinerary in order to give young girls opportunities to go along the route on their journeys from home to school or while running errands in their neighborhood.
- The third move was to bias the route more towards the lower income part of the site, pushing the route lines away from the high-income, less religiously conservative sections for the benefit of the more conservative ones.
- Fourth, the route lines were shifted to run closer and sometimes through *Gounti Yenna* in order to have opportunities to provide it with public spaces but also take advantage of the green scape's quieter surroundings and more pleasant ambient temperatures and natural shade.
- While researching the valley, I became apparent that some portions of it as fairly dangerous, housing illegal drug activities as well as loitering drug addicts. The lines were therefore pushed back westward onto a safe, well-lit road along the stadium.
- Finally, the site having strong commercial pockets meant that some areas were very noisy and

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF GREEN VALLEY
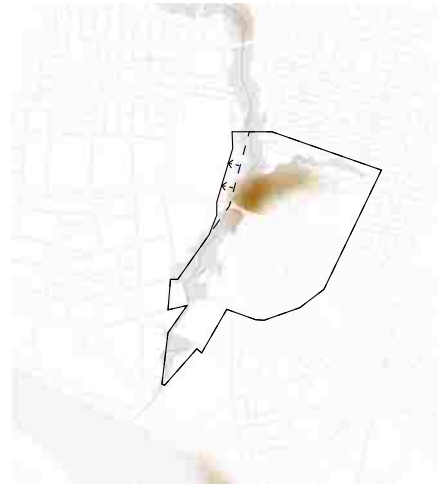
AVOID UNSAFE ZONES

LIMIT EXPOSURE TO CROWDED AREAS
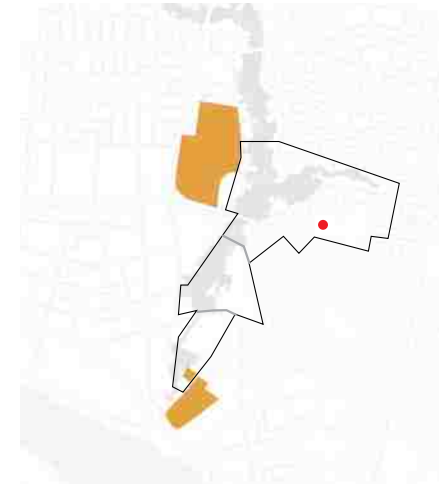
RESULT: A 4 MILES ROUTE THROUGH THE CITY

traffic congested. Furthermore, many of the merchants in those markets are men, many very conservative making for than less comfortable surroundings for the route. While the intent of the route is to give young girls an experience of the city in its full glory, I thought it best to avoid areas where they could be subjected to an intense level of scrutiny, which might discourage them from using the route altogether.

These different considerations created a 4 mile long itinerary linking all the public spaces and most of the schools on the site, providing a good base on which to add program to give the girls, but also the youth in Niamey, additional reasons to use it. The route is designed in a recognizable way with a consistent material palette and design in order to create the impression of an alternate world as one strolls through the city and queue people in to its presence and special nature as they approach it.

PROGRAM

Figure 57. Top right - Current Acceptable Activities

Figure 56. Top left - Expending the acceptable activities
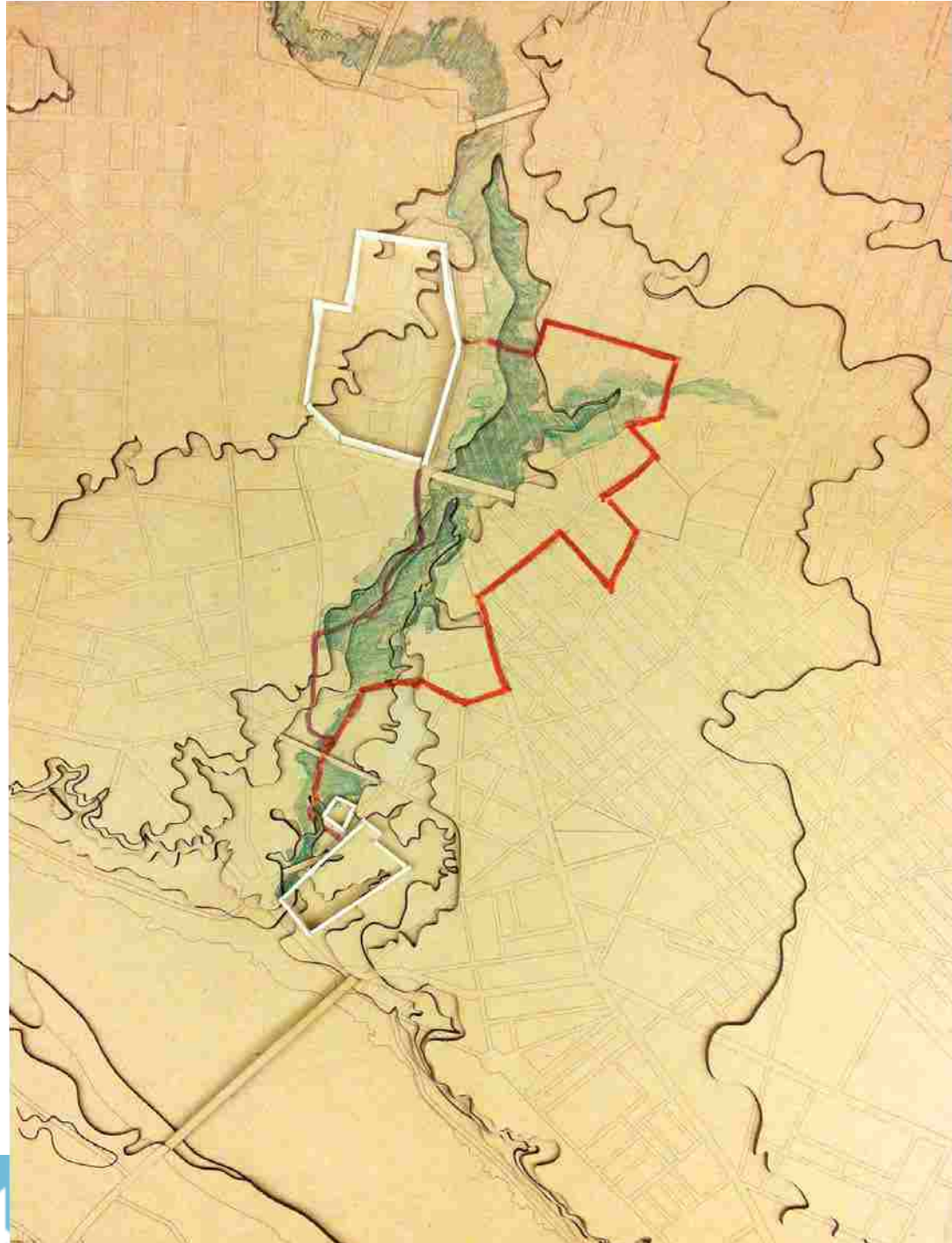
Programing the route is critical in insuring girls are not questioned by the society that looks on as they loiter along it. From the public spaces existing on the site and the conversation with the girls, it appears that some specific activities are both desired by them and sanctioned even by their parents. Notable ones are:

- Practicing sports and fitness at the National Stadium
- Putting together girl dance parties at the stadium
- Watching rehearsals of plays and concerts and the French-Nigerien Cultural center
- Studying at the cultural center's library
- Strolling through the National museum grounds
- Watching the performances, people, artisans working, and zoo animals

These program elements for the most part could very well exist outside of an institutions' walls. Consequently, "spin-offs" of them are proposed to populate the itinerary but in a way that is sensitive to their locations, the level of privacy inherent and the thermal conditions on the site. They take the form of a series of interventions on the route that provide benefits not only for the girls but the community as at large. These interventions are designed in a systematic manner to provide comfortable easily identifiable spaces that have a consistent expression throughout the route, in keeping with the latter's design approach.

Figure 58. Programed zones

Figure 59. Next page - Program type placement

GIRLS ONLY ACTIVITIES

GIRLS CENTERED ACTIVITIES

MIXED-GENDER ACTIVITIES

OUTREACH AND MENTORING PROGRAM SPACES

A REGIONAL MARKET FAIR

- STUDY CARRELS
- MULTIPURPOSE AMPHITHEATER AND GROUP FITNESS STATIONS

To create comfortable loitering conditions along the route, the program is organized in 3 main categories:

- **Girls Only activities:** these are particularly desirable in areas that have higher traffic concentration and are more densely populated. They refer to structured community or organization led programs geared towards outreach, health education and mentoring of young girls. The spaces that house these activities will need a higher level of privacy and lower visibility from the public.

- **Girl Centered activities:** these are useful in currently deserted areas that require a big influx of women in order to feel safer, but is open to all. In this proposal, they take the form of a women-oriented market that houses international fairs regularly taking place in the stadium vicinity. These fairs currently bring women from surrounding countries to Niamey to sell clothing, fabric, fragrances, household items, etc. They are hugely popular in the city but have no official "home". The route will have a designed intervention aimed at housing the market fair.

- **Mixed-gender activities:** these are the majority of the activities. The consist of:
  - Study carrels that provide spaces for studying n groups. They are located near schools, in quiet neighborhood streets for convenience.
  - Multipurpose amphitheaters that accommodate fitness classes, concert rehearsals and plays.
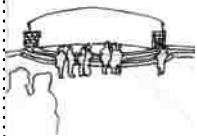
WATCH   STROLL

MULTIPURPOSE AMPHITHEATERS

GROUP STUDYING   STROLL

STUDY CARRELS
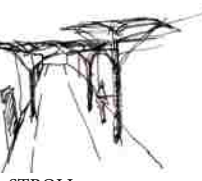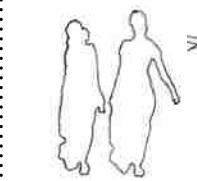
STROLL

MARKET FAIR

WOMEN CENTERED ACTIVITY

OUTREACH AND MENTORING PROGRAMS
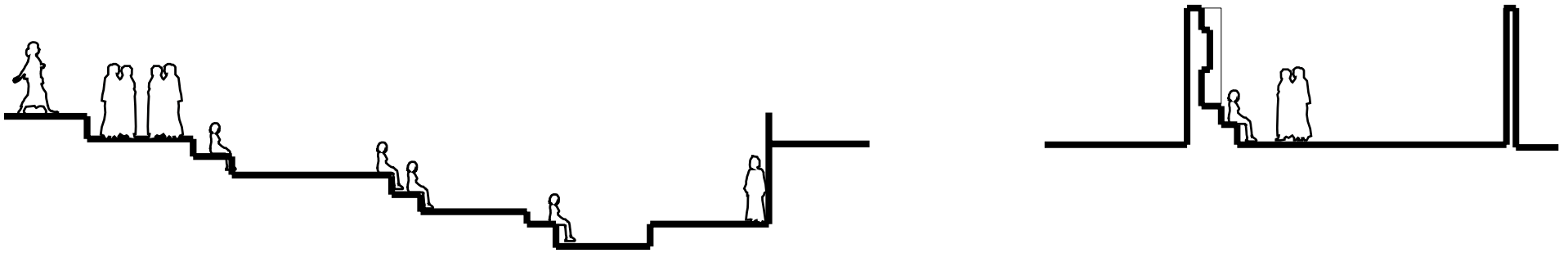
DESIGN CONCEPT

With the necessity of placing program along the route as a sort of camouflage and pretext for the young girls to walk in the city came the necessity for the those program elements to be expressed as modest yet visible interventions rather than small enclosed buildings peppered along the way. I decided that program alone was not enough to attract the girls into in the life of the streets. Enclosing them in buildings at each program point did little more than what the Stadium and the National museum already do: it would simply provide them with additional public spaces where they are hidden from view. So the design concept expresses itself as a series of designed *moments* one would stumble upon during a casual stroll. It might seem counter intuitive to *expose* the young girls to the public gaze in this context, but it is very important to not have the program places seem "covert" or that the girls have something to hide or ulterior motives when they visit these program spaces. These concerns have led to a simple place making approach that involves

- Providing a ROOF to further define space, but also, and most importantly to provide thermal protection in a city where temperatures can reach 110 degrees for a sustained period of four months.

- Using the city WALLS as an infrastructure for interventions. Niamey, like many Muslim cities, is a place of walls. The traditional architecture is one of compounds, resulting in walls defining the streets rather that the sidewalks and motor roads. These walls also of-

fer a blank surface for the passerby, but as highlighted in the theoretical framework , they are used as a framework against which people set up small businesses or elect as meeting place with friends and a few chairs. In the same spirit, I propose that the walls along of near the route be used as an infrastructure for place making and housing programed activities.
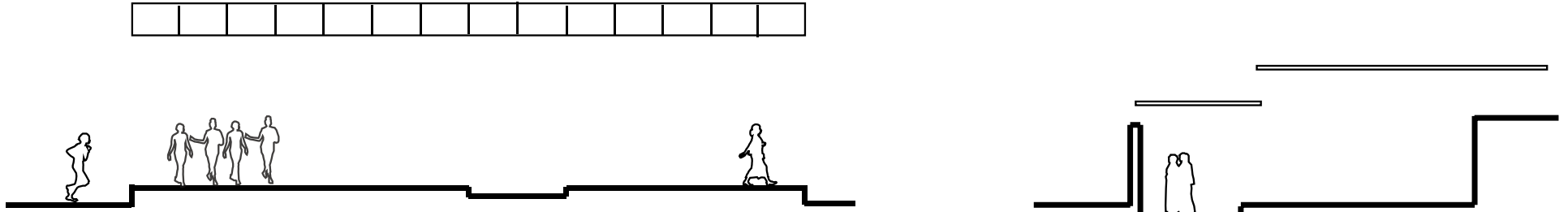
- Manipulating the GROUND to create spacial separation from the street, provide space for congregating, and vary the level of relative privacy afforded depending in the program type.

- Exploring ideas of "transparent" ENCLOSURE that test higher degrees of spacial separation and privacy while the activity they contain is clearly discernible to anyone walking by.

- Using easily accessible LOCAL MATERIALS in simple ways to implement the above strategies.

This place-making approach results in a kit of parts for the programed spaces that uses one or more of the above strategies in simple ways.

THE INTERVENTION KIT OF PARTS

LOCAL COMMUNITY-ROOTED MATERIALS

Materials were the earliest decision made in this design process and determined the look and feel of the route and its interventions. I looked for places on the site that could provide at least the majority of the materials for the project. The most interesting prospect was Katako market, near college Banizoumbou where I conducted my user-related research. The market is and intense and unusual place where one can find virtually anything from used parts, plywood, bricks, water bottles, water jugs, to household items. I therefore looked there for elements that would be inexpensive, low maintenance and could be used in an unorthodox or surprising way, hopping for a chance to offer a sense of magic to the programmed spaces and the itinerary.

A top priority was the need to provide shading to make using the route as comfortable as possible. I selected two types of materials for this purpose: palm leaf woven mats and recycled plastic jugs, both of which are available in great quantity in Katako. The woven mats are used every day, everywhere for sitting on to chat with friends, for sleeping but also as "decking" in traditional mud structure or straw hut ceilings (Figure 65.) The recycled water jugs are currently used in the city to transport and sell water in. They can also be found in massive quantities at Katako market. Haven seen them used with the top cutoff and bolted together to create

Figure 61. Top - material palette

Figure 62. Bottom right - water jugs make a playground © basurama.org

Water jugs
Metal, rebar for making trusses

KATAKO

Woven mats

MUSEUM

RIVERFRONT

Fired earth paving
Compressed bricks

various objects for a children's playground (Figure 62), I thought the same technique could yield some very expressive shading structures as well.

The ground and wall manipulations are very simply created using compressed earth blocks as well as thin fired bricks pavings for the route.

Using material sourced from within the route also presents the advantage for a different degree of community buy-in and involvement in the project. Aside from the fact that the materials are familiar everyday items, one can imagine an artisan walking down a newly shaded street that uses some of his woven mats on his or her daily trips to work for example.

Figure 63. *Material origins*

Figure 64. *Above middle - Water seller - © www.institutions-africa.org*

Figure 65. *Above right - Woven mats used to clad a ceiling*
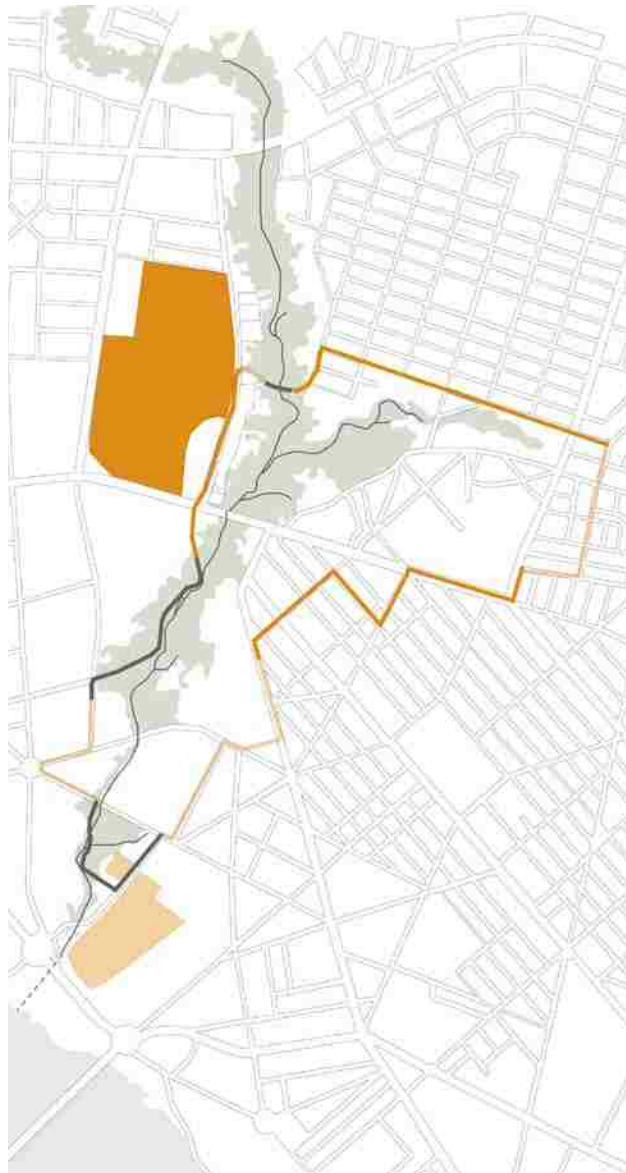
COOLER - NO SHADING REQUIRED
NEUTRAL - NEEDS MODERATE SHADING
HOTTER - NEEDS FULL SHADING

Figure 66. *Route's thermal zones*

Figure 67. *Above - Shading strategies*

A ROOF FOR THERMAL COMFORT

Along the route, thermal comfort was assessed to see where shading would be most needed (Figure 66). This laid the ground for a logic for the types of shading strategies that would be proposed depending on the nature of the environment:

- An unshaded barren street is fully shaded, almost turning it into a comfortable room. This provides thermal comfort but also represents a community amenity when there are celebrations such as weddings which invariably spill over into the street, forcing hosts to spend a big amount of their budget on plastic canopies to shield their guests.

- In partially shaded streets, only the route pathway is shaded when needed, bring focus to the route

- In landscape portions of the route, within the Gounti Yenna valley, more substantial shading structures, made with portions of water jugs, are used. The highly durable plastic material is very low maintenance and the expressive design applied to it will not overpower its vast and untamed landscape surroundings. On the contrary, their three-dimensional effect with help to give shape to the route in those wast open zones.

Figure 68. *Shaded zones*
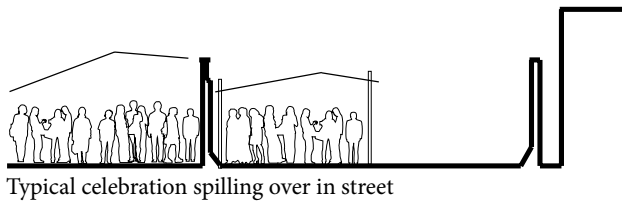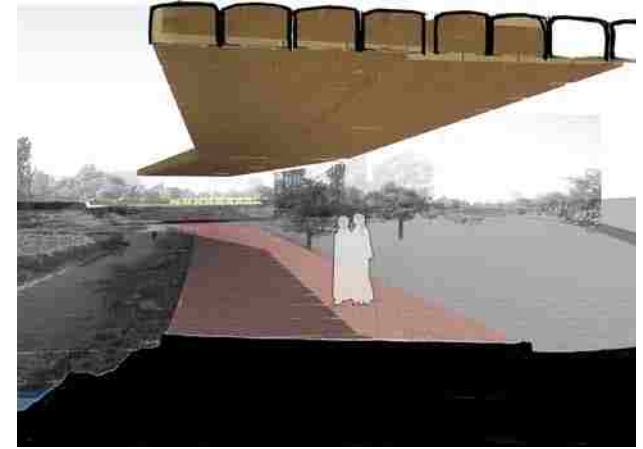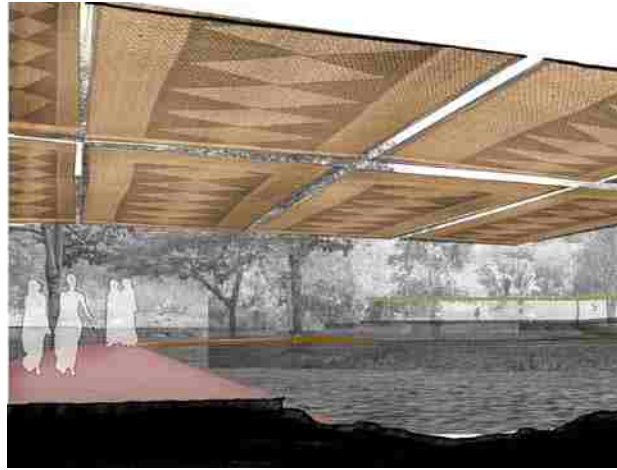
Typical celebration spilling over in street
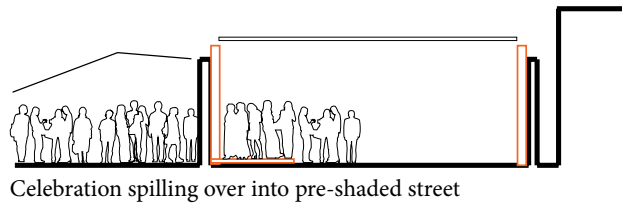
Celebration spilling over into pre-shaded street

Figure 69. *Above - early conceptual shading visions*

Figure 70. *Bottom right - Shading as community asset*

A ROOF FOR THE ROUTE

Inside the city street, the route is made comfortable with shading from woven mats, 4 feet by 6 feet in dimension that are assembled together as shown in Figure 71 . The mats are linked together with simple metal connections and suspended from metal trusses. Because the structure that holds them is hidden above, they appear to be floating over one's head as the perspective in Figure 70 shows.

Furthermore, this roof on the city route is woven intimately into the existing fabric of the city by making use of its walls as partial structural infrastructure. Figure 70 shows compressed earth block columns embedded in the compound walls, providing support for the trusses. Going a step further, this support performs double duty by providing additional reinforcement to the often crumbling raw earth walls of compounds in the poorer neighborhoods.

1 MARKET

2 ROUTE PATH

3 GOUNTI YENNA VALLEY

Figure 71. Upper left - shading unit assembly

Figure 72. Market site plan - Scale: 1/128th

A ROOF FOR THE MARKET

The market showcases the second type of roof as described previously, which is intended for the environment of the valley. The market is a quarter mile long flexible space. While it takes advantage of a long stretch of wall enclosing multiple institutions as it's structural and spacial support, it is its shading structure that is most significant to the space. It provides both thermal comfort throughout the day, as the market is oriented South East, but provides a structure for dividing the space up into stalls by suspending partitions onto its truss members. Just like with the woven mats shading the streets, the shading being suspending from the structure obscures the latter while floating the former over one's head as Figure 73 shows.

Figure 73. Top - Market roof model

Figure 74. Next page - View from inside the market
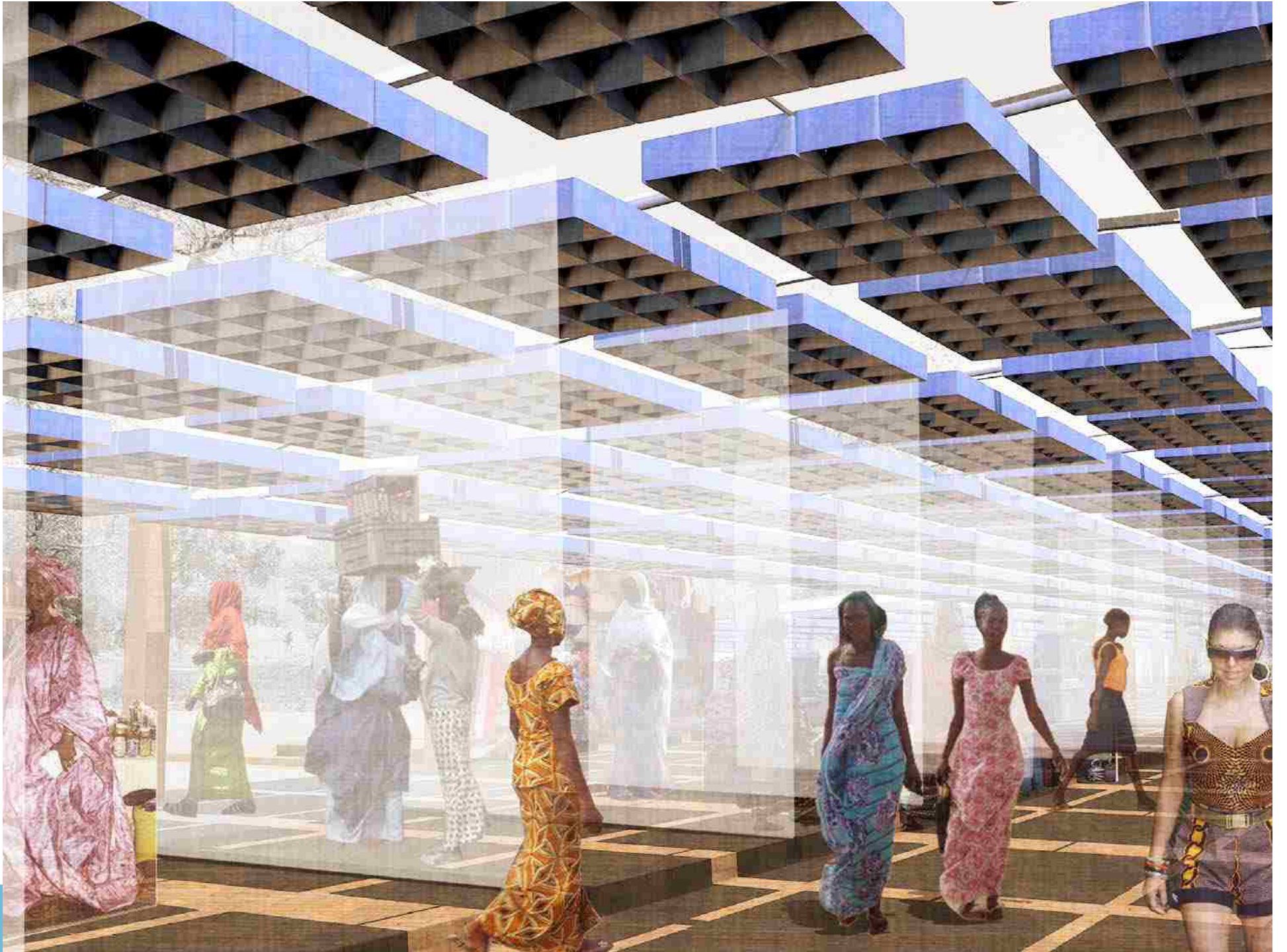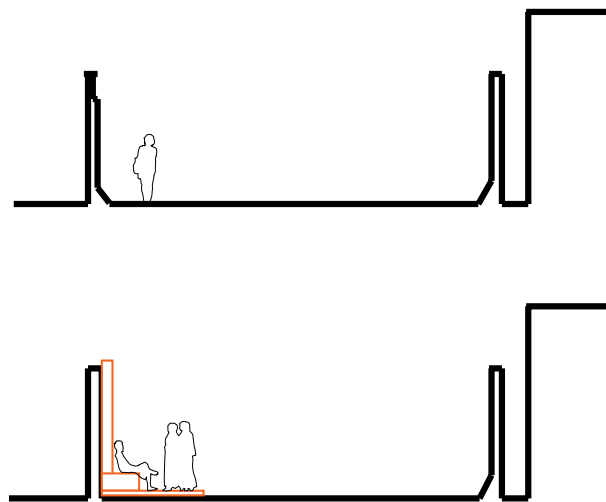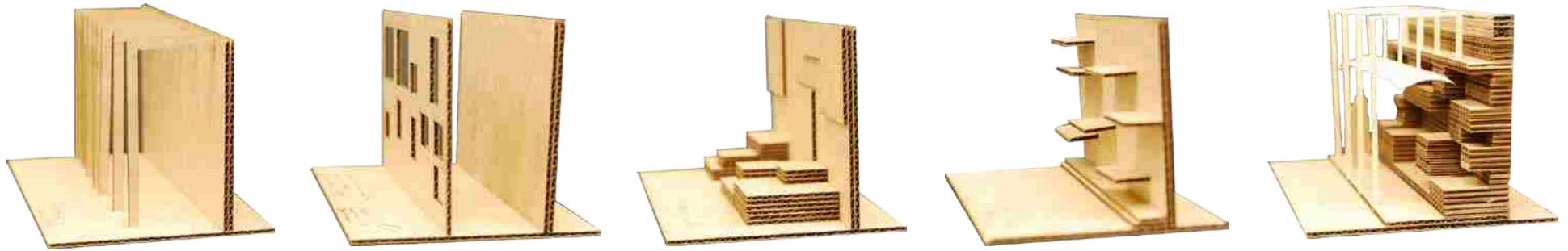
THE CITY WALL AS INFRASTRUCTURE

In a city of compounds, walls offer a blank face that is already used for various economic and social activities. They thus lend themselves perfectly to small intervention programs.

I propose to take this use of the walls further and start manipulating its boundary and thickness to create spatial separations, usable convivial space or a protected passages as shown in the studies above. This use of the wall is complemented by the wall buttress approach described for the route's roof, which solidifies the city walls and uses them as structural support for the shading structures. This more overt manipulation allows the creation of seating space and niches carved in the wall that can serve a variety of purposes as the following example of the study carrels use of wall space shows.

Figure 75. Top - Wall thickening conceptual explorations

Figure 76. Bottom right - Wall manipulation diagrams

① STUDY CARRELS

② ROUTE PATH

③ OVERHEAD SHADING STRUCTURE

Figure 77. Top - study carrel model

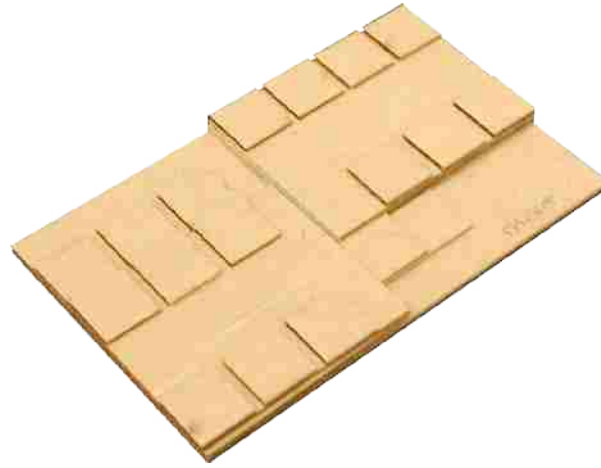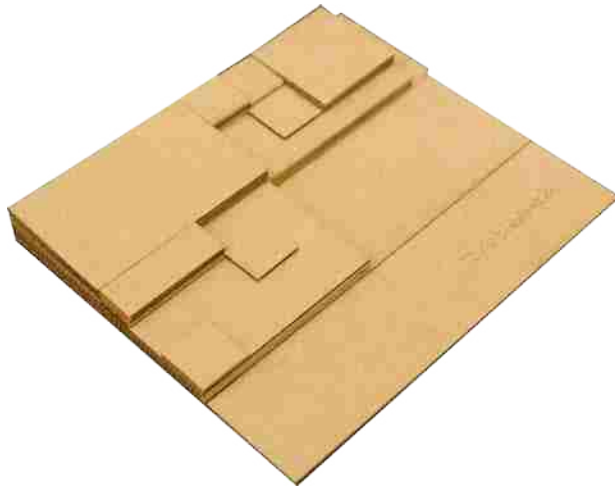*Figure 78. Top right - study carrel section perspective*

Figure 79. One study Carrel Site Plan - Scale: 1:64

Figure 80. Next page - Study carrel perspective view

Figure 81. Bottom next page - study carrel site section Scale 1:100
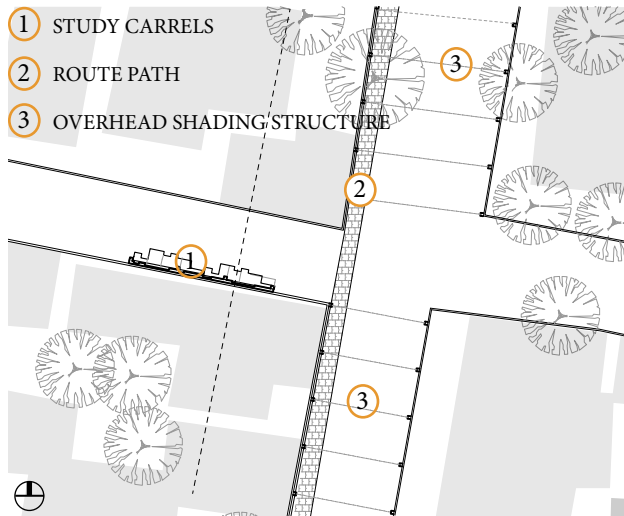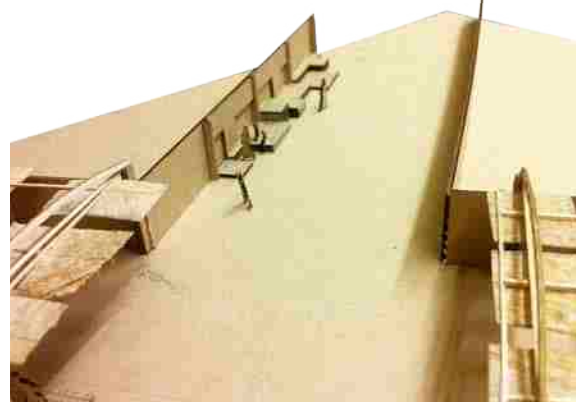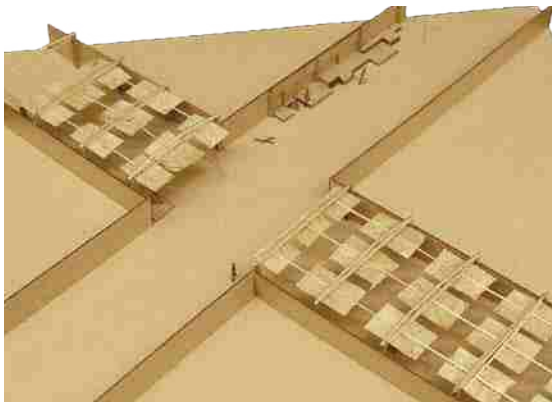
STUDY CARRELS

Studying outdoors, in the street as groups is very common in Niger. One can often notice students assembled after on weekends or even at night under a street lamppost, going over their lessons. This is particularly true in low income neighborhoods where homes routinely aren't equipped with electricity. The program of study carrels therefore lends itself to showcasing how the city walls can be used in an opportunistic manner.

This preexisting condition of using the street as place of study prompts a natural placement of the study carrels along the walls, which is thickened and manipulated using compressed earth blocks, creating stepped seating of varied height and sizes. The proposed arrangement allows up to three groups of students to study side by side as shown with the perspective in Figure 80. Sited in quiet side streets of lower income parts of the route which has very little car traffic, they take over what would have been side walk space, unapologetically biting a piece of public space the same way food sellers or tailors' shacks do throughout the city.

GROUNDING INTERVENTION SPACES

The route's ground can be used in multiple ways, manipulated sectionally to provide:

- Programmatic separation between interventions and their surroundings, in the same way a side-walk is raised to mark its limit
- Space for sitting and congregating, as shown in the conceptual models above
- A series of smaller, more intimate spaces within a bigger one, allowing multiple types of activities by various groups, providing each with their own space.
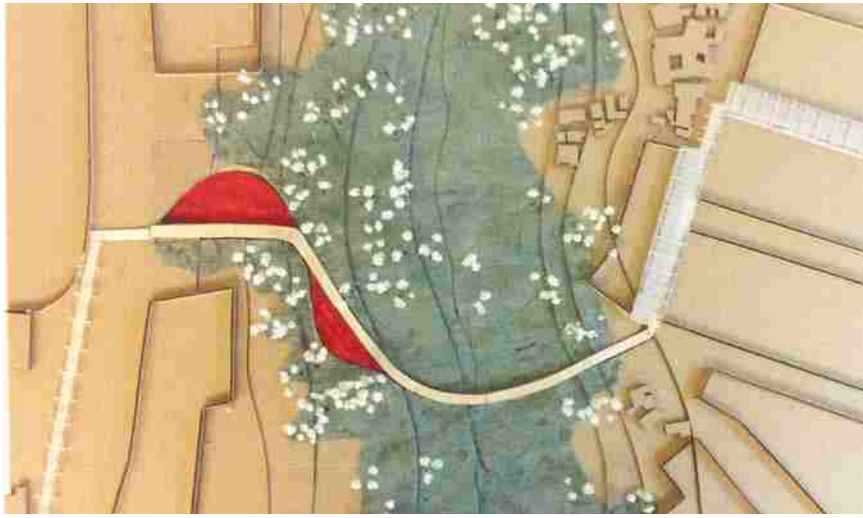
Figure 82. Top - Early conceptual ground manipulation models

Figure 83. Bottom right - Ground manipulation diagrams

Figure 84. Next page - One study Amphitheater Site Plan - Scale: 1:64

1 MULTIPURPOSE AMPHITHEATER

2 ROUTE PATH

3 NATIONAL STADIUM GROUNDS

4 GOUNTI YENNA VALLEY
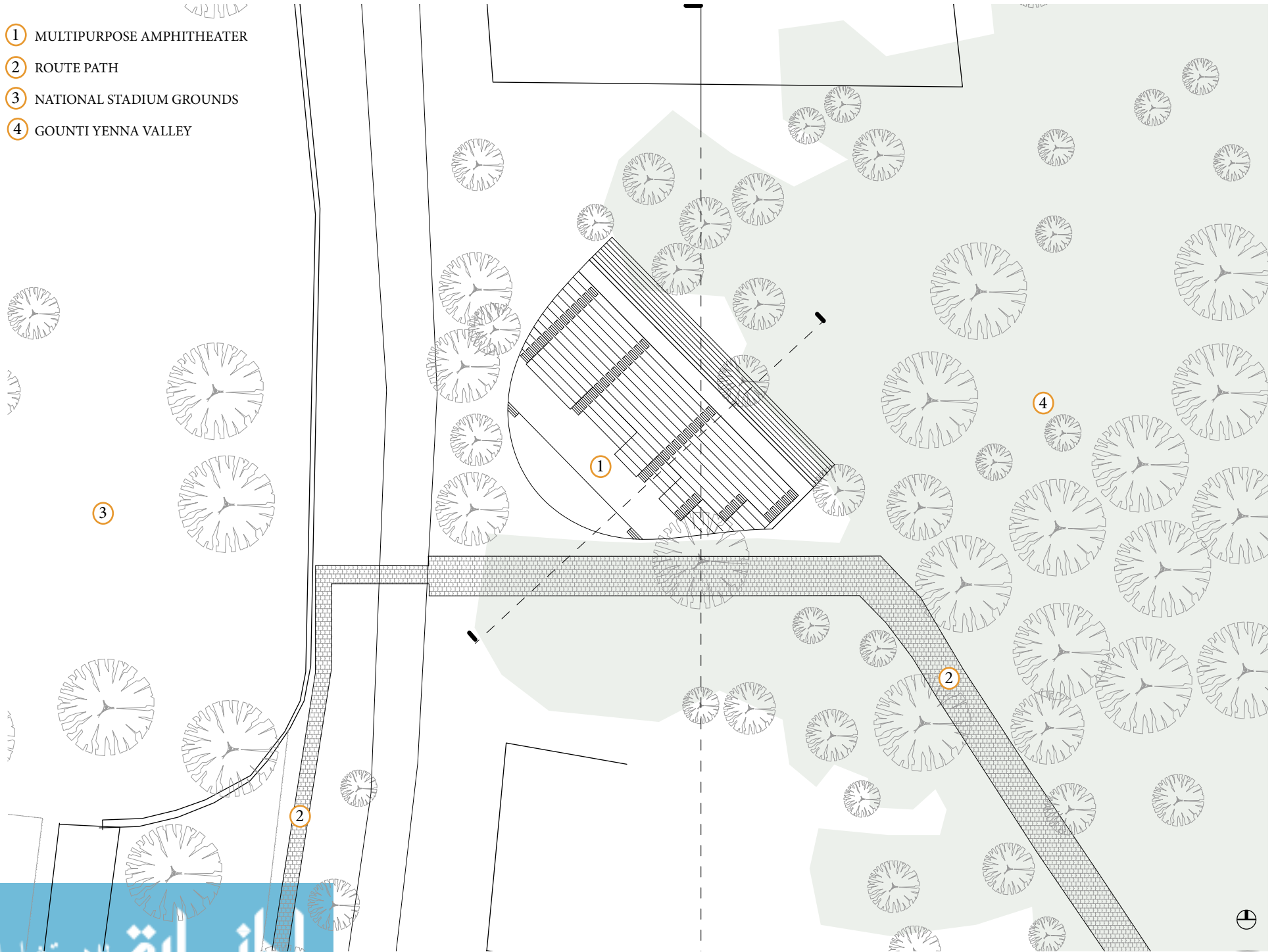
MULTIPURPOSE AMPHITHEATER GROUNDS

The multipurpose amphitheaters are sited in the Gounty Yenna valley for its privacy and cooler temperatures, lending itself better to physical activities. Here, the ground is manipulated to provide sitting and viewing space for concerts or simply watching rehearsals as one passes by. The space is stepped in an irregular manner, creating platforms that can be used for individual fitness classes or small gatherings.

These amphitheaters are sprinkled about in three different areas on the route, providing multiple opportunities of use.

Figure 85. Top left - amphitheater site model

Figure 86. Top right - Amphitheater section perspective

Figure 87. Next page - Amphitheater used for fitness activities

Figure 88. Bottom next page - Amphitheater site section - Scale 1:100
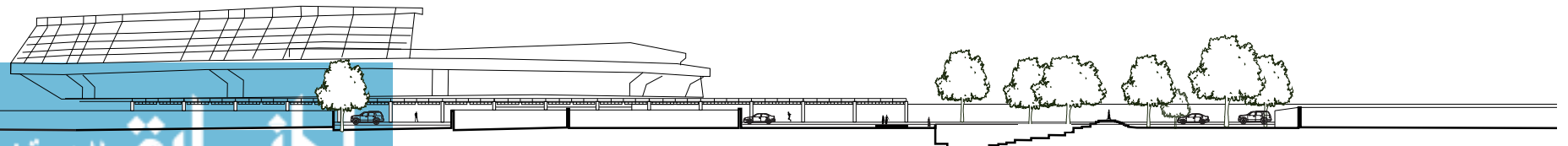
THE TRANSPARENT ENCLOSURE

As important as visibility for the intervention programs is, some of them require a greater deal of separation and privacy, an enclosure designed to be both public and private. This can be achieved by creating a gradation of spatial privacy that goes from the street to a covered corridor that then straddles a partially walled covered but open space as shown in the section perspective above. The result is a space that blurs the line between inside and outside, but protects the "inside" portion by sinking it lightly into the ground to further mark the spacial separation.

OUTREACH PROGRAM SPACES

The outreach programs are the types of space that need a higher degree of separation compared to the study carrels, amphitheaters and market. Creating a light enclosure for these spaces keeps them visible but can still provide a certain level of separation when outreach programs are in session. Furthermore, similarly to the market, the wide open floor plan can be further broken up by suspending light partitions from its "roof" structure as shown with the perspective in Figure 92.

Figure 89. Top left - Outreach program at proximity to study carrels site model

Figure 90. Top left - Outreach program section perspective
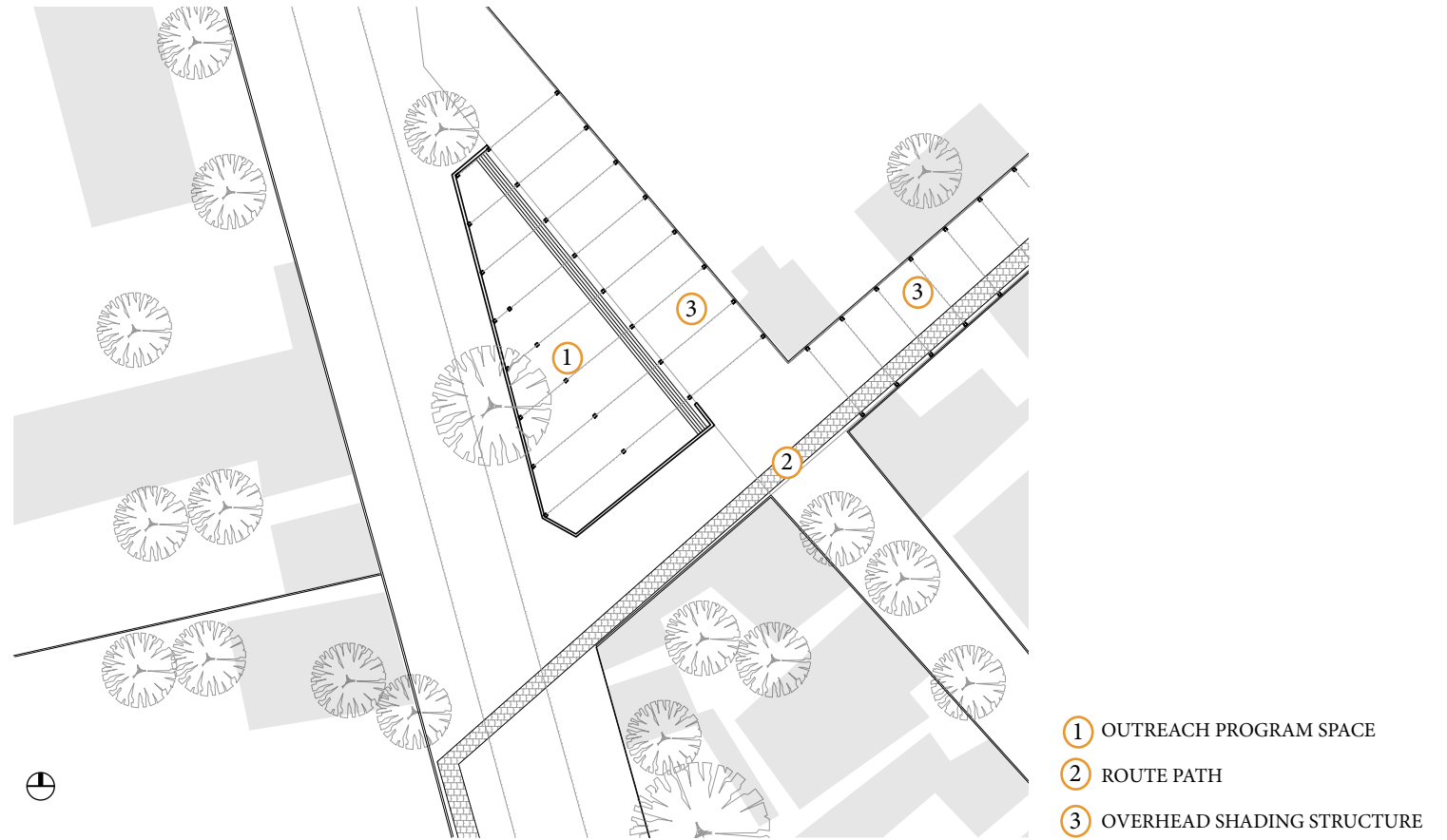
1 OUTREACH PROGRAM SPACE

2 ROUTE PATH

3 OVERHEAD SHADING STRUCTURE

Figure 91. *Outreach program plan. Scale - 1:64*

Figure 92. *Next page - Outreach program view*

Figure 93. *Outreach program site section. Scale - 1:100*
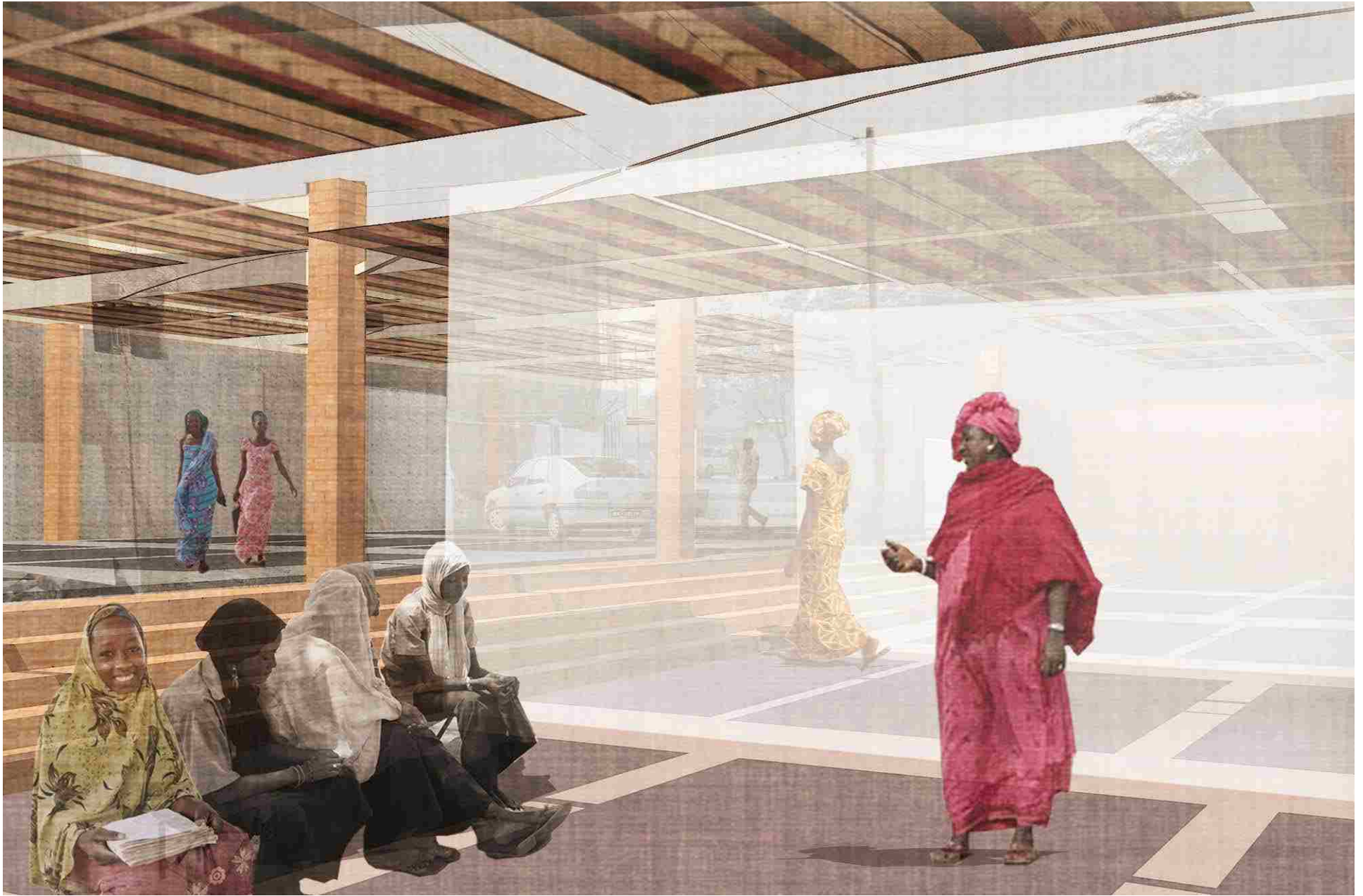
CONCLUSION

Though we might not always be conscious of it, equal access to public space is almost never a given. Whether in the so called Developed world or the Developing one, open or conservative societies, there are codes of behavior and inequalities that make these spaces more or less accessible. Women seldom feel safe walking in a deserted street or park, be they in Seattle or in Paris, which is akin to saying they are out of place in those spaces at that particular time of day. A homeless person is not wanted on the sidewalk or park bench, prompting city officials to design ways to make those places undesirable for them. In Niamey, these "designed ways" are embedded in the city's conservative culture. A person's reputation and honor is all that matters in the eyes of the society, and said society decides what maintains one's reputation and honor. In most Muslim societies, women have a tenuous relationship with the world outside their home, even when they are not confined to them. Where they can and can't go is strictly codified, especially when it comes to where they can linger and why. Consequently, unless they are going to school, to work or running errands, there are no opportunities for them to experience the city. This project provides them with such an opportunity while ensuring they have something to do in public and that they are not judged for being where they are.

The design response the described problem takes the approach of "hacking the city" in the same way it is already being hacked for social, communal and economic imperatives in the city, using available spaces and resources such as leftover zones, walls, vegetated areas, as well as readily available materials to guide an architectural response. Programed interventions are thus produced, sometimes

even designed to be used only by women in order to reinforce the route's identity as a women friendly space. They are visible and accessible to the public and easily identifiable in their look and feel in order to give them a sense of being part of a whole, a four mile long space spread through a city.

A concern around the project's proposals has been that while it tries to provide space through the city of Niamey that frees young women to be engaged with its streets and daily life, it is not forceful enough in taking a more subversive approach as a solution. Perhaps it does not go far enough as a feminist tool to level the plane-field among genders in terms of spatial use. But perhaps some revolutions need to be quieter in order to have an effective long term impact. My position is that while it is revolting that young women aren't as free to do something as simple as sitting in front of their house with their friends, reversing such a cultural norm requires a societal change, not a strong-armed approach that would make people balk and resist. The project offers a program that serves as a camouflage, allowing girls to be part of a city in a more acceptable way for their society. Not only do they rip the benefits of having a fuller right to the city, but they do so without fear, without feeling uncomfortable, which might be more effective in the long run and in ensuring a maximum number of girls use the spaces. Their presence in greater number in sustained manner in the city, both as they stroll along the route or loiter in one of the intervention spaces makes their visibility in the public realm more of a norm in the long run. What was yesterday suspicious or intolerable would become normal and unquestioned.

Another concern is that the city-hacking approach proposed presents some inherent drawbacks. Because it is a tactic that is widely practiced for other uses, the intervention spaces are vulnerable to being taken over as well. Programed spaces such as the study carrels are uniquely exposed to being co-opted by street hawkers and other types of vendors. Their location in quiet streets that might not provide much in way of customers provide a certain level of protection from this, but not entirely. Only if the spaces are intensely used, will they be further protected from take over by other actors in the city. Ensuring such use would require a more careful look at the proposed program and, more importantly, involving young girls, their parents and other community members in a dialog that could ultimately yield an even stronger program. Ideally, a total community involvement in a project such as this would be crucial both for making sure the young girls are never criticized or uncomfortable

being out and about on the designed route, but also that their parents are not suspicious of their activities there. Of course, this would also go a long way toward insuring that intervention spaces are not taken over as they would be viewed as community assets everyone would have a vested interest in safeguarding.

The above concern however points to the fact that, while the project took this "hacking" design approach to make place and space that allows women to be part of the city more confidently, the architectural response could be used for all sorts of programs and projects throughout the city and maybe even in other developing countries. In the latter, the co-opting of space is commonly a direct result of two conditions:

- The fact that renting a proper commercial space is out of reach (both for educational and economic reasons) for the majority in the city, as is fulfilling the western-inspired permits and other permissions needed to set up a private venture. As a result, economic informality is the norm rather than the exception and produces an imperative for setting up shop wherever one can to survive.
- The fact that contemporary urban centers in African countries were often built during colonization, based on a western notion of urban design. The indigenous cultures are often at odds with the way the spaces were designed to be used, yielding new cultural norms such as weddings being celebrated all the way in the street in the absence of a free communal space nearby that would have housed the function for example.

These take-over actions are often fought by city officials who routinely demolish informal stands and shacks that mushroom along main thoroughfares in an attempt to produce what is viewed as a more "civilized" (read "closer to western standards") city where streets and sidewalks have distinct uses and inherent order. This project embraces these survival approaches and argues that they might hold the key to new and more culturally adapted typologies for what cities can be and how they can function to fulfill social, economic and cultural needs.

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FIGURES LIST

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Figure 14. Bottom right - The street as home: A typical reed mat home on a sidewalk provides a shelter to a homeless family. The structure even has a makeshift veranda where the inhabitants spend the day and the warmest nights, a traditional feature in Nigerien homes.

Figure 16. Top right - A wedding in Niamey. The men sit outside in the morning during the religious ceremony. They are replaced by young people (male and female) in the afternoon for the dancing portion of the wedding. The celebration typically lasts until night. © louizb (flikr.com)

Figure 17. Top left - A Faada of young men in Niger.

Figure 18. Two young women chatting in the street in Goré Island, Senegal. © Carol Kiecker

Figure 19. Top right - The Movement Café, London, UK - Studio Myerscough

Figure 20. Top middle - Guinean students studying under street lamps in public places © BBC Focus On Africa

Figure 21. Top left - Houston Pavilion, Chongqing, China, Morris Architects

Figure 22. Students drawing at College Banizoumbou

Figure 23. Top right - College Banizoumbou entrance

Figure 24. Top left - College Banizoumbou recess area

Figure 25. Right - Drawing 1: Home vicinity in the Liberté neighborhood

Figure 27. Top middle - Drawing 2: Home vicinity in the Boukoki neighborhood

Figure 26. Top left - Drawing 3: Home vicinity in the Zongo neighborhood

Figure 28. The girls are expressing their views about public space and public behavior in the city

Figure 29. Top right - The National Stadium in Niamey

Figure 30. Top middle - Girls traning on the stadium grounds

Figure 31. Top left - A pavilion in the National Museum

Figure 32. Bottom right - Couple stroling at the museum

Figure 33. Top - Market Shading in Niamey. Simple cloth shading along market lanes allows shoppers to linger.

Figure 34. Bottom - Scaffolding between homes in Marrakesh that allows adaptation of shading material to the circumstances.

Figure 35. Young girls enjoying the Corniche Ouest circuit

Figure 36. (Next page) Dakar aerial map

Figure 37. Young men people-watching along the Geri route

Figure 90. Top left - Outreach program section perspective

Figure 91. Outreach program plan. Scale - 1:64

Figure 92. Next page - Outreach program view

Figure 93. Outreach program site section. Scale - 1:100

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