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The Constructs of Coexistence: Visualizing Contemporary Saint-Louisien Identity Among the Architectures of a Colonial Past

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Visualizing Contemporary Saint-Louisien Identity among the Architectures of a Colonial Past
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ABSTRACT

Saint-Louis, Senegal occupies a unique place among other Senegalese cities because of its history as the former colonial capital and, therefore, its profound experience with cross-cultural interactions. This study demonstrates how an urban identity predicated on coexistence is cultivated. Through interviews with Saint-Louisien residents and urban technicians, a metropolitan image is herein illustrated. Included in that image are specific sites of appropriation and the dreams of a utopian future, highlighting the continued dynamism among the architectures of a colonial past.

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INTRODUCTION

For the third year, people flocked to "Festival Métissons" in Saint-Louis, Senegal, and were treated to a mélange of musical cultures. The seemingly frivolous celebration in bars and restaurants across the island of Saint-Louis (*île N'Dar*) was both a product and an indicator of something far more profound: the undeniably fundamental and continuous cultural collision upon which the city of Saint-Louis has been constructed. The *métissage* of French and Senegalese cultures to produce something uniquely Saint-Louisien has been the subject of countless inquiries, both personal and academic. But it does not require a meticulous search to uncover the products of this cultural mix. Saint-Louis' built environment – its architecture, plazas, bridges and roads – makes palpable the history of cross-cultural interaction.

For a post-colonial nation like Senegal, and especially for a former colonial capital like Saint-Louis, the task of confronting and reconciling the physical vestiges of colonialism is complex and daunting. In a publication compiled by the Institut Francais de Patrimoine, Chief Conservator of Heritage Bernard Toulier articulates this task in his introduction. Unsurprisingly, his contribution provides more questions than answers regarding the construction of national heritage and contemporary urban identity through historic preservation. He explains, "the 'historic monument' is not a 'cultural invariant' but 'a recent and Western invention'" (Toulier 20).[i] Employing that framework of Western imposition, Toulier asks, "In a society in search of an identity, notably after independence, what is heritage? How does one rewrite or reread history?" (20).[ii] I asked similar questions throughout my study, trying to elucidate the contemporary image of Saint-Louis among the spaces and structures of a colonial past.

An investigation of Saint-Louis' urban identity reveals the ongoing coexistence of cultures promulgated through selective historical memory and the appropriation of certain urban

spaces. Therefore, Saint-Louisiens – both individuals and organizations based in the city – constantly navigate inherent contradiction to produce a utopian yet nostalgic idealism.

BACKGROUND

To understand Saint-Louis' contemporary identity, it is necessary to have at least a basic grasp of the historical trajectory of the city. The first French commercial institution was established near Saint-Louis in 1628, but it was not until 1659 that the "settlement […was] transferred to another island situated farther downstream: the island of N'Dar, then the property of the Barak (king) of Waalo," which is still where the city is found today (Editions Sepia).[iii] In 1764, "the mixed-race Charles Thevenot became the first mayor of Saint-Louis," which demonstrates the far-reaching scope of Saint-Louis' *métisse* history (Editions Sepia).[iv] Along with Dakar, Rufisque, and Gorée, Saint-Louis was eventually granted *commune* status by the *AOF* administration, thus offering all Saint-Louisiens the same civil rights as French citizens. With its vibrant *métisse* population (people of mixed racial heritage born to French colonists and their Saint-Louisien wives), Saint-Louis developed an idiosyncratic social context, as Allison Midei describes in her ISP from the fall of 2009. The city became a place where Senegalese citizens pursued French education and gained civic power, both affirming French cultural expectations while strengthening Saint-Louisien agency. Midei explains how Saint-Louisiens continue to be "proud of their city," a holdover from *métisses'* self-righteous creation of an urban landscape not quite French but not quite Senegalese (26).[v] I will further discuss this pride in coexistent identities in my analysis.

In 1854, "Louis Faidherbe was named governor of Senegal," an event that would radically change the face of Saint-Louis and of the colony as a whole (Editions Sepia).[vi] As

Emily Gossack meticulously details in her ISP from the fall of 2000, Governor Faidherbe "worked towards his vision of architectural unity on the island," which included "razing hundreds of grass huts in 1859 and again in 1860" (11). As the Lille School of Architecture's *Rapport Scientifique* begins to explain, "the war against urban filth and precarious habitats translated itself, by 1855, into the 'Battle of the Huts,' during which the indigenous housing was decisively destroyed and forbidden from public roads" (24).[vii] The French *maisons à l'étage* that sprinkle the island to this day were harbingers of despotic rule. Herein lies the beginning of a contradiction of meanings and memories: the buildings are both beautiful remnants of the past and sinister reminders of oppression.

Colonial architecture and a contemporary urban perspective in Saint-Louis are irrevocably intertwined, and this relationship begs the question of how Saint-Louis might move forward and continue to forge a post-colonial urban identity. Since Gossack's investigation, Saint-Louis has been identified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, and much progress has been made toward categorization and historic preservation of notable structures, spearheaded by the *Agence de Developpement Communal* (ADC) in Saint-Louis. In 2008, with the help of a presidential decree, the ADC adopted a *Plan de Sauvegarde et de Mise en Valeur* (PSMV), a code that, according to the former director of the ADC El Hadj Malick Diakhaté, "is a key document [and] supersedes even the [state-issued] Code of Urbanism."[viii] The PSMV explains in detail what must be executed when approaching construction or renovation projects in Saint-Louis by articulating the four classes of architectural structures: "Historical Monuments," which have been identified through a 1971 patrimony law; "Significant Architectural Value," which are structures that are entirely protected and can only be conserved; "Mild Architectural Value," which are buildings that can be transformed as long as respect for the original structure is

maintained; and "Without Architectural Value," which are, evidently, unprotected buildings (ADC 6).[ix]

The Lille School of Architecture in France supported the classification endeavor after the city of Saint-Louis was added to UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites. They produced the *Inventaire Architecturale et Urbaine* of the island of Saint-Louis, in which the Lille School and its team of both French and Senegalese technicians articulated the parameters of their project and where historic preservation would be focused within the city. Because of an ambiguity in the UNESCO classification, Lille's Architectural and Urban Inventory articulated in the *Rapport Scientifique* a chosen focus on the island of Saint-Louis, or *Île N'Dar*, with its dense display of historic architecture (11). The organization thus elevated above the rest one of the three Saint-Louisien districts, the other two being *Sor*, the mainland, and *la Langue de Barbary*, the narrow strip of land between the Senegal River and the Atlantic Ocean (Map 1).

Between the Architectural and Urban Inventory and the PSMV, among other official processes of historic preservation and valorization, Saint-Louis "has all the cards in hand to conduct a thorough conservation," Diakhaté said.[x] The city, however, has continued to face obstacles in carrying out preservationist tasks, for reasons that Diakhaté thought might include cultural perceptions among the population as well as economic limitations. In other words, Diakhaté intimated that there might be a chasm between the official conception of Saint-Louis and the popular image of the city. With this examination of contemporary, urban Saint-Louisien identity, I hope to articulate a holistic image of Saint-Louis, using both technical and quotidian perspectives. My goal herein is not to condemn or condone historic conservation but rather to use the classification and preservation efforts as a jumping-off point for the analysis of contemporary urban identity. As Toulier writes in his introduction, "[heritage] makes a historic

object sacred through a process of appropriation, while expressing the cohesion of a national or international community" (22).[xi] Historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch agrees, stating, "there is a common factor everywhere: the appropriation of the 'colonial city' (and its inheritances) by the citizens of the African metropolis to make, in spite of Western denial, *their* city" (1099).[xii]

How and to what extent is this process of appropriation practiced in Saint-Louis? How does it affect the contemporary identity of the city? What does it mean for the future of Saint-Louis? These are the primary questions that structured my investigation and analysis.

METHODOLOGY

My study examined how Saint-Louisiens – both technicians and individuals, offically affiliated and independent – understand the space of the city. There is, as has been previously demonstrated, an institutionally condoned urban image manifested in the plan for historic preservation. I also focused primarily on the island itself, which, as the Lille architects noted, simply provides important boundaries for an investigation of urban space. But my focus did not exclude *Sor* and *la Langue de Barbary,* but rather used the island as a spatial framework for analytical consistency.

I began by perusing the body of literature about Saint-Louis and, more generally, about urbanization in West Africa and beyond. Because I came to this study with a background in United States-centric Urban Studies, I had to question and/or confirm my intellectual assumptions about the structure of cities in order to approach Saint-Louis on its own terms rather than from an imposed definition of urban space. The body of secondary sources and literature, though far too vast for me to investigate completely, ensured that my analysis would stem from historical patterns and contemporary trends relevant to the region and not just from my Western

academic training. The ISPs of SIT alumni also helped to build an appropriate analytic framework.

The next stage involved meetings and discussions with my advisor, Alioune Fall. Fall works at ADC, supervising and instructing ongoing restoration projects in Saint-Louis. Because of his exhaustive knowledge of the city and innumerable professional and personal connections, Alioune was an invaluable resource. He helped structure my project by providing contacts for interviews and access to the Lille Architectural and Urban Inventory at ADC. I conducted interviews both with respondents with whom Alioune invited me to speak and with interlocutors I met through my experiences in the city. Through these interviews, I assessed the contemporary visualization of the city, the prevailing Saint-Louisien images.

This last method of interviewing to gain insight into urban images was inspired by urban theorist Kevin Lynch and his work, *The Image of the City*. Lynch therein conducts what he calls an "imageability study" where he "consider[s] the visual quality of the American city by studying the mental image of that city which is held by its citizens" (Lynch 2). He defines *imageability* as "that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer," because "the image is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience" (4, 9). An urban mental image is therefore a potent and complex concept. I approached my analysis of people's images of Saint-Louis primarily through conversation and verbal description, but also by asking respondents to sketch mental maps of the city.

The elucidation of such a powerfully esoteric phenomenon as the urban image requires flexibility, for as Lynch argues, "there seems to be a public image of any given city, which is the overlap of many individual images" (46). Tijane Sylla, former Senegalese Minister of Tourism

and Aerial Transports, makes a similar claim in his introduction to Roberto Omar Francisco's *Saint-Louis du Sénégal: Architextures*. Sylla writes that Saint-Louis is a "city, both singular and multiple," implying that Lynch's claims about the multiple faces of American cities also apply to Saint-Louis (4).[xiii]

Lynch analyzes the various components of the complex urban images by classifying them into five "types": paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Paths are often "the predominant elements in [people's] image [because they] observe the city while moving through it." (Lynch 47). Edges, on the other hand, are "the boundaries between two phases," perhaps connected by a path (47). Districts, Lynch explains, are "recognizable as having some common, identifying character" and might be comprised of one or many nodes, "strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter" (47). Landmarks, the last of Lynch's categories, are "another type of point-reference, but […] the observer does not enter within them," thus acting as a more distant or intangible node (48).

I include these definitions because they are crucial when evaluating how people effectively or ineffectively appropriate urban space in the architectures of a colonial past. Through the interviews and mental maps, I identified which elements throughout the metropolis were highlighted more often than others and what they might demonstrate about people engaging, both physically and intellectually, with the history and contemporary identity of the city. Lynch, however, makes a value judgment about a city based on its imageability, or in other words, based on how legible it is to its users. I refrained from making such a value judgment and instead wanted to see what the resulting images would say about Saint-Louisien identity, good, bad and otherwise.

FINDINGS

My interviews, when placed in the context of my secondary source research and observations of the city, had "coexistence" as a commonly salient theme. Thus, my findings are structured around my argument that Saint-Louisien identity is predicated on multiple versions of coexistence, in the physical and visible and environment and, more esoterically, in conceptions and mental images. These identities are based in delicate but crucial cognitive balance in order to produce visions of Saint-Louis as a flourishing destination, a metropolis recalling its former brilliance.

Coexistence: Pride

Saint-Louis' *métissage,* or hybridization of cultures and races, still functions as a point of pride and emanates to a significant degree from the city's built environment. There is an undeniable and widespread pride in the French history of the city. Ndef, a resident of *Sor* who has an internship on the island, made clear from the outset of our interview that the connection with French identity remains fundamental. She reminded me that Saint-Louis "*is* the first French West [African] colony."[xiv] Ndef's choice of verb tense – we *are* rather than we *were* – underlined the extent to which French culture continues to function dynamically as a component of Saint-Louisien identity. The cultural fusion that Allison Medei describes in her ISP about *signares* and *métisses* is also very much relevant today. Marie-Caroline Camara, a French expatriate with Senegalese and Saint-Louisien roots, immediately identified herself as *métisse* when discussing her ancestry in the country and city. Such pride is inculcated through events like Festival Métissons, which I mentioned earlier, where school-aged children sang lyrics like "*Ma mère est noire, mon père est blanc, je suis métisse et je suis très content!*" (My mother is Black, my father is White, I am mixed and I am very happy!).

Indeed, the strong ties with Saint-Louis' French heritage produce a sort of superiority complex. Aly Sine, the director of the regional Municipal Services Office, explained how "Saint-Louis has an identity that differentiates it from other Senegalese cities."[xv] Marie-Caroline elaborated on this theme, clarifying why Saint-Louisiens might feel so distinct from the rest of Senegal. She proffered, "they didn't live as if [in] a colonized country – they lived like French citizens of an overseas territory," hearkening back to the *commune* status granted to Saint-Louis at the end of the 19th century.[xvi] In fact, most respondents spoke fondly, even fiercely, of their uniquely Saint-Louisien identity, Ndef going so far as to say that she is "very, very, *very* proud to be Saint-Louisien" and that "other regions […tell] us, 'you are all *toubabs*!'" because of their indelible French ties.[xvii]

Respondents were particularly proud of two manifestations of cultural coexistence, in religion and, oddly enough, in war. Two primary religious "nodes" were highlighted several times: the *Grand Mosquée*, in the *île nord* neighborhood of the island, and the Catholic cathedral, located in the center of the island next to *la Gouvernance*. These two "nodes" were usually mentioned in tandem and followed by an explanation of the religious tolerance throughout the city – and even the country. Aly chose "the church and the mosque in the north" as two of the most important buildings in Saint-Louis, connecting them seamlessly in his response and thus in his mental image of the city.[xviii] Cheikh Ndiaye, a middle school English teacher at CEM Abdoulaye Mar Diop in *île nord,* set out some of the mosque's more remarkable traits, including that it "is the oldest in Saint-Louis, [even in all] of West Africa," but to identify its location, he explained that it "is next to the French consulate."[xix] Cheikh, therefore, also connected Islam with French influences. Michel Bellanger and Jordane Vignais, the director and regional manager of the French organization *Patrimoine Métier Solidarité* (PMS), also discussed the

cathedral and the mosque in conjunction. Jordane elaborated on the design of the mosque, pointing out that there is a "clock tower in the mosque," a beacon of religious coexistence.[xx] Finally, Louis Camara, acclaimed author and lifelong resident of Saint-Louis, also talked about religious interaction in the context of his family. Louis' father was Muslim and his mother Catholic, and they ultimately "separated for a religious reason."[xxi] Louis, however, holds no grudges or bitterness from this history of divisiveness but rather embodies religious harmony by frequently going to the cathedral, even though he is a practicing Muslim. These cognitive connections of the two sanctuaries or "nodes" implicitly link Islam and Christianity, Senegal and France, again demonstrating the proud coexistence of cultures.

During both World War I and II, France conscripted Senegalese into its army, and White French soldiers often fought alongside these *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*. The interviewees who discussed this wartime collaboration did so with nostalgic pride. Marie-Caroline recalled her grandfather's involved in WWI, saying: "My Saint-Louisien grandfather left to fight in WWI in France […] He battled for France […] If I am here today, it's because my grandfather fought in WWI."[xxii] Through this anecdote, Marie-Caroline demonstrated the lasting impact of bonds formed in wartime between France and Senegal, bonds that she still uses to rationalize her presence in the city of Saint-Louis. From the "other" side of someone without familial or ethnic ties to Senegal, Jordane of PMS explained why the wartime collaboration was relevant to the contemporary cooperation between Senegal and France, saying, "During WWII, the Senegalese were with the French […] Therefore, I think that [the French] are obligated to help revitalize Senegal."[xxiii] Jordane thereby legitimized his presence as a White, French male in Senegal while also arguing for the continued collaboration between the nations.

But for an "imageability" study like this, the pride in the built environment, and urban plan more generally, is most notable in contributing to this same proud coexistence. The interviewees were in startling agreement about the importance of colonial architecture. As Michel of PMS said, the island of Saint-Louis has an undeniable "imprint of France" with its ubiquitous *maisons à balcons* and various historic monuments.[xxiv] Louis Camara deemed this "historic charm" and said that it is "an asset for the city."[xxv] Louis continued, explaining how "colonial architecture is important to conserve because it is a milestone in the history of [the] country."[xxvi] Marjorie Da Silva, a White, French expatriate and resident of Saint-Louis for the last year, added, "to keep the [urban] homogeneity, it is necessary to maintain this [colonial] style […] the architecture, the colors," or in other words, "the richness of Saint-Louis."[xxvii]

The architecture is so vital to the metropolitan image because it lends Saint-Louis a niche, a uniqueness of which Aly Sine of the Municipal Services Office is acutely aware. If you see something that resembles the city on TV, he explained, "and you were once in Saint-Louis," you can say to yourself, "ah, that reminds me of Saint-Louis!"[xxviii] Marjorie made a similar claim, in highlighting two nodes, emphasizing that they were "two buildings specific to Saint-Louis that you could not find elsewhere."[xxix] Cheikh, the middle school teacher, even posited that the city "was not African, but indeed European."[xxx] In making this claim, he hinted at another idiosyncratic element that continues to shape the city: the gridded urban plan proposed and implemented by Faidherbe. Evidently one of the more fundamental "structures" of the city, the urban plan remains a point of pride because of its uniqueness. The Lille *Rapport Scientifique* underlined this point, stating, "these […] blocks constitute, more than the buildings themselves, a veritable urban form that gives to the city, regardless of the angle from which one discovers it […] an identity and a coherence that it is absolutely necessary to preserve" (28).[xxxi] Marie-

Caroline agreed, citing "the architectural ensemble of the town, the homogeneity, the urban plan" as some of the most definitive elements of Saint-Louis.

Pride in the spaces of Saint-Louis also corresponds with neighborhoods, or "districts," the smaller but similarly vital urban groups. First, the island itself is regarded as a unified morsel of the city, as compared to *Sor* and *la Langue de Barbary*. Louis Camara explained this island pride, depicting a hyperbolic haughtiness among the residents of *île N'Dar*. "They are very proud to be *les insulaires* [the exclusive residents,]" he said, "Now we say that with humor."[xxxii] But even so, a sarcastic slogan remains in the urban imagination, that "if you do not live on the island, you are not truly Saint-Louisien."[xxxiii] This sarcastic insularity distills even further as the island is separated into two primary districts, *île nord* and *île sud*. Louis articulated this tradition of neighborhood affiliation, poking fun but also quickly adding, "I am a *'nordiste*,'" having lived his entire life in that district.[xxxiv] Thus, pride in "districts," "nodes," and even in the urban plan itself is a fundamental element of Saint-Louis' image. The fact that Saint-Louis demonstrates this unique mixture of urban traits and has managed to protect the cachet throughout its history only augments the pride in the minds of Saint-Louisiens.

Coexistence: Contradiction

To maintain such pride, however, necessitates the delicate navigation of problematic conflicts, producing what can be seen as another side of Saint-Louisien coexistence, that of contradictory versions of history. Many of the aforementioned points of pride in the city have unsavory historical underpinnings, requiring a selective historical memory to sidestep. For example, the much-touted religious coexistence on the island was not, as respondents intimated, always so egalitarian. The *Centre Hospitalier Régional de Saint-Louis* illustrates this rather malignant history. The hospital is still housed in the original structure – and in fact was cited by

certain respondents as one of the most important buildings on the island – but is also a particularly startling symbol of oppression. To construct what was first a military hospital exclusively for Senegalese, French colonists razed a Muslim cemetery to clear space for the structure, firmly supplanting indigenous culture with (supposed) White, Western prerogative.[1] A less extreme but nonetheless indicative example can be found in *la Grand Mosquée,* one of the nodes cited as a marker of religious tolerance. As archeologist Hamady Bocoum writes, "the substitution of the minaret with a clock tower proves that the French Republic was capable […] of integrating local realities in the management of urban space" (129).[xxxv] But this "integration of local realities" still managed to place a Christian symbol atop a Muslim base, symbolizing in the built environment religious domination rather than respect or tolerance.

Selective historical memory functions particularly effectively in regards to the Senegalese contribution to the French war efforts. While the "collaboration" was highlighted as a point of pride and as rationale for the continued relationship between France and Senegal, the history of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* is undeniably one of inequality and hardship. In WWII especially, the numerical contribution to the French army from West Africa was astronomical, amounting to over 100,000 troops (Scheck 2). France, however, had to racially re-image its WWII experience to reconcile the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais'* significant contribution with the maintenance of colonial rule. Before the impending Allied victory, Charles de Gaulle, leader of the Free French forces, issued an order releasing all of the T.S. troops from duty on the front lines and replacing them with White French soldiers (Echenberg 373 – 374). This *blanchissement,* or whitening, of the French troops ensured that the lasting image of WWII would be White, not Black (Echenberg 373 – 374). The oppression continued in Senegal after the war, when veterans finally revolted at

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[A] This information was given in an interview for a different project and thus the respondent must be kept anonymous, as s/he did not complete a consent form.

Camp de Thiaroye as they awaited their long overdue compensation for their wartime efforts. 35 Senegalese were ultimately murdered in the suppression of the revolt, which was, at its core, a representation of the inequality between the French and Senegalese during the wars (Bewick, Think Africa Press).

Admittedly, Jordane of PMS hinted at this history when speaking of France's continued obligation to Senegal based on wartime debts. Whether France's continual involvement in Senegalese affairs is the most effective way to demonstrate an awareness of the oppressive history is unclear, though, because, very basically, France still has a stronghold in Senegal. Foreign aid is not inherently oppressive, but it maintains the status quo in the relationship between the two countries. Of course, Saint-Louis prides itself on its French connections, but it is also necessary to acknowledge the irony and even vanity of a continual French presence in Senegal and in the city, especially aid given to historic preservation projects. Jordane and Michel, themselves employed by a French organization devoted to historic conservation, discussed another institution, the *Agence Française de Developpement* (AFD). AFD provides money for projects, as Michel said, "to help the population carry out construction work."[xxxvi] Jordane added that that the total number of Saint-Louisien sites designated for AFD funding is 133. PMS, Jordane and Michel's organization, also provides significant amounts of financial support. They explained the process of allocating money to projects throughout Saint-Louis: they work alongside the *Agence de Developpement Communal* to identify which structures are most in need of restoration, and if the proprietors of the house cannot afford preservation work, PMS (and the French government) underwrites the project. PMS also offers its services in the private sector to those homeowners who can manage the significant cost of restoration. This particular system of fund allocation seems to be, from what I have learned, as egalitarian as is

possible, but the fact remains that such a reliance on French funds reinforces the superiority of the French aesthetic. Photography historian Jennifer Bajorek illustrates this concept when she explains nostalgic attachment to colonial imagery, stating, "Buckley is not afraid to name what is whitewashed by all of this 'loving' attachment to colonial visual culture: namely, the refusal of certain rights to the postcolonial state" (160).

Therein lies the issue: by affirming the aesthetic of a colonial past, French institutions continue to assert their dominance. This is especially true in Saint-Louis, where the neat perpendiculars of the urban grid conceal their oppressive history. Though in her interview Marie-Caroline Camara said that Saint-Louis did *not* demonstrate a case "where a town would have existed, would have been razed and reconstructed by the colonists," history paints an entirely different portrait.[xxxvii] As mentioned before, Faidherbe had to eliminate the preexisting settlement on *île N'Dar* in order to realize his vision of urban control. In the section entitled *Atlas des Cartes Historique,* the Lille *Inventaire* also glosses over the intense domination inherent in this story, but does mention that "Faidherbe launched an important campaign of management and embellishment on the island," involving "an ordinance [mandating] the suppression of all huts in the center of the island" (16).[xxxviii] Failure to comply would incur the consequence of "demolition by the French army" (16).[xxxix]

The grid was thus constructed through oppressive measures and indeed served the French more than the indigenous Senegalese population, perpetuating inequalities. Alain Sinou, professor at the *Institut francais d'urbanisme*, explains this in "Le processus de patrimonialisation de l'espace colonial en Afrique de l'Ouest." He writes:

> The conceptual uniformity of the [urban] model […] was also thought of as a means of comfort for the colonist. His career directed him to successively reside in different territories and cities of a transcontinental empire, so he was thus assured to find, wherever he was, a similar environment and urban framework" (138).[xl]

Urban regulation thereby placated the colonist. It also propagated a system of segregation, in

Senegal at large and in Saint-Louis specifically, a fact that was completely absent from my

interviews. According to Hamady Bocoum, "Senegalese were prohibited from passing on

certain roads of Saint-Louis during the hours of *sieste*" in order to presumably protect the

colonists' peaceful space – space that had been aggressively taken from those now excluded

(128).[xli]

Coexistence: Appropriation and Autonomy

Despite these historical and contemporary conflicts, spaces throughout Saint-Louis are

valorized and the unique *métissage* of the city is touted, both officially and individually. We can

thus analyze coexistence from yet another angle, that of the cultivation of autonomous identities

among physical vestiges of oppression. Not only are Saint-Louisiens fiercely proud of their

mixed cultural and racial heritage but also acutely adept at navigating historical contradictions to

appropriate contemporary spaces for new and independent use. This process requires significant

cognitive navigation around the painful thorns of colonialism. Louis Camara illustrated that the

first president of Senegal helped with this task. "Colonization was painful," Louis explained,

"but like Senghor said, it was a necessary evil. We must protect the positives and manage the

negative[s]."[xlii] Colonial history is therefore viewed as positively as is possible, a wider trend

throughout postcolonial nations that Sinou elucidates:

> Colonialism is observed in a nuanced manner: While its foundation of social and racial
> inequalities and its results of social and economic oppression remain objects of criticism,
> [colonialism] is also analyzed by historians and even by political figures from
> independent nations as a form of transition in these societies towards modernity (135).[xliii]

Saint-Louis exemplifies this dualistic mindset, this implicit acknowledgment of the past but explicit focus on the future. Marie-Caroline Camara reinforced this when she stated, "we all have to live with this history […] we must simply accept it in order to advance."[xliv]

Through conversations and the creation of mental maps, residents of and officials in Saint-Louis were able to demonstrate exactly how the spaces of a colonial past are appropriated and thus balanced against contemporary identities. Two urban elements in particular exemplify this process, the Pont Faidherbe and Place Faidherbe. Six of my eight respondents mentioned the Pont Faidherbe in a positive manner, either as a key Saint-Louisien structure or something they like to visit (Map 1). The Pont Faidherbe was constructed during the colonial era, was restored with French money (according to Jordane of PMS), and, of course, bears the name of the most heavy-handed governor. Yet, in a representative case of Saint-Louisien coexistence, the bridge is dynamically appropriated to serve contemporary needs to the point where the structure is loved not for its association with Faidherbe but with the city. Ndef, the intern from *Sor*, explained her adoration for the bridge when naming it as one of the most important Saint-Louisien structures: "It's the Pont Faidherbe. I don't know how to explain it […] it has always astonished me."[xlv]

The Pont Faidherbe, however, is far from a static object in the urban imagination but is rather a dynamic "path," as Kevin Lynch would define it, crucial to the physical metropolitan configuration. Its dynamism is readily understandable: on any given day, vendors trek across the bridge carrying their wares in carts or baskets; students trudge along the pedestrian walkway to and from school; mothers carry infants in their arms as they make their way from one side of the Senegal River to the other. There is no fee to cross the bridge, ensuring that *île N'Dar* and the official city center remain extremely accessible. Marie-Caroline and Marjorie implied the

importance of the bridge during our discussion of the necessity of managing "judicious

interactions between the three sections" of the city; the bridge is *the* crucial connector,

facilitating interaction.[xlvi] Because of its low-lying design, the middle section of the Pont

Faidherbe pivots to let large boats pass. Jordane explained that "when the bridge is open […]

you are blocked on the island or you are blocked [in *Sor*]," which is a problem because "there is

a lot of passage, the bridge is always full."[xlvii] He thus confirmed the vibrancy and contemporary

importance of the bridge, a colonial holdover positively and effectively appropriated.

Place Faidherbe is not a "path" but rather a "node," as the population can enter the square

and use it (Map 1). Five out of my eight interviewees discussed Place Faidherbe as a key urban

"node," highlighting its importance. Because the plaza houses a memorial statue of the

governor, it stirs up more controversy than the bridge with the same namesake. Through this

controversy, though, Place Faidherbe is also effectively appropriated. Louis Camara set out the

parameters of the debate:

> General Faidherbe's statue can still be found at the plaza. Older Saint-Louisiens do not think that the statue harms anyone, but younger generations think that the statue is a symbol of colonial oppression. That merits reflection. It is valid to think that the statue does not have a rightful place here […and that it] may be necessary to replace it with something else, still a symbol of [Saint-Louisien independence].

The fact that Place Faidherbe engenders this discussion means that the population has taken

ownership of the space. Various cultural events throughout the year further solidify Place

Faidherbe as a proprietary Saint-Louisien "node," like the Saint-Louis Jazz Festival based in the

plaza. As yet another indicator – albeit socially problematic – of contemporary appropriation is

the significant homeless population residing in the square. Thus, Place Faidherbe, like the Pont

Faidherbe, serves a cross-section of Saint-Louisiens for myriad purposes, another dynamic urban

space contributing to autonomous identity.

Appropriation of the urban fabric also occurs with historic houses. This reclaiming of colonial vestiges and creation of contemporary meaning is predicated much more on wealth than is the appropriation of public urban spaces, but nonetheless, the houses contribute to the cachet of the island and thus to its autonomous identity. Not surprisingly, Marie-Caroline Camara, who resides in a historic building she restored, promotes the idea of architectural appropriation among the housing stock of the island. "My ancestors," she explained, "even if they were not the owners of the house, they still worked there […] My grandfather, he was an accountant in a house of commerce."[xlviii] Therefore, it is possible to valorize the structures because, whether it was a choice or not, Saint-Louisiens have always been involved in and around the built environment of the city. A conscious choice can be made to appropriate the structures of the past by highlighting nostalgic connections and downplaying the oppression and pain imbued in the colonial walls.

Coexistence: Utopian Visions for the Future

To cultivate a post-colonial urban identity is to navigate contradiction but also to embrace progress, a task Saint-Louisiens approach with a utopian yet nostalgic idealism, a final example of Saint-Louisien coexistence. In the urban imagination, there is a ubiquitous awareness of a mythic golden age, constructed through those same cognitive gymnastics heretofore demonstrated. This stems from official promotion of the image of colonial glory as demonstrated in the Lille School's *Inventaire*. In the *Atlas des Cartes Historique,* the study claims that "the 19th century [was] the golden age of the colonial administration" (23).[xlix] Again, I posit that there was no such "golden age" but rather an age of significant oppression coupled with immense development. Nevertheless, this officially promoted nostalgia permeates the population, at least according to my respondents. Louis Camara emphasized the importance of

historic restoration "so that the city can rediscover [its former glory]."[l] Louis demonstrated,

though, how nostalgia could also be forward-looking and utopian. "History is a source of

inspiration for artists," Louis said.[li] Saint-Louis could have "an intense cultural life" by adhering

to this philosophy and could embody the mental image most of my respondents had of the city,

again very well articulated by Louis: "Saint-Louis should be a sort of 'Venice of Africa,' […]

with an intense cultural life. [It could become] a city that plunges its roots into its African past

and that opens itself at the same time to modernity."[lii] Aly Sine also mentioned the school of

thought that idealizes Saint-Louis as a "Venice of Africa."

Specific ideas abound as to how to foster urban progress, further depicting the balance

between nostalgia and utopia. Marie-Caroline confirmed this balance, stating, "it's not

modernism *or* preservation," but a mixture of the two that will propel Saint-Louis into the 21st

century.[liii] As for urban innovations, Marie-Caroline and Louis Camara both suggested that, with

the extra space on the continent in *Sor,* an advanced, ecological, and thoroughly contemporary

city could flourish while the historic cachet could be preserved on the island. According to

Jordane, this cachet indeed must be preserved to maintain urban vitality, because cultural tourism

is a crucial aspect of contemporary Saint-Louisien identity. "If there is no tourism," Jordane

claimed, "the city is dead. People struggle, hotel managers struggle, and vendors, they don't sell

anything."[liv] The exchange between nostalgia and utopia particularly resonates in cultural

tourism, a "plan" for Saint-Louis that capitalizes on the (constructed) charm of the past and

indelible hope for the future. Louis, Marie-Caroline, Aly, and Michel all repeated this refrain:

tourism will allow Saint-Louis to thrive.

To support a newfound urban vision, Marie-Caroline recognized that it is necessary to

"invigorate the creativity of architects, urbanists, and residents," an ideal but intangible goal.[lv]

The gleam of hope slipping from his face, Louis Camara sighed in recognition of these overwhelming tasks. "All of that," he admitted, "remains, for the moment, utopia."[lvi] A literary mind, he revealed a cognitive grappling with the distance between urban images and realities.

CONCLUSION

Saint-Louis, especially *île N'Dar* itself, occupies a minuscule space. From this constricted area – the urban grid, the French colonial architecture, the looming mosques and the churches – emanates an undeniable and startlingly persistent coexistence. Saint-Louis' unique history of relatively peaceable interactions, both secular and religious, is touted as a point of pride and cultivated through carefully selective historical memory. Autonomous, contemporary spaces are thus highlighted through effective processes of appropriation. Cultural tourism brings the promise of a more utopian future, but also a bittersweet nostalgia for something that perhaps never was.

Significant questions remain regarding the strategy of touristic cultivation as a method to ensure Saint-Louis' continued relevance. My skepticism stems mostly from my Urban Studies academic framework from Vassar College. The body of urban theory is robust regarding the criticism of tourism as an aspect of metropolitan identity. For example, in his 1994 paper "What Ever Happened to Urbanism?" urban theorist Rem Koolhaas argues, "as the concept of the city is distorted and stretched beyond precedent, each insistence on its primordial condition – in terms of images, rules, fabrication – irrevocably leads via nostalgia to irrelevance" (963). In this scathing analysis of backwards-looking urban planning, Koolhaas warns of the dangers of creating a city based on historic romanticism, because that romantic past may no longer be relevant to the contemporary metropolis. Daniel Bluestone, in his work *Constructing Chicago*,

examines the role architecture played in Chicago's Industrial Revolution, stating, "artists and architects should express their own age with their own styles" (105). This again runs counter to the practice of restoring rather than revising the urban composition of Saint-Louis.

Don Mitchell and Lynn A. Staeheli's chapter "Clean and Safe? Property Redevelopment, Public Space, and Homeless in Downtown San Diego" further problematizes conscious urban image-making. In discussing the revitalization of American cities, Mitchell argues, "public space has become a key battleground – a battleground over the homeless and the poor and over rights of developers, corporations, and those who seek to make over the city in an image attractive to tourists, middle- and upper-class residents, and suburbanites" (4). In such a sugarcoated city, the homeless who have appropriated Place Faidherbe would not be welcome, the vendors with the unwieldy wares would perhaps have to pay a toll to cross the Pont. Saint-Louis could become a gated community.

I cannot help, however, but feel somewhat positive about "image-ing" Saint-Louis as a beacon for tourism as long as such attraction to the region creates pride and autonomy. Especially in the case of this former colonial capital, where having a mixture of cultures is so fundamental to the identity of the city, a locally motivated development of tourism would undoubtedly bring innumerable assets to the town and region. This is just what Louis Camara suggested, that the change has to come from within. As far as I could discern from my discussions with just eight creative residents and technicians, Saint-Louis has an abundance of intellectual and visionary resources to stimulate and guide such growth. It is an unfortunate truth, though, that the city still relies on significant amounts of international investment to realize its own projects. Foreign aid makes contradictions inevitable as the city is financially directed from an outsider's standpoint.

Outsider status significantly impeded my project and also undermines the credibility with which I can offer suggestions as to the direction of Saint-Louisien development. As a *toubab* in Saint-Louis, it was challenging to initiate and maintain an equitable rapport with respondents for the project. I found myself limited to those Saint-Louisiens who could understand my academic framework because they were also well-educated intellectuals or technicians. This led to a noticeable homogeneity in responses to my questionnaire, which then was difficult to analyze. Were the responses uniform because Saint-Louis indeed has universally understood images that comprise its identity, or were they similar because my pool of respondents shared fundamental characteristics? These limitations were compounded by the brevity of the study, which was completed in less than four weeks.

But the limitations also offer opportunities for further research. With a larger pool of informants and an extended time frame, how would Saint-Louisien coexistence be depicted? How exactly can tourism be co-opted to attract resources and support a contemporary identity? Like Louis Camara, I feel similarly hopeful yet bittersweet. Toward the end of my study, I met a group of Italian architecture students conducting research for their theses, which would ultimately be comprised of suggestions for urban projects to reinvigorate the Saint-Louisien waterfront. Like me, the Italian students embodied foreign intervention, but they also approached their research using a sociological framework, asking the people of the city how they interacted with the waterfront. As they cultivated working relationships with Saint-Louisiens, they thereby exemplified the city's ability to construct coexistence. Residents and foreigners yet again collided – and collaborated – amidst the grid of Saint-Louisien streets.

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Original French Quotations

[i] Le 'monument historique' n'est pas un 'invariant culturel,' mais 'une invention spécifiquement occidentale récente.'

[ii] Dans une société en quête d'identité, notamment après les indépendances, qu'est-ce que le patrimoine ? … Comment réécrire ou relire l'histoire ?

[iii] L'habitation […] est transférée dans une autre ile située plus en aval: l'ile de N'Dar, propriété du Barak (roi) du Waalo.

[iv] Le métis Charles Thevenot devient le premier maire de Saint-Louis.

[v] Ils sont fiers de leur ville.

[vi] Louis Faidherbe est nommé gouverneur du Sénégal

[vii] La lutte contre l'insalubrité et l'habitat précaire se traduit, en 1855, par la 'bataille de la Paillotte,' durant laquelle les masures sont détruites d'autorité et interdites sur la voie publique.

[viii] Le document clé […] qui vient au dessus du code de l'urbanisme

[ix] Monuments Historiques; Grand intérêt architectural; intérêt architectural moyen; sans intérêt architectural.

[x] Toutes les cartes à main pour faire une bonne conservation.

[xi] [Le patrimoine] sacralise l'objet dans une opération de réappropriation en exprimant la cohésion d'une communauté nationale ou internationale.

[xii] Car, partout, un facteur commun demeure : la réappropriation de la 'ville coloniale' (et de ses héritages) par les citadin africains, qui en font bel et bien, en dépit des dénégations occidentales, leur ville

[xiii] Ville une et plurielle

[xiv] Nous sommes la première colonie occidentale française

[xv] Saint-Louis a son identité qui l'a différencie d'autres villes [du] Sénégal

[xvi] Il ne se vivaient pas comme un pays colonisée, il se vivaient comme citoyens francais d'une territoire d'outre mers

[xvii] Je suis vrai-vrai-*vraiment* fière d'être Saint-Louisienne […] Les autres régions […] ils nous appellent, "vous êtes les toubabs!"

[xviii] L'église et la mosquée au nord

[xix] La mosquée la plus ancienne de Saint-Louis, [de] l'Afrique de l'Ouest […] à coté du consulat de France

[xx] Une cloche dans la mosquée

[xxi] Se sont séparés pour une raison religieuse

[xxii] Mon grand-père Saint-Louisien est partie faire la guerre de 1914 en France […] Il s'est battu pour la France […] si je suis ici aujourd'hui c'est parce que mon grand père a fait la guerre 1914

[xxiii] Quand il y a eu la guerre 39 – 45, les sénégalais étaient avec les français […] donc, je pense qu'ils sont obliges de faire vivre le Sénégal

[xxiv] Une empreinte de la France

[xxv] Un cachet historique, ca serait un atout pour la ville

[xxvi] L'architecture coloniale est importante a conserver parce qu'elle est un jalon dans l'histoire de notre pays

[xxvii] Pour garder l'homogénéité, il faut garder ce style […] l'architecture, les couleurs […] la richesse de Saint-Louis.

[xxviii] Si vous étiez une fois a Saint-Louis […] ah, ca ressemble à Saint-Louis

[xxix] Les deux bâtiments spécifiques à Saint-Louis et qu'on trouve nulle part ailleurs

[xxx] Ce n'est pas africain, c'est tellement européen.

[xxxi] Ces blocs pleins constituent, plus que les bâtiments eux-mêmes, un véritable corps urbain qui donne à la ville, quel que soit l'angle d'ou la découvre…une identité et une cohérence qu'il convient absolument de préserver.

[xxxii] Ils sont très fières d'être les insulaires […] maintenant on dit ca avec humour

xxxiii Si on n'habite pas sur l'ile, on n'est pas vraiment Saint-Louisien

xxxiv On s'identifie par quartier […] je suis 'nordiste'

xxxv La substitution du minaret au clocher prouve que l'Etat républicain français était capable […] d'intégrer les réalités locales dans la gestion des espaces urbains

xxxvi Pour aider la population a faire des travaux

xxxvii On n'est pas non plus dans la situation d'une ville qui aurait existé, qui aurait ete rase et reconstruit par des colons

xxxviii Parallèlement, il lance une importante campagne d'aménagement et d'embellissement de l'ile. Sa première mesure consiste à engager une bataille contre les paillotes en ordonnant la suppression de toutes les cases du centre de l'ile.

xxxix Sous peine de démolition par l'armée

xl L'uniformité conceptuelle du modèle…est aussi pensée comme un moyen de rassure le colon. Sa carrière le conduisant a résider successivement dans différents territoires et villes d'un empire transcontinental, il est ainsi assure de retrouver, ou qu'il aille, un habitat et un cadre urbain similaires […]

xli Certaines rues de Saint-Louis étaient ainsi interdites aux indigènes à l'heure de la sieste

xlii Comme Senghor a dit, c'était un mal nécessaire. Il faut conserver les…positifs et gérer le négatif

xliii Le colonialisme est observé de manière plus nuancée : si les inégalités sociales et raciales sur lesquelles il se fonde et si l'oppression sociale et économique qui en résulte demeurent objets de critique, ce système est également analysé par les historiens, de même que par des acteurs politiques des nations aujourd'hui indépendantes, comme une forme de la transition de ces sociétés vers la modernité

xliv On a tous besoin de vivre avec cette mémoire […] il faut justement l'accepter pour avancer

xlv C'est le pont Faidherbe, je ne sais pas comment expliquer, ca m'a toujours étonnée.

xlvi Des interactions judicieuses entre les trois quartiers.

xlvii Quand le pont est ouvert […] vous êtes bloques sur l'ile ou vous êtes bloques [à Sor]…[il y a] beaucoup de passage, le pont est toujours plein

xlviii Mes ancêtres, même s'ils n'étaient pas les propriétaires de la maison, ils y ont travaillé...mon grand-père, il était comptable dans une maison de commerce

xlix Le XIXe siècle, l'âge d'or de l'administration coloniale

l Une restauration de la ville pour qu'elle puisse retrouver [sa gloire d'auparavant]

li L'histoire c'est une source d'inspiration pour les artistes.

lii A mon avis Saint-Louis devrait une sorte de Venice Africaine […] avec un vie culturelle très intense […] une ville qui plonge ses racines dans son passé africaine et qui s'ouvrent en meme temps dans la modernité

liii Il n'y a pas le modernisme *ou* la préservation

liv S'il n'y a pas de tourisme, la ville est morte. Les gens se plaignent, les hôteliers se plaignent, les vendeurs, ils ne vendent pas

lv Susciter la créativité des architectes, des urbanistes, des habitants

lvi Mais tout ca, c'est pour l'instant de l'utopie.