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# The Faidherbe statue and memory making in Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal, 1887–2020

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## Abstract

**This study explores the ways in which the French colonial administration used the Faidherbe statue in Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal as one of the tools in their discursive practices related to the construction of legitimation and naturalisation of the colonial domination in Senegal. The unveiling of the statue also provided the educated local elite with an opportunity to construct competing memories. It shows that during the last decade calls were made for the removal of the statue from the Government Square that have left the city residents divided.**

## Introduction

This chapter examines the place of the Faidherbe statue in the French colonial project in the capital of colonial Senegal, the construction of competing memories by both the French and the Senegalese, and the statue's contestants. The chapter argues that the construction of a colonial order required legitimation through signs, symbols, language and meanings. The Faidherbe statue, unveiled in March 1887, and the ritual processes associated with it, contributed to the naturalisation of the French domination in Senegal. It became the site of the production, transmission, consumption and internalisation of selected segments of French history and the foundational events in the creation of the colony, as well as the repetition of the message that the colonial order was beneficial. Another argument is that the construction of hegemony had its own internal contradictions and vulnerabilities, which left open the door to negotiation and contestation.

## The unveiling of the Faidherbe statue

Léon Faidherbe was the natural choice of the organisers as a potent symbol of French domination in Senegal because of his achievements during his tenure as governor (1854–1861 and 1863–1865). Indeed, he was credited for having transformed disparate trading posts and 15 African polities into a unified colony through a series of alliances and wars of conquest

and for being the ‘creator’ of Senegal, the ‘builder’ of Saint-Louis and an effective administrator who organised the colonial bureaucracy.

The decree of 29 January 1886 had authorised the erection, on one of the public places in Saint-Louis, of “a monument of general Faidherbe, as a mark of gratitude for the services he rendered as Governor”. The General Council deliberated on the matter on 9 June and 21 December 1886, and the Municipal Council of Saint-Louis also examined the proposition in December 1886. A Committee for the organisation of the commemorative event was set up on 28 January 1887; it was presided over by the president of the Colonial Commission and included the mayor of Saint-Louis as vice-president and the following members: general councillors Aumont, Crespin, Delor, Germain d’Erneville; municipal councillor Beccaria Alphee Lezongar; head of the Public Works Office, Sallenave; and three military officers.

The date of the official commemoration of the unveiling of the Faidherbe statue was set up for the morning of April 20. The date had a deep symbolic meaning in the narrative of the French West African empire, as it was the anniversary of the day when the first assault on the Fort of Medine – the most advanced French trading post between the Senegal and Niger rivers – led by al-Hadj Umar Tal in 1857, was repulsed. The initial assault was followed by a three-month siege of the Fort of Medine, which was finally broken with Faidherbe’s arrival by steamboat with supplies and 500 reinforcements in extremis when the fort was on the verge of surrendering. Umar Tal was an Islamic scholar and reformer, the founder of the Tidjaniyya Sufi Brotherhood and the founder by 1860 of a vast but short-lived empire in West Africa, who left a legacy of resistance to French colonial rule.<sup>1</sup> But, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the celebration took place in March, instead.

Given the place of Faidherbe in the narrative of the formation of the French West African empire, the organisers of the festivity chose a central place in Saint-Louis – the Government Square (*la Place du Gouvernement*) – for the erection of the Faidherbe statue. Its centrality was related to its very location in the center quarter of the city-island, in front of the Governor’s residence and government buildings, between two military garrisons (North and South Roignat buildings), and a short distance from the Catholic parish building. Over the years, the

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Umar Tal, see Robinson (1985).

Government Square became a special place of ritualistic significance where military parades and most civic celebrations took place, the point of departure of political and religious processions, and the ultimate symbol of power and authority in Saint-Louis. The space was big enough for the official celebrations to take place there without obstacles.

The Faidherbe **statue** (Figure I) stood as the most potent symbol of the French domination in Senegal for three main reasons. First, the place Faidherbe occupied in the narrative of the colonial conquest of French West Africa made him the pioneer of French colonial enterprise in West Africa; his admirers among the French political, military and economic elites referred to him as a “visionary”, an “extraordinary genius”, the “liberator and organizer of the colony, whose popularity laid on the merit, the character, the disinterestedness, the services rendered, and a powerful and successful career.<sup>2</sup> The second reason was the duration of the ceremonies (four days, from 17 through 20 March), the sheer number of participants (some of them coming from Dakar and Paris, including *Député* Gasconi and Admiral Ribell, Commander in Chief of the Navy Division of the South Atlantic) and the schedule of activities that required an efficient organisation and an unprecedented mobilisation of resources for the decoration and illumination of public buildings and commercial fleet. Third and finally, the commemorative event made it possible for the deployment of the rhetoric of empire and the martial form of Bonapartist nationalism, especially the values of force and order.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Archives Nationales de France, Le Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer (ANFCAOM)/FM/SEN/X/24/B, “Inauguration de la statue élevée au general Faidherbe à Saint-Louis on March 17, in *Moniteur du Sénégal et Dépendances*, March 24, 1887, 95-103.

<sup>3</sup> For more on memory making, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 2015).





Figure 1: The Faidherbe statue in Saint-Louis (Senegal) (Kalala Ngalamulume, 1994)

The ceremony of the unveiling of the Faidherbe statue also sheds light on the republican commemorative practices, especially the cultural dimension of the republican festive rituals. These included the distribution of the activities between mornings, afternoons and evenings, but also in the way these activities targeted all the five senses (hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell). The spectators' ears were bombarded with noises surrounding the festivities, including the volleys of government artillery guns, military fanfares' music, excessive noise and shouting at the unveiling of the monument, musicians' flutes, and the music at the dancing parties. The organisers also tried to catch the participants' eyes with the beautification of public places through the decoration and illumination of public and private buildings, a fireworks display, monuments, a torchlight procession in the evening, games and amusements, and parades with cavalry, troops, warriors and musketeers. The Amazones, female warriors of Dahomey, were brought to Saint-Louis to participate in the parade. There was also much touching among the crowds of spectators, especially in the summer months, during the dancing parties, parades and processions in the city's streets.

A sense that was much stimulated during the ceremony was taste. It was not just about the republican banquet and dinners offered to the elite, but also the distribution of rice to the urban poor and the indigents. Indeed, a subcommittee had recommended offering 105 bags of rice (worth 1 080 francs) to the indigents and Christian unemployed workers on the city island, 20 bags of rice (worth 200 francs) to the urban poor in the slum of Guet-N'Dar, 15 bags of rice to the urban poor in the slum of Ndar Toute (worth 150 francs) and 10 bags (worth 100 francs) to the urban poor in the slum of Bouetville.<sup>4</sup> Food distribution to the urban poor became one of the most useful patrimonial strategies of the colonial state, which contained constructive ambiguities and left much unsaid. In his classic work on gift exchange, French sociologist Marcel Mauss has helped us understand its role in the production and reproduction of social ties. He explained that gift giving involved three obligations: giving, receiving (meaning accepting) and making a return gift (counter-gift) after it has been received. It also created a twofold relationship between giver and receiver (Mauss, 1925). Maurice Godelier (1999, p. 12), French anthropologist, presented this relationship as ...

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<sup>6</sup> ANFCAOM/FM/SEN/XI/1 c: Governor to Minister, March 25, 1887.

... [a] relationship of *solidarity* because the giver shares what he has, or what he is, with the receiver; and a relationship of *superiority* because the one who receives the gift and accepts it places himself in the debt of the one who has given it, thereby becoming indebted to the giver and to a certain extent becoming “dependant,” at least for as long as he has not “given back” what he was given.

However, Godelier (1999) warned us that “there are things that cannot be given, things that are sacred” (p. 7). Although the colonial officials did not expect counter-gifts back from the urban poor, the real goal of food distribution was to create a relationship of dependency and to obtain the acceptance of the colonial order. Food distribution did not extend to the elite, who, instead, had received the invitations to the dancing parties and banquets, whose menus were as “worth the appetite of the heroes of Homer”.<sup>5</sup>

The elites also consumed many drinks and plenty of wine during the toasts accompanying the speeches. All the conspicuous consumption and food distribution were part of the colonial administration’s patrimonial strategies aimed at the consolidation of the colonial power in Saint-Louis, the capital of Senegal. Most of these commemorative practices – celebration of military victories, historical mythmaking, ideological creativity, organisation of the evening amusements and festive innovation – would be reproduced in the subsequent celebratory moments.

Several speeches followed the unveiling of the Faidherbe statue, which combined the Bonapartist cult of strong will and military exploits with the republican fascination with modernity. Speakers also seized the occasion to try to construct the official memory of the colonial conquest and to find legitimating formulas for the colonial project. They enumerated Faidherbe’s most significant achievements that comprised the following: city (Saint-Louis) sanitation and hygiene, street building, drainage of the Pointe Nord, linking of the city island to the continent with a bridge via Pointe de Barbarie, building of the waterfront, opening of the Bank of Senegal, establishing of the printing press and the construction of the project of a telegraphic line between Saint-Louis and Dakar. They made references to the administrative decrees he signed, especially the decree of 1857 that organised the Muslim justice and Koranic schools and that obliged Muslim pupils to attend French schools.

The organisers of the ceremony did not only construct Faidherbe as a colonial hero, however. They also celebrated him as a French national hero, because after he left Senegal for France, the

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<sup>6</sup> ANFCAOM/FM/SEN/XI/1 c: Governor to Minister, March 25, 1887.

central administration in Paris called him to defend France against Prussian troops at Bapaume in France in January 1871, where he distinguished himself through acts of bravery.

During the ceremony, the organisers highlighted the names of two localities (Medina and Bapaume) as places of ritualistic significance and had these names inscribed on the Faidherbe statue. Speakers at the banquet focused on the theme of empire and Faidherbe's achievements and legacy. The image of Faidherbe that emerged from the rhetorical statements about the French empire in West Africa was that of an archetype, a model that all administrators ought to follow.

The Faidherbe myth was born and Faidherbe became the "hero with a thousand faces", to borrow Joseph Campbell's (1949) expression. From then on, Faidherbe's name would be associated with any initiatives judged successful, such as the steel Faidherbe Bridge, the Lycée Faidherbe and the Catholic Faidherbe Singers group, called the Société Musicale 'la Faidherbe.

The local population participated in the celebrations either as spectators or as active participants in a series of amusements that featured games, music, animal races (horses, cows, donkeys and camels) and a parade of warriors from Cayor. The big crowds cheered winners on enthusiastically. Therefore, the local urban residents were not just passive consumers of leisure activities initiated by the colonial authorities or the Catholic Church clergymen.

The public celebration also sheds light on gender roles during the festivities in Saint-Louis. Indeed, the evening of the opening ceremony was devoted to a parade of **ladies of grace and beauty**, all 20 years old, that was held on the Maurel and Prom Company vessel from 21:00 until late in the night. This short reference to the **ladies of grace and beaut** tells us something about the ways in which the elite socially and culturally constructed the women in colonial Saint-Louis as bodies to be admired, gazed at, desired and paraded before men. One needs to keep in mind the suggestion made by cultural historian David Waldstreicher (as cited in Hazareesingh, 2004, p. 17) that "parading is politics". The (unspoken) criteria for the selection of women – their age (in their 20s), looks (beautiful) and marital status (single) – speak to the passion, the power of desire and the politics of sexuality prevalent in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup>-century France and Saint-Louis.

## **Lines of division**



The list of the invited guests did not contain the names of a few prominent notables of Saint-Louis, such as Auguste Foret, a French journalist founder of the *Réveil du Sénégal*, a newspaper that was critical of the colonial administration's policies and of the Roman Catholic clergy and their supporters. His name did not figure on the list of guests to the banquet following General Councillor Germain d'Erneville's demand, certainly because of his critiques of some members of the Catholic community. Also, no single member of the Devès clan, one of the leading Creole families in Senegal, attended the republican banquet. Their absence probably had to do with their Masonic membership and the perception that they supported the *Réveil du Sénégal*, which in their view had published **the rudest insults** against civil servants and the **most honorable inhabitants**. It was certainly because of their opposition to the expansionist policies of the colonial administration. As a result, a delegation of 600 elite women, accompanied by Mayor Bourmeister, requested an audience with the Governor on 15 March – two days before the celebrations began – to complain about the freemasons' activities.<sup>6</sup> A combination of pressure from the subscribers to the newspaper and lawsuits forced Forest to close his newspaper. Therefore, the celebration highlighted the lines of solidarity and fracture among the Saint-Louisian elite and between them and the other social groups.

### **Memory and representation**

On 15 July 1910, Lieutenant-Governor Jules Peuvergne suspended Justin Devès, mayor of Saint-Louis, from office for a period of three months on the grievance of having abused his power, shown contempt for the colonial authorities (governor and governor general) and squandered the municipal financial resources.<sup>7</sup> The mayor was eventually revoked from office in September 1910, but the conflict left the governor in a tenuous and uncomfortable situation.<sup>8</sup> The conflict showed that Governor Jules Peuvergne had difficulty constructing hegemony in Senegal, that is, using the existing signs and conventional practices, relations and distinctions, and images and epistemologies in such a way that they would become naturalised, taken for granted, and would not normally be the object of explication, open contest or argument (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992). Justin Devès, because of the strength of his network across vast areas of Senegal and Mauritania, was among those who seriously contested the authority of Governor Peuvergne, and both men were engaged in propaganda warfare to try to undermine each other's reputation. Paris decided to transfer Governor Peuvergne from Senegal to Guadeloupe and dependencies, but Devès took credit for the decision and even convinced some within the colonial administration about his influence in

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<sup>6</sup> ANFCAOM/FM/SEN/XI/1 c: Governor to Minister, March 25, 1887.

<sup>7</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/5, piece 35: Governor Peuvergne's ordinance dismissing Mayor Justin Devès from office.

<sup>8</sup> ANFCAOM/FM/SEN/XI/1 c: Governor to Minister, March 25, 1887.

Paris, to Peuvergne's great chagrin.<sup>9</sup>

Less than two years after his revocation, Justin Devès, General Councillor, was re-elected mayor of Saint-Louis in May 1912, clear evidence of his immense popularity among the urban residents and beyond. He continued to use his influence to weigh on various events occurring in Saint-Louis, especially in the electoral process. He passed away on 22 June 1916 and was replaced by First Deputy Mayor Pierre Chimère, who became the first black mayor.<sup>10</sup>

Arguments over the building of a monument to honour his memory came into the open a month later, when a group of city residents, signing as the "Habitants of Saint-Louis" representing the residents of the city island (North and South quarters) and the slums of Guet N'Dar, N'Dar Toute and Sor, petitioned the Municipal Council. They requested the erection of a monument on a public place in the city, to be called Place Justin Devès (Justin Devès Square), to honour the deceased mayor whose efforts were aimed at elevating the *indigène*. The petitioners stated that "This monument is an act of gratitude that we owe to his memory, and it will bear the following motto: 'The Indigène Grateful'."<sup>11</sup>

During a hastily held meeting of the Municipal Council on 26 August 1916, Pierre Chimère, the new mayor, acknowledged that late Mayor Justin Devès did a great deal of good for the *indigènes* and agreed with the petitioners about the course of action to be followed. Drawing on his experience, Gabard, former mayor of Rufisque, agreed with Chimère and explained the process he followed in his city to erect a similar monument, that is, a committee would be formed to begin the collection of necessary funds for the erection of the monument. But Municipal Councillor Dupit was apprehensive about a decision-making process that would not seek the governor's opinion before the deliberation.

The discussion also focused on the location of the new monument. Until then, there were two monuments in Saint-Louis: the Faidherbe statue located in the Government Square and the monument dedicated to the doctors who were victims of the 1878 yellow fever epidemic that was erected near the Dakar-Saint-Louis train station. Chimère suggested the open space near the prison, called the Place de la Geôle. Another participant, Cavialle, mentioned the space near the mosque as another appropriate location.

The Municipal Council unanimously accepted the city residents' petition and recommended that

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<sup>9</sup> ANFCAOM/SEN/VIII/31, piece 2, Governor to Minister of Colonies, January 16, 1911.

<sup>10</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, piece 12: official telegram announcing the death of Mayor Justin Devès.

<sup>11</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, piece 15: Municipal Council meeting minutes, August 26, 1916.

the mayor transmit it to the hierarchical authorities with the expression of their full support.<sup>12</sup> The place selected for the erection of the monument was Geole Square in the northern part of the city near the prison. The participants also agreed to wait for the approval from the administration officials before proceeding with the formation of a preparatory committee, the opening of the subscriptions or the selection of the best location in the city for the erection of the monument. Priority was given to taking the necessary steps to obtain the decree authorising the building of the monument and the name of the new place.<sup>13</sup>

If for the municipal councillors the petition made perfect sense, the same was not true for the governor and the governor general, who saw the Devès network as an obstacle to the construction of French hegemony in Senegal. David Robinson has told the story of the development of the Devès system as an alternative model of French hegemony in the Senegalo-Mauritanian zone and explained the hostility of the Devès to the governors who led the final conquest of Senegal in the 1880s and 1890s, and the hostility of Lieutenant Governor Peuvergne toward Mayor Justin Devès that led to his suspension in 1910 for fraud and other grievances (see Robinson, 2000). So, the colonial administration officials were not prepared to erect a monument in his memory. This is the reason why it took them seven months, until 1 March 1917, before replying to the city residents' petition that was backed by the recommendation made by the Municipal Council.

In his response to the Municipal Council's request, Governor General Clozel presented the criteria that, from his perspective, determined the choice of individuals who qualified to have monuments built in their memories. His reasoning deserves full presentation because of its implications:

“Without opposing this project, I estimate that the erection of a monument should, in principle, be decided only when the services rendered by the man to whom it is destined to honor the memory were undisputable and exceptional and when his public and private life was unblemished. In West Africa we have shown until now a great moderation concerning the monuments of this nature and, at the exception of some commemorative

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<sup>12</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, piece 15: Municipal Council meeting minutes, August 26, 1916.

<sup>13</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, piece 15: Municipal Council meeting minutes, August 26, 1916.

stones or plaques, the only true monuments the group (the colonial officials) possesses, those of Faidherbe and that of Ballay, are fully justified by the eminent personality of the men for whom they perpetuate the memory.”<sup>14</sup>

Having presented the criteria for the erection of colonial public monuments, Clozel turned to the object of the motion of the Municipal Council:

“In order to allow me to give my opinion concerning the response to the motion of the Municipal Council of Saint-Louis, I would appreciate it if you would let me know first of all if the private and public life of late Mr. Devès, and the services that he has rendered the Colony, can, in your eyes, justify a honor that would put his name in parallel with those of the two eminent characters mentioned above.”<sup>15</sup>

Governor Levecque took three months before expressing his own opinion on the matter. In his response, he first recognised that Mr Justin Devès belonged to one of the most prominent and most influential families of Saint-Louis, who was raised in France where he studied law before returning to Saint-Louis to do business, but mainly as businessman earning his living in the political arena (*agent d'affaires vivant de la politique*). He then went to the core of his argument. He underlined the great influence Justin Devès exercised on colonial policy as well as his interference in all political matters even during the years he didn't hold a public office. Having recalled Devès' cursus honorum and the events leading up to his election as mayor of Saint-Louis in 1909, his suspension from his position as mayor on 15 July 1910, his revocation on 21 September 1910 and his re-election as municipal councillor and mayor in 1912, while at the same time serving as a general councillor, Levecque also reiterated the conclusion already reached by Clozel. He stated, “the nature and gravity of the facts articulated in this report against Devès, and that I do not intend to revisit, allow me to reject the motion approved by the Municipal Council.”<sup>16</sup> The governor general fully agreed with the governor's decision.<sup>17</sup>

How did the petitioners and the municipal council react to the colonial administration's rejection of their demand? There are no traces of their reactions in the public records consulted by this researcher. The silence might be justified by the fact that, by mid-1917, the focus of the attention of both the colonial authorities and the local population had shifted to the alarming news about the spread of the bubonic plague epidemic in some parts of Saint-Louis, which was followed by class-

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<sup>14</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, piece 14: Governor General Clozel to Lieutenant-Governor, March 1, 1917.

<sup>15</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, piece 14: Governor General Clozel to Lieutenant-Governor, March 1, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, piece 18: Governor to Governor General, June 24, 1917, no. 1619 related to the monument in memory of Justin Devès.

<sup>17</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/6, no piece number.: Governor General to Lieutenant-Governor, July 1917. This letter was never sent out to the governor. It seems to have been simply classified.

based sanitary measures targeting mostly the urban poor, popular resistance, the declaration of the state of emergency, the evacuation of the entire population of Guet N'Dar, the most populous slum of Saint-Louis and a legacy of bitterness.<sup>18</sup>

### **“Faidherbe Must Fall”**

After Senegal achieved its independence, the new authorities maintained excellent relationships with France and did not follow the examples of other African countries, where the authorities renamed the colonial cities and the street names and decolonised the monumental landscape by removing the colonial monuments from the cities' central places, putting them in the museums or simply by destroying them. Senegal was not alone in this respect. Several other former French colonies had adopted the same policy of accommodation vis-à-vis France. A few changes took place, but they were mostly symbolic and did not indicate a rupture with the colonial practices. For example, in Dakar (Senegal), former President Léopold Sédar Senghor (1960–1980) rebaptised the Protet Place and renamed it Independence Square and Gambetta became Lamine Gueye. But he replaced the street William Ponty (a colonial governor general) with George Pompidou (French President), to the great chagrin of Sembene Ousmane, Senegalese novelist and filmmaker who, in 1978, challenged President Senghor in an open letter. He wrote the following:

Isn't it a provocation, a crime, an assault on the moral dignity of our national history to sing the Lat Joor anthem under the socle of the Faidherbe Statue? Why since independence are our streets, our arteries, our boulevards, our avenues, our places still bearing the names of the old and new colonialists? Hasn't our country ever produced men and women who deserve the honour to occupy the frontons of our high schools, middle schools, theatres, universities, streets, and avenues, etc.?

(<https://faidherbedoitomber.org/faidherbe-vu-du-senegal>. Accessed 26 March 2019. (

Author, year, p. x)

But it was not until the adoption of the law on political decentralisation, which empowered the mayors, under the administrations of presidents Abdou Diouf (1981–2000) and Abdoulaye Wade (2001–2012), that some streets were renamed the presidential decree was no longer needed to make such changes. It was in that context that the municipal council in Saint Louis renamed the Lycée Faidherbe, built in 1886, as Lycée Cheikh-Oumar-Foutiyou-Tall in 1984. Yet, other

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<sup>18</sup> ANFCAOM/3G3/7, piece 198: excerpts of the report on the political and administrative situation during the fourth trimester of 1917.

streets with the names of some influential colonial officials, such as Jules Ferry and Léon Faidherbe, were not renamed at that time. The same is true concerning the Boulevard de la République in Dakar Plateau, which celebrated the advent of the Third Republic in France and was kept after independence in a semantic confusion.

Early conversations about the utility of the Faidherbe statue in Government Square in Saint-Louis began in 2011. They were launched by the associations, such as the members of the Pan-Africanist movement SeMett, who were displeased with the presence of the statue in this central place and threw eggs at the statue, and even put Senegalese traditional clothes on it. Most of the debates were taking place in the social media, but the municipal authorities did not seem aware of them. When President Abdoulaye Wade visited the renovated Faidherbe Bridge in Saint-Louis in 2011, he declared that the colonial monuments and buildings were **the symbols of the friendship and cooperation between France and Senegal**. There was another compelling reason that an administration official later explained in response to a question from a reporter of the France 24 television network concerning those debates. Indeed, Aly Sene, deputy-director of the municipal technical services, stated that the Faidherbe statue was in a zone classified by the UNESCO as ‘World Heritage’, and that the citizens were free to petition the city government about their concerns (Les observateurs, “A Saint-Louis du Sénégal, la statue de la discorde,” [Observers.france24.com](http://Observers.france24.com), 24/09/2014. Accessed on 26/03/2019. ).

However, public opinion about the presence of these visual links to the French empire was changing rapidly, not only in Senegal, but also in France. Similar changes in the public opinion were also observed in South Africa and the United Kingdom with the #RhodesMustFall movement. The protesters had in common the desire to disrupt ‘the order of things’, in the Foucauldian sense, that is, the underlying epistemic assumptions, ways of thinking, that determined what is truth and what is accepted discourse about a subject.

In Senegal in 2014, a blogger and cyber-activist who visited Saint-Louis for the first time was offended, not by the Faidherbe statue *per se*, but by the inscription on it, which reads as follows: “To his governor Louis Faidherbe, Senegal grateful.” He launched a debate on Facebook and pushed for a petition to the municipal authorities. He even suggested a new name for the Place Faidherbe, which he called Place Baya Ndar, meaning Ndar Place – Ndar being the local name given to the island on which Saint-Louis was built. He revealed that the Municipal Council had adopted the new name during a meeting held on 26 September 2014 (see *Le Point d’Afrique* , 2020).



The debates intensified in 2017. On Tuesday 5 September, *Ndarinfo.com*, a local online newspaper, reported that passers-by found the Faidherbe statue laying on the ground following the rain and heavy winds that fell on the city the night before. Quickly, the news spread through the city and a crowd gathered at the Faidherbe Square, trampling the statue, throwing objects at it, taking selfies and showing hostility towards the French influence. In a context dominated by an economic crisis and high unemployment, the urban poor did not particularly like the inscription on the monument about Senegal's gratitude to Faidherbe. The news media headline asked a crucial question about the collapse the statue: Was it a spectacular fall or a demolition? The question was important, given that the event took place a few hours before the celebration of the Magal des deux Raakas, an important Murid annual commemoration of the day Cheikh Amadu Bamba prayed the Kurel des deux Raakas in the office of the governor general of French West Africa in Saint-Louis, where he was summoned by the Private Council on 5 September 1895, before his exile to Gabon. The news media reported that some individuals in the crowd had interpreted the timing of the event as a 'mystical phenomenon' that sent a clear message that the Faidherbe Square had to be decolonised and rebaptised Cheikh Amadou Bamba Square and that the statue of Serigne Touba Khadimoul Rasoul, as they affectionately called Cheikh Amadou Bamba, be erected to replace the Faidherbe statue.<sup>19</sup>

The news report provoked strong reactions among the readers. Francophile readers, who identified themselves as 'sons of Ndar', argued that history could not be erased. One of them contended that Saint-Louis was built and shaped by the French, that Faidherbe was a great man and, although a symbol of colonisation, he nevertheless was an expert (*un connaisseur*) of the peoples of Senegal, was married to a Senegalese woman with whom he had a son, and that he was sympathetic to Islam and was appreciated by the marabouts. Another reader insisted that the Faidherbe statue belonged to the cultural heritage of Saint-Louis. Abdou Aziz Guissé, director of the cultural legacy of Senegal, argued that "the statue belonged to the architectural and historical heritage of the city of Saint-Louis, classified as world heritage by Unesco. It is kept, not to celebrate colonization, but for the *devoir de mémoire*" (Le Point Afrique, 2020 ).

Francophobe readers who felt strongly that it was time to end **the hegemony of the French colonial empire** in Senegal still disagreed on the form that the new **authenticity** would

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<sup>19</sup> **Ndarinfo.com, Sept. 5, 2017.**

take. Pro-Murid readers saw in the event the confirmation of the prediction made by the founder of the Murid *confrerie* that Saint-Louis did not belong to the French. However, one of the critiques of the religious recuperation of the event and the politicisation of the Deux Raakas warned that “we are in the Republic of the Murids” and complained that the Murids wanted to rewrite the history of Ndar according to their own vision, whereas Ndar belonged to all. He suggested that the names of city’s quarters or neighbourhoods be changed and replaced with the names of “our worthy and brave men”. Another critique even suggested that the Place Faidherbe be renamed Place El Hadj Malick Sy, for the founder of the Tijaniyya Sufi brotherhood (1855–1920).<sup>20</sup>

As these debates raged in the media, the mayor of Saint-Louis announced two days later, on 7 September 2017, that the statue would be restored and that even though the debate over the colonial past was **necessary**, it was not up to the mayor to decide about the removal of the statue. The Faidherbe statue was eventually reinstalled in the middle of the night on 21 September 2017. However, the debates continued, not only in Senegal, but also in France, especially in Lille, where a collective, called Faidherbe Doit Tomber (#FaidherbeMustFall), characterised the renovation in 2018 of the Faidherbe statue by the Socialist Party mayor Martine Aubry as **a permanent insult to the memory of the colonized people**. Although the mayor acknowledged the legitimacy of the debate, she nevertheless affirmed the heritage value of the statue.<sup>21</sup> In Senegal, it was until the fall of 2020 that Faidherbe Square was renamed Baya-Ndar (Le Point Afrique, 2020 ). In conclusion, the debates over the Faidherbe statue in Saint-Louis tell us a lot about the enduring historical legacy of the French in Senegal and the strength of the institutional as well as personal and family ties between the two countries and their peoples. The responses and initiatives of the city residents to the #FaidherbeMustFall protest movement have revealed a divided society along political, ideological, cultural, confessional and geographical lines.

## **Conclusion**

The events surrounding the unveiling of the Faidherbe statue in Saint-Louis were an ideal occasion not only for the celebration of French national ‘greatness’, but also to produce the official historical narrative of the creation of the colony of Senegal, reflecting on Faidherbe’s

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<sup>20</sup> **Ndarinfo.com, Sept. 5, 2017.**

<sup>21</sup> Idem.

achievements and legacy, and negotiating the different meanings of the statue itself, its symbolism and what it stood for. The collective identification with Faidherbe shows similarities with the imperial mythmaking during the Second Empire. However, the construction of the official historical narratives also contained silences and distortions concerning the agency of the local population, which resulted in the uneven power in the making of the archives and of the historical narratives, and the attribution of retrospective significance.

The ceremony of the unveiling of the Faidherbe statue also sheds light on the republican commemorative practices, especially the different political, financial and cultural dimensions of the rituals of the Third Republic in colonial Senegal. The political dimension of the rituals related to the messages the organisers wanted to convey to the audience (imperial nationalism, values of force and order, progress and ‘civilization’, and empire building). The financial dimension of the rituals concerned the budget, voted by the General Council, which underlined the importance accorded to such planned activities on the priority list of the colonial administration officials. The mobilisation of the funds and the unanimous vote of the budget also reflected the degree of consensus within the colonial bureaucracy.

The construction of French hegemony during the governorship of Jules Peuvergne was seriously challenged by Mayor Devès, who took advantage of the opening ceremonies of the General Council sessions to express his contempt for the governor. Following the mayor’s death, his followers petitioned the colonial administration for the erection of a monument in memory of the late mayor, which raised questions about memory and representation.

In recent years, protest movements against the colonial statues in South Africa and elsewhere found echoes in Saint-Louis (Senegal) and Lille (France), where the campaigns for the removal of the Faidherbe statue captured national and international attention. The reactions in Saint-Louis revealed the division among city residents between the Francophiles, including the municipal authorities, who prefer the status quo and those who are in favour of the removal of the Faidherbe statue.

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