



Figure 0.1 Faidherbe fallen, 5 September 2017.  
Photographer: Thierno Dicko

## Prologue

### Faidherbe Must Fall

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On the morning of 5 September 2017, the inhabitants of Saint-Louis woke to a strange scene. The statue of Louis Faidherbe that had formed the focal point of the Square Faidherbe since 1887 had fallen. The effigy lay next to its pedestal, its face buried in the sand of the public garden that it had decorated (Figure 0.1). According to the accounts given in the newspapers, the statue had been toppled by a thunderstorm.<sup>1</sup> This explanation seemed implausible to a few inhabitants of Saint-Louis, who speculated that the statue might have been overturned by the Muslim pilgrims who had travelled to the city to commemorate 5 September 1895. On that day, the Sufi saint Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba was condemned to exile by the colonial government. Since the 1970s, disciples of the Sufi order founded by Bamba have commemorated that day – and every year they have demanded the removal of the statue. During the night of 4 September 2017, a thunderstorm finally knocked it over. Denying any involvement, Bamba’s disciples hinted at the mystical powers of their spiritual guide.

It is telling that the statue of Faidherbe was allegedly toppled by a Sufi saint who had lived under French colonial rule and who had been tried in a room at the Governor’s Palace that overlooked the square and the statue, both of which were in situ in 1895. During his trial by the privy council, Bamba was condemned to seven years of exile in Gabon. Although there was a lack of substantial evidence, the jury found him guilty of stirring up a revolt against the colonial administration. To protest against the unsound proceedings of the trial, Bamba allegedly uttered a prayer of emergency. Sent into exile, this founder of one of the most important Sufi orders in Senegal is now remembered for his pacifist resistance to the French. How striking that the toppling of the monument to Faidherbe should have been brought about by this pacifist, as if returned from the afterlife to complete his life’s work. On that stormy

<sup>1</sup> See ‘Intempéries: Faidherbe tombe à Saint-Louis’, *Le Quotidien*, 6 September 2017, [www.lequotidien.sn/intemperies-faidherbe-tombe-a-saint-louis/](http://www.lequotidien.sn/intemperies-faidherbe-tombe-a-saint-louis/) (accessed 15 August 2020).

4 Prologue: Faidherbe Must Fall

night of 4 September 2017, the anti-colonial pacifist confronted the colonizer once again. Spectres of colonialism still haunt the city of Saint-Louis.

After Faidherbe's fall, the municipality resurrected his statue in a matter of weeks. The city's mayor, Mansour Faye, strongly opposed the removal of historical statues and spoke out in favour of the integral preservation of Saint-Louis's colonial heritage. Faye had a substantial but controversial legacy to defend. The French had founded Saint-Louis in 1659 as a *comptoir* (trading post) on the Senegal River and named it after Saint Louis, the patron saint of France. In the nineteenth century, this important trading post developed into the military centre out of which the French conquered West Africa and established colonial control. The city's layout of military barracks, administrative buildings, ports, quays, and traffic arteries, with the city connected to the mainland by an iron bridge, provided Saint-Louis with the modern infrastructure necessary to support France's 'civilizing mission' in West Africa. This infrastructure had been realized under Governor Faidherbe. In a city that owes its existence to the French empire, it is not surprising that its mayor wishes to maintain its colonial heritage and to preserve the memory of Faidherbe.

Saint-Louis functioned and flourished as a colonial city until a strategic decision was made in 1902 to transfer the capital of French West Africa (*Afrique-Occidentale Française*) from Saint-Louis to Dakar. At the end of the colonial period, Dakar also assumed the function of capital of Senegal. However, the national government of the independent state of Senegal acknowledged Saint-Louis's historical significance; later, it submitted an application for the registration of the 'Island of Saint-Louis' and, in 2000, Saint-Louis was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site.<sup>2</sup> The application recognized that Saint-Louis's urbanization plan had been Faidherbe's initiative. He had been a major figure in the making of the colony; assuming the function of governor of West Africa twice (in 1854–61 and 1863–5), he had commanded the colony from his seat at the Governor's Palace in Saint-Louis. In 1857, Faidherbe founded the army of *Tirailleurs sénégalais*, composed of African recruits, who effectively conquered West Africa. He established ports and a road between Dakar and Saint-Louis, and, in Saint-Louis, he founded the School of Hostages, where the sons of chiefs were assimilated into French civilization. Acknowledging that this colony was also a *puissance musulmane* (Muslim polity), he founded the Muslim tribunal to

<sup>2</sup> See the UNESCO World Heritage List at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/956> (accessed 19 September 2020).

adjudicate civic matters according to sharia. Most importantly, Faidherbe transformed the colonial administration into an effective apparatus to implement colonial policy.

Faidherbe's significance for the making of modern Senegal – its infrastructures, institutions, and colonial library – cannot be overstated. And his contribution to the making of the French empire was fully recognized at the time. In 1886, a statue was erected to honour his contribution to the colony (Figure 0.2); its epigraph read: '*A son Gouverneur L. Faidherbe, le Sénégal reconnaissant*' (To Governor L. Faidherbe, its obliging Senegal). Unsurprisingly, in the controversy surrounding the statue, the wording of this epigraph was questioned: many Senegalese do not feel in the least obliged to Faidherbe. Even at the unveiling on 20 March 1887, the dedication was contested. But the residents of the villages that had been razed to the ground, their fields set on fire, their livestock confiscated, their daughters distributed as loot to the soldiers of the colonial army – all under the authority of General Faidherbe – had not been consulted, their voices had not been heard. The traces of their existence were effaced by the statue dedicated to the man who wrote history.

But not quite. The counter-memory of the colonial heritage of General Faidherbe resurfaced in the Black Lives Matter protests that erupted in the wake of George Floyd's death – asphyxiated by the police in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. Around the world, the Black Lives Matter movement incited the removal of public statues of slave traders, colonialists, and racial supremacists, and reignited the anti-colonial iconoclasm that had been initiated in 2015 with the call for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes from the campus of the University of Cape Town. In this context, the debate about the statue of Faidherbe resurfaced once again in the public sphere of Saint-Louis. Activists for the removal of the statue liaised with the global movement for decolonization and adopted a French translation of the Rhodes Must Fall eponym: '*Faidherbe doit tomber*' (Faidherbe Must Fall). They assumed a public presence through Facebook, using social media to create a platform. In 2020, they once again raised the question of Faidherbe's legacy and initiated a national debate in Senegal. Some people did not mince words when assessing his legacy. The national newspaper *Le Soleil* published the following contribution on its blog:

We must kill Louis Léon Faidherbe. Let's do it. We must stone him. Overthrow him. Yes, he died in Paris in 1889. But we need to kill him again, symbolically. It's a way to exorcise the demons of colonialism. To exercise revenge on behalf of the families of the 28,000 Senegalese (estimated by the historian Iba Der Thiam) that he killed so savagely when planting the French flag on our soil. Accidentally,

6 Prologue: Faidherbe Must Fall



Figure 0.2 Postcard of the statue of Louis Faidherbe.  
Source: Collection of Ferdinand de Jong

the moustachioed general sits proudly on a pedestal in Saint-Louis. Let's topple him. Kick him! Break him! That will restore pride to those of us who feel humiliated at the sight of the old Governor of Senegal commanding Ndar [Saint-Louis].<sup>3</sup>

This call for a belated overthrow of the colonizer sounds like a radical break with the past to liberate Senegal from its colonial consciousness, the decolonization Frantz Fanon called for in the making of a national culture. Such radicalism is not often heard in Saint-Louis. But the blog correctly identifies the statue as embodying Senegal's colonial heritage – colonialism incarnate, it *materializes* the legacy of colonialism. That this legacy is still firmly in place 60 years after Senegal acquired national independence seems unbelievable and unacceptable to many young people. Faidherbe's statue is out of tune with the deracialized and decolonized future they imagine. They demand a break with the legacy of colonialism materialized in monumental time, to breathe again.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Saint-Louis openly professes his filiation with the French general and with the French more broadly, acknowledging the long colonial history of Saint-Louis and the city's continuous reliance on French tourism and development collaboration. Only a few years ago, the French Development Agency helped restore the famous Bridge Faidherbe that links Saint-Louis, situated on an island in the Senegal River, to the mainland.<sup>4</sup> Established in 1897 to link the colonial city to the colony, the bridge symbolizes the infrastructural legacy of colonialism. Faidherbe Must Fall confronted this local attachment to the former colonizer, symbolized by the statue, square, and bridge named after him. But in response to the demand of Faidherbe Must Fall for full decolonization of the urban space, the author Moumar Gueye wrote an open letter to the national newspaper *Le Soleil*. His was a passionate plea for respect for the old statue and the figure it represents. The letter addressed not only the statue itself, but the perceived attack on the history of Saint-Louis, its culture of peace, elegance, and religious tolerance, its *métissage*.<sup>5</sup> This author felt that the entire colonial heritage – which he assumed as his – was under siege; he even experienced the demand for the fall of Faidherbe as an assault on the city's tutelary spirit

<sup>3</sup> 'Billet "Vite dit!": Tuer Faidherbe', *Le Soleil*, 22 June 2020 (my translation), <http://lesoleil.sn/billet-vite-dit-tuer-faidherbe/> (accessed 13 August 2020).

<sup>4</sup> 'Résumé d'évaluation: Réhabilitation du pont Faidherbe de Saint-Louis, Sénégal', AFD, March 2015, [www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/resume-d-evaluation-rehabilitation-pont-faidherbe-saint-louis-senegal?origin=/fr/rechercher?query=pont+faidherbe](http://www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/resume-d-evaluation-rehabilitation-pont-faidherbe-saint-louis-senegal?origin=/fr/rechercher?query=pont+faidherbe) (accessed 19 September 2020).

<sup>5</sup> *Métissage* is a French term that references both racial and cultural mixing. The city of Saint-Louis is known for its legacy of *métissage*, which is the subject of Chapter 3.

8 Prologue: Faidherbe Must Fall

Mame Coumba Bang, the siren who protects the city against evil and punishes it when neglected.<sup>6</sup>

Acknowledging and appreciating that the city was the product of French colonialism, Moumar Gueye wondered if the entire infrastructure of Saint-Louis was to be taken down? To reinforce the impossibility of this rhetorical question and to emphasize Saint-Louis's indebtedness to the colonial project, he pointed to the many ways in which Saint-Louis and Senegal still depend on the former colonizer. Insisting that its assistance is still vitally important today, he pointed to the significance of the French army base in Dakar and mentioned that French is one of Senegal's national languages. Here was a staunch defence of French colonialism and its legacy by a *doomu ndar*, as the inhabitants of Saint-Louis are called in Wolof, with a sense of recognition of their sensibilities. Many of the inhabitants of the old city, *la vieille ville*, as Saint-Louis is lovingly called by the Senegalese, do not wish to dissociate themselves from France – some *feel* French to this day.

Saint-Louis is the oldest city in Senegal and once enjoyed the administrative status of French *commune*, as did Gorée, Dakar, and Rufisque. Inhabitants of these *quatre communes* (four communes) enjoyed French citizenship and were represented in the French National Assembly. Saint-Louis was capital of French West Africa and the colony of Senegal until national independence ended all that. Ever since then, Saint-Louis has been nostalgic for its heyday under French colonialism. Today, the city is deeply melancholic over the loss of its maritime, commercial, and political significance. The tourist industry is one of the principal economic activities through which the old city capitalizes on its colonial heritage. The other *communes* adapted better to independence and have come to terms with their colonial legacies. In its coverage of the Faidherbe Must Fall campaign, the national newspaper *Le Soleil* provided an inventory of the many street names that Gorée, Dakar, and Rufisque have changed over the years.<sup>7</sup> Gorée, the island known for its role in the slave trade, recently renamed its Place de l'Europe (Europe Square) as Place de la Liberté et de la Dignité Humaine (Square of Freedom and Human Dignity). The process of renaming streets,

<sup>6</sup> For a contemporary account of the workings of the siren, see this 2020 YouTube video in which the threat of flooding in the city is blamed on the neglect of Mame Coumba Bang: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5rYApDXu4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5rYApDXu4) (accessed 21 November 2020).

<sup>7</sup> See also 'Enquête – Avenues ou rues Faidherbe, Jean Jaurès, Carnot, Félix Faure, boulevard Général de Gaulle ...: Les symboles du colonialisme au cœur de Dakar', *Le Quotidien*, 22 June 2020, [www.lequotidien.sn/enquete-avenues-ou-rues-faidherbe-jean-jaures-carnot-felix-faure-boulevard-general-de-gaulle-les-symboles-du-colonialisme-au-coeur-de-dakar/](http://www.lequotidien.sn/enquete-avenues-ou-rues-faidherbe-jean-jaures-carnot-felix-faure-boulevard-general-de-gaulle-les-symboles-du-colonialisme-au-coeur-de-dakar/) (accessed 19 September 2020).

squares, schools, theatres, and sports stadiums had progressed steadily in most Senegalese cities. Under its previous mayor, Saint-Louis had also been working on its colonial street names. A long list of streets named after French colonial administrators had already been rebaptized after Senegalese figures of national or local importance. In September 2020, under public pressure, the city council of Saint-Louis renamed Faidherbe Square as Baya Ndar. This name had already been used by the population: *Baya* is the Wolof term for a crossroads, Ndar the name for Saint-Louis. The square is a de facto crossroads, but the word *baya* also references the idea of a crossroads of civilizations. Baya Ndar celebrates Saint-Louis as a city of cultural confluence.

The decolonization of public space is ongoing – however hard it may be for those who still feel attached to the former colonizer, such as Moumar Gueye, who concluded his open letter thus: ‘One can’t simply efface the traces of History! History will always be with us, in our books, our engravings, memories, archives, architecture, arts and culture! History is eternal!’ Gueye was not the only one to protest against the forceful removal of traces of colonialism. For the author Louis Camara, another Saint-Louis luminary, one cannot dissociate the history of Saint-Louis from the figure of Faidherbe. For him, ‘whether one likes it or not, Saint-Louis and Faidherbe are inseparable’. Camara is among those who wish to maintain the statue: ‘There are things one can reproach him for, certainly, but there are also certain achievements one needs to acknowledge. If the statue goes, I will certainly feel some nostalgia, because I have grown up with it, but,’ he admits, with an eye to the future, ‘no regrets.’<sup>8</sup>

The global protest movement that emerged after the killing of George Floyd reflects generational changes taking place across the world, in Saint-Louis, in Senegal, and across the Senegalese diaspora. The reclamation of another past and another future is pursued not only in Saint-Louis but also in Lille, Faidherbe’s place of birth, where streets, squares, and a statue are also named after him. In 2018, the local chapter of the Faidherbe Must Fall movement demanded the removal of the statue. The activist Salian Sylla, of African heritage, wrote an open letter to the socialist mayor of Lille, Martine Aubry, which remained unanswered. Interviewed by Florian Bobin, Sylla says: ‘We are still in a situation where

<sup>8</sup> ‘Sénégal: à Saint-Louis, polémique autour d’une statue de l’époque coloniale’, clip on France 3, 1 July 2020, [https://mobile.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/senegal/senegal-a-saint-louis-polemique-autour-dune-statue-de-lepoque-coloniale\\_4030335.amp?\\_\\_twitter\\_impression=true&fbclid=IwAR2GY89WrR4LKPmilAbPakV7uGHciWZs3hU9h-bL4TFUTC4wN98xFik\\_AZw](https://mobile.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/senegal/senegal-a-saint-louis-polemique-autour-dune-statue-de-lepoque-coloniale_4030335.amp?__twitter_impression=true&fbclid=IwAR2GY89WrR4LKPmilAbPakV7uGHciWZs3hU9h-bL4TFUTC4wN98xFik_AZw) (accessed 19 September 2020).



the Left, which has always been, at least in its principles, on the side of the dominated, has not lived up to its historical role.<sup>9</sup> Sylla denounces France's refusal to acknowledge its racism, for instance when it comes to the French police force. He critiques the political environment in which those who question racism are themselves accused of being racist: 'That's what the debate in France is all about; when you talk about certain subjects, they caricature you and throw stones at you.' Sylla interrogates the parameters of a public sphere in which race cannot be named, least of all blamed (cf. Mbembe 2005). For the time being, though, he confidently continues to work towards the statue's removal: 'As long as I see this equestrian statue ... celebrating the power of a heroized man, Martine Aubry will be able to say whatever she wants. Still, for me, she will always be at odds with the principles she claims to defend.' Sylla, with a sense for historicity, claims another filiation, not to the colonial project, but to the universal equality promised by the French Revolution.

Faidherbe represents the contradictions of the 'civilizing mission', then and now, in Lille and Saint-Louis (cf. Conklin 1998). The debate about the future of the statue in Saint-Louis inaugurated a public examination of the heritage of colonialism in which that legacy was weighed again, its achievements celebrated, its victims mourned. The controversy raises a range of questions: how does one repair the legacies of colonialism? How does one think the future departing from that past? For the poet Léopold Sédar Senghor, co-founder of the *Négritude* movement and first president of Senegal, forgiveness was the way forward. But who is to forgive what? In his essay *On Forgiveness*, Jacques Derrida tried to answer that difficult question. What is to be forgiven? Who is to be forgiven? Derrida explores the aporia of forgiveness without providing definitive answers, but his essay was timely in addressing the culture of expiation that surrounds us. In 2017, the French president Emmanuel Macron offered a belated response to Senghor's prayer. Macron declared colonization a crime against humanity, a real barbarism: 'And that is part of the past that we are facing today, offering our excuses to those to whom we have committed these crimes.'<sup>10</sup> Macron's historical acknowledgement of the wrongs committed by the French state was received as a step

<sup>9</sup> 'The mark of the former colonizer: an interview with Khadim Ndiaye and Salian Sylla', *Africa Is a Country*, 21 July 2020, <https://africasacountry.com/2020/07/the-marks-of-the-former-colonizer> (accessed 17 August 2020).

<sup>10</sup> See 'Video: En Algérie, Macron s'excuse pour la colonisation, une "faute grave" pour la droite', *Le Parisien*, 16 February 2017, [www.leparisien.fr/elections/presidentielle/video-en-algerie-macron-s-excuse-pour-la-colonisation-la-droite-denonce-une-faute-grave-15-02-2017-6684201.php](http://www.leparisien.fr/elections/presidentielle/video-en-algerie-macron-s-excuse-pour-la-colonisation-la-droite-denonce-une-faute-grave-15-02-2017-6684201.php) (accessed 19 September 2020).

towards reconciliation, but what do apologies really accomplish for those who have received the legacy of colonialism? How can the irreparable violence of colonialism be repaired? ‘Forgiveness does not,’ says Derrida (2001: 41), ‘it should never amount to a therapy of reconciliation.’

This book examines how Senegal comes to terms with its colonial past. The question of the legacy of colonial violence has often been understood in terms of perpetrators and victims. In this binary opposition, the Senegalese are construed as the victims of the French colonizers, the perpetrators of the colonial project. In this register, postcolonial President Macron offered his apologies for French colonialism. But the question really is what has become of the colonial project? What are the contours of this inheritance? French imperialism was inflected with a colonial humanism that appealed to colonial subjects involved in political struggles to obtain citizenship. However paradoxical the imperial project, the colonized eventually received rights. The independent Republic of Senegal was founded on the principles of universal human rights inherited from the French Revolution. As the inheritance of colonialism is inflected with other legacies, how does one assume an inheritance open to multiple filiations? This is a more complex question than one of colonial guilt. As Derrida (1993: 24) states in another work: ‘One never inherits without coming to terms with [*s’expliquer avec*] some specter, and therefore with more than one specter.’

In this context, it may be useful to ask how helpful the binary opposition of victim and perpetrator is in ‘working through’ and ‘coming to terms’ with the colonial legacy. The binary opposition between victim and perpetrator has recently come to be questioned. Michael Rothberg suggests that ‘subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes’ (2020: 1). Rothberg proposes to name such subjects ‘implicated subjects’: ‘An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles.’ The term ‘implicated subject’ acknowledges that modes of implication are ‘complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory’. I think that the notion of implicated subjectivity is helpful in thinking about colonialism and in trying to understand how Senegalese subjects come to terms with its legacy today.

So, what happened to the statue? While the debate about the statue was raging in Senegal’s media, the monument itself was removed from its pedestal for maintenance purposes while the municipality refurbished