



FAIDHERBE MONUMENT

Saint-Louis, Senegal

16.026083,-16.5054907



Image by HaguardDuNord via Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Executive Summary

On September 5, 2017, a 126-year-old statue of Senegal (Senegal) governor, Louis Faidherbe, collapsed after heavy rain and winds. The accident sparked a protest among activists and religious communities across Senegal. Minimising the extent of the protest, local authorities restored the statue within a few days, resulting in even more controversy, with debates on social media and in the local and international press. Demands to bring down the statue collided with local authorities' fears of losing the UNESCO World Heritage Site status and subsidies from the French government.

Introduction

When the statue of Louis Faidherbe in Ndar (Saint-Louis), Senegal, collapsed on September 5, 2017, due to severe rainfall and winds, activists in the Senegalese community seized the opportunity to call for its removal and demand that it be replaced with a statue of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, founder of the *Mouridiyya* (Mourides Brotherhood). A growing protest on social media followed, reaching an international scale. Despite these protests, political leaders chose to restore the statue on September 21, 2017. Their decision might have been influenced by rising concerns that the city of Saint-Louis could lose its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition to this status, the square, where the statue of Faidherbe is located, is also part of a restoration and embellishment fund allocated by the French Development Agency (AFD). Following the re-erection of the statue, the protest campaign for the removal of the statue continued, triggering a movement seeking the decolonisation of public spaces. This movement spread extensively across former French colonies, along with the slogan 'France out'. France's president, Emmanuel Macron, spoke of 'an anti-French feeling in Africa.' This movement demonstrates the eagerness from Pan-African movements, young Africans and Africans living in the diaspora, to put an end to a dominant French presence in Africa and symbols of colonialism in their public spaces.

Background

Louis Faidherbe and his Legacy in Senegal

Louis Faidherbe was born in Lille, France, in 1818. Trained as an engineer, Faidherbe planned and carried out the conquest and 'pacification' of Senegal.¹ Faidherbe was first appointed to head the small detachment of army engineers in the colonial town of Saint-Louis, which was established by France in 1659 on land settled by the Wolof people. At the time of Faidherbe's arrival in 1852, Saint-Louis was the only French territory in the Senegalese region. Control over Senegal had been established in 1816. However, before Faidherbe arrived, commercial and economic development were hindered by increasing customs enforced by local rulers on French merchants. Lobbied by powerful merchants from Bordeaux, Louis Faidherbe was appointed governor on December 12, 1854. He remained governor until 1861 and was appointed once more between 1863 and 1865.

Faidherbe's confrontational governorship led him to soon embark on a mission to 'pacify' Senegal, which involved applying the 'Bugeaud method.'² Named after the French Governor of Algeria, Thomas Bugeaud, the method consisted of pillaging, massacring, burning and destroying villages,

¹ Yves-Jean Saint-Martin, *Le Sénégal sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Karthala, 1989), 242-243.

² Leland C. Barrows, "The Merchants and General Faidherbe. Aspects of French Expansion in Sénégal in the 1850's," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 61, no. 223 (1974): 245.

and beheading resistance fighters, with the objective of solidifying French control of the territory and promoting trade on the *Dexug Senegaal* (Senegal River). In Faidherbe's own words, it was a question of becoming '*suzerains du fleuve*' (suzerains of the river).³ The objective was to ensure the freedom of trade along the Senegal Valley region. To do so, Faidherbe declared war on local rulers, which ultimately led to the end of the taxes imposed on French merchants by local rulers and traders. The end of these taxes signified the beginning of the French colonial conquest in the Senegal region.

Outside of his destructive military campaigns, Faidherbe is also known for the large-scale urban development and engineering projects he developed in Saint-Louis and the coastline of Senegal and for his solidification of French control of Wolof territory.³ As a result, Faidherbe has a mixed reputation among the Senegalese people. The traditionalist historian Amadou Bakhaw Diow summed it up:

Many Senegalese have ambivalent feelings about him: he is sometimes seen as a colonial conqueror confronting armed resistance from the Senegalese kingdoms, and sometimes as the creator of the modern state and liberator of the Black Senegalese from extortion by the Moors of neighbouring Mauritania.⁴

This relative ambivalence towards his legacy is also evident in his policy towards Islam. If Louis Faidherbe used to be described as an Islamophile, historical studies shed a new critical light on this. Faidherbe's stance was driven more by political calculation than genuine tolerance, since Muslims far outnumbered Christians in Senegal. This realpolitik was reflected in two major ways for Senegal's Muslims. First, in the field of education, Faidherbe appointed secular teachers to mission-run schools, allowing Muslim children to attend classes. Second, in the realm of Islamic law, whose application was partially recognised.⁵ His legacy, in religious matters, is now regarded as another tool he used to lay the ground for cultural assimilation in Senegal and the disappearance of indigenous culture. Senegalese historian Khadim Ndiaye notes that :

Faidherbe is the one who engaged in religious and ethnic manipulations throughout his presence in Senegal. While we know that ethnic groups in the pre-colonial period were moving and permeable sets, Faidherbe contributed, through his raciological manipulation, to freezing them by imposing rigid categories. Faidherbe is also the one who celebrated the 'logically triumphant blond warrior', responsible for 'regenerating the black race'. He did not hesitate to write in 1879, amplifying the racist views of the School of Anthropology of Paris, that 'the inferiority of the Blacks undoubtedly comes from the relatively small volume of their brains'.⁶

³ Ibid

⁴ Dakaractu, "France: Le collectif «Faidherbe doit tomber» met la pression sur Martine Aubry," *Dakaractu*, May 24, 2018.

⁵ Christopher Harrison, *French Islamic policy in Senegal and Algeria. In: France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960*. (Cambridge University Press; 1988):11-24

⁶ Khadim Ndiaye, FAIDHERBE, ce dangereux persécuteur qui n'épargna ni humains ni végétaux, Impact.sn, 2015

The Statue

Construction of the monument to Faidherbe in Saint-Louis started in 1886, and it was inaugurated on March 20, 1887.⁷ As for the statue itself, it took a further five years to assemble it.⁸

The sculptor, Adolphe-Désiré Crauk, known as Gustave Crauk, came from Valenciennes, France. He had met Faidherbe in 1871 and sketched him from life.⁹ The bronze statue, which weighs 350 kilos, portrays Faidherbe posing as a proud general. A marble plaque was installed on the plinth bearing the inscription: 'In gratitude, from Senegal to its governor, L. Faidherbe'.¹⁰ The colonial administration at the time had begun the project to beautify the city. As part of this project, the administration commissioned the monument in 1887, in memory of former Governor Faidherbe, to be built in the Place du Gouvernement. The colonial administration chose Faidherbe as he fulfilled the criteria for the erection of a monument in memory of an individual who is known for his exceptional services and an irreproachable life, both public and private.¹¹

It was not until a century later, in December 1977, seventeen years after Senegal became independent, that the writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembene wrote a critical open letter to the country's Francophile President Senghor.¹² In his letter, Ousmane Sembene denounced the presence of statues of Faidherbe across Senegal, including the capital, Dakar.¹³ A few months later, on the night of August 12, 1983, a different statue of Faidherbe in front of the palace and of the military headquarters of the presidency in Dakar was removed.¹⁴ However, other Faidherbe statues were not removed and remain to this day, most notably the one in Saint-Louis, which is still considered an emblem of the city.

⁷ Dominique Perchet, "Monument au général Faidherbe – St-Louis du Sénégal," *E-monument*, January 15, 2012.

⁸ Florian Bobin, "In Senegal and France, Faidherbe Must Fall," *Review of African Political Economy*, July 7, 2020.

⁹ Grailles Bénédicte, "Louis Faidherbe, Général Republicain et Fils du Nord. Entre Image d'Épinal et Culte Régional (1870-1914)," *Revue du Nord*, no. 350 (2003/2): 359-378.

¹⁰ "A son gouverneur L. FAIDHERBE le Senegal reconnaissant" Translation by author.

¹¹ Kalala J. Ngalamulume, "Leisure in Colonial Saint-Louis (Sénégal), 1850–1920," in *Leisure in Urban Africa*, eds. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, Cassandra Rachel Veney (Africa World Press, 2003), 80.

¹² Khadim Ndiaye, "Cheikh Anta Diop et Sembene Ousmane contre Senghor : « on ne décolonisera pas l'Afrique avec les langues étrangères »,» *Facebook*, accessed June 3, 2021.

¹³ "Faidherbe vu du Sénégal," *Faidherbe doit tomber*, accessed August 18, 2020.

¹⁴ Dominique Perchet, "Monument au général Faidherbe – St-Louis du Sénégal," *E-monument*, January 15, 2012.



Figure 1: "Statue de Louis Faidherbe à Saint-Louis, Sénégal" Image by mostroreddo via Wikimedia Commons CC-BY 2.0

History of the Contestation

Early protests for the Removal of the Statue (2014-2017)

The statue had been contested long before the events of September 4, 2017, with some advocating its removal after the end of French colonial rule. It has been said that in May 1974, Professor Abdoulaye Bathily, a historian, was among the first to denounce the statue's presence in Saint-Louis¹⁵. Following Senegalese independence in the 1960s, Iba Der Thiam, then the Senegalese Minister for Education, had strived to begin the process of decolonisation in Senegal, including the removal of the Faidherbe statue. However, he was met with great resistance within the department.¹⁶ More recently, Der Thiam has said that the continued commemoration of Faidherbe is a 'symbol of an unfinished decolonization',¹⁷ as the former governor had 20,000 people killed in a period of less than eight months.

Young Senegalese had already organised campaigns to bring down the Faidherbe statue. For instance, on one notable occasion, the pan-Africanist movement *Se Mett*, along with some local supporters, tagged the statue, threw eggs at it, draped it in traditional boubous, and posted photomontages of Faidherbe toilet rolls on the internet.¹⁸ In 2014, a blogger and cyber activist called for a debate to address the statue's conservation or removal on a Facebook page, ça

¹⁵ Amadou Bal BA, "FAIDHERBE statues to be unbolted". *Le Club de Mediapart*, June 23, 2020.

¹⁶ Rose-Marie Bouboutou, "Faut-il déboulonner les statues des colons en Afrique?". *BBC Afrique*, July 10, 2020.

¹⁷ Amadou Bal BA, "Faidherbe statues to be unbolted". *Le Club de Mediapart*, June 23, 2020.

¹⁸ France24, "À Saint-Louis du Sénégal, la statue de la discorde," *Les Observateurs*, September 23, 2014.

*m'interpell.*¹⁹ A Facebook campaign in 2014-2015 followed, initiated by the same blogger who sought 5,000 signatures for a petition, saying: 'let's pull down this shameful statue.'²⁰

In protest of the statue, in 2018, a group named *Le Collectif sénégalais contre la célébration de Faidherbe* (The Senegalese Collective Against the Celebration of Faidherbe) was founded, consisting of several hundred people in Senegal and more within the diaspora.²¹ They demanded the permanent removal of the statue and have since made efforts to make Faidherbe's crimes better known across Senegal. In 2020, the mayor of Dakar, Alioune Ndoeye, suggested creating a debate on the presence of Faidherbe's statue, citing the statue as well as the streets and avenues named for Faidherbe and other French colonists were a reminder of a 'painful colonial past', even claiming this fight was one of 'racists oppression'.²²

Collapse of the Statue (2017)

The collapse of Faidherbe's statue on the night and morning of September 4-5, 2017, in Saint-Louis, northern Senegal, was caused by extreme bad weather but coincided with the celebration of the 43rd commemoration of the *Magal des Deux Rakkas* (Magal of the Two Rakkas), dedicated to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853-1927), a Muslim religious leader and founder of the Mouride brotherhood who had peacefully opposed French colonisation. The commemoration of Bamba's life takes place every year in the Place Faidherbe and gathers a large number of the Mouride's followers across Senegal.²³ The collapse of the statue that day had a profound impact on the Mouride believers, as well as activists from all faiths, most notably among Senegalese youth. The collapse triggered a 'spontaneous' protest driven by public debates around the question of the Faidherbe statue, leading to demands for the statue to be replaced by one of the religious leaders associated with the brotherhood.²⁴ Namely, photomontages were made and diffused, where we can see Faidherbe's statue being replaced by one of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, founder of the brotherhood.

The adherents of this powerful religious brotherhood, the Mourides, saw the statue's collapse as an omen, symbolising the victory of their founder, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. Similarly, the youth leader of a political party stated that the fall of Faidherbe's statue on the 'eve of the celebration of the Two Rakkas of Saint-Louis' asserts 'once more the victory of Ahmadou Bamba over the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Débouloignons cette statue honteuse," Facebook, accessed June 3, 2021.

²¹ Aïssatou Diallo and Jules Crétois, "Faïdherbe Doit Tomber" : Des Collectifs Français et Sénégalais à l'Assaut du Mythe du Colon Bâtisseur". *Jeune Afrique*, April 10, 2018.

²² Le Quotidien, "ENQUÊTE – Avenues ou rues Faïdherbe, Jean Jaurès, Carnot, Félix Faure, boulevard Général de Gaulle,... : Les symboles du colonialisme au cœur de Dakar". *Le Quotidien*, June 22, 2020.

²³ Ferdinand de Jong, "Remembering the Nation: The Murid Maggal of Saint-Louis Senegal," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 50, no. 197 (2010): 123-151.

²⁴ "La statue de Faïdherbe s'écroule et provoque des réactions hostiles," *Leral.net*, September 6, 2017.

colonists', leading to the demand that the square must be renamed *Place Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba*.²⁵

Others did not believe in the 'mystic phenomena' and went on to suggest that the collapse of the statue was due to intentional 'acts of unbolting'.²⁶ For instance, the local news outlet Ndarinfo reported on the event, headlining it 'Collapse of Faidherbe's statue: spectacular fall or unbolting?'²⁷ As for the organisers of the Two Rakkas ceremony, they denied their involvement in the statue's collapse.²⁸

The authorities and the Ministry of Culture revealed that the climate, as well as the age of the statue, were responsible for its collapse. After the statue fell, it was removed and transferred directly to the headquarters of the local fire brigade. Supervising the safekeeping of the statue before its repair, Abdoul Aziz Guissé, director of Scheduled Cultural Heritage (Patrimoine Culturel Classé), addressed the question of the causes of the collapse:

After examining the statue, experts stressed that, owing to the dilapidated state of its iron clamps, which had completely rusted, and of its rotten wood, together with the strength of the rains and bad weather on the Monday, the base could no longer support its weight.²⁹

Contestation reinvigorated in 2020

For decades since their independence, Senegalese intellectuals such as Khadim Ndiaye, Abdou Khadre and Gaye Emad have protested against the statue of Faidherbe.³⁰ Local journalist Alyman Bathily wrote that the statue ought to have been toppled long ago as it was, 'an insult to their dignity'.³¹

In the summer of 2020, following the murder of African American George Floyd in the U.S, the debate about Faidherbe's statue was reignited in Senegal, mostly on social media and online media. It coincided with the global Black Lives Matter movement, which originated in the United States, calling for the removal of statues of Confederate generals and other figures associated with slavery. However, the discussion was not as widespread as it was in 2017. Khadim Ndiaye of the Senegalese Collective Against the Celebration of Faidherbe was still one of the most important voices who spoke out, and he continues his campaign to have the statue removed.

²⁵ Ndarinfo, "Effondrement de la statue Faidherbe, chute spectaculaire ou déboulonnage?," *Ndarinfo*, September 5, 2017.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Fatoumata Diop, "Saint-Louis : La mairie va remettre la statue de Faidherbe 'à sa place'," *Homeviews Sénégal*, September 5, 2017.

²⁹ L'Essentiel, "Saint-Louis: La statue Faidherbe transférée provisoirement à Rognât Sud," *L'Essentiel*, September 7, 2017.

³⁰ Survie, "FAIDHERBE VU DU SÉNÉGAL". *Survie*, April 10, 2018.

³¹ Voa Afrique, "Le Sénégal décide de réinstaller à Saint-Louis la statue de Faidherbe". *Voa Afrique*, September 8, 2017.

Other voices supporting the removal of the statue include the coordinator of the Saint-Louis Civic Forum, Mame Latyr-Fall, who demanded that the authorities decide about the statue before the local population toppled it themselves. In 2020, she stated that ‘The death of George Floyd serves as a catalyst for this issue to be put back on the table. Why not hold a local referendum on this issue?’³² Senegalese historian, Mbaye Thiam, favours the idea of removing the statue and placing it in a museum of colonial history.³³ On the other side of the debate, a former journalist, El Hadj Tall, believes that the statue should remain where it has always been.³⁴ A new association, ‘*the Ndomo ndar yi initiative*’ (initiative of the natives of Saint-Louis), led by Abdou Karim Cissé, has organised a broad online consultation. The results indicate that young people are in favour of removing the statue, while the elderly part of the population prefers to preserve it.³⁵

On June 14, 2020, French president Emmanuel Macron denied any possibility of removing historical statues with a racist or colonial past, stating that, ‘the Republic will not erase any trace or any name of its history. The Republic will not tear down any of its statues.’³⁶ During Emmanuel Macron’s visit to Senegal in February 2018, he made his speech at Place Faïdherbe in Saint-Louis, making promises to fund the then-fallen statue’s renovation.³⁷ Across Senegal and France, a great number of buildings and roads bear the name Faïdherbe. In addition to the statue of him in Saint-Louis, there is also a square and a bridge named in his honour, all of which were ‘honoured’ by Emmanuel Macron during his 2018 visit.³⁸ There was also once a Faïdherbe high school and a Faïdherbe brass band, of which the school has since been renamed.³⁹ All of which reflect the Faïdherbe myth.

Media and Journalism responses to controversies surrounding the statue

The media coverage about the 2017 controversy was strong and two-faced as local and international media related it in different ways. Since the end of the 19th century, the Brotherhood of the Mourides had developed connections with the state, with particular influence over elections.⁴⁰ Their spontaneous protest following the collapse of the statue received extensive coverage in the local and international press. While the local media emphasised the coincidence of

³² Théa Ollivier, “Senegal: civil society mobilized to remove the symbols of colonialism”. *Telereport*, June 15, 2020.

³³ Aliou Diouf, “Bradage du littoral : L’audit du foncier réclame,” *Emedia.sn*, June 15, 2020.

³⁴ RFI, “La société civile mobilisée pour retirer les symboles du colonialisme,” *RFI*, June 15, 2020.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Rose-Marie Bouboutou, “Faut-il déboulonner les statues des colonJournalisms en Afrique?”. *BBC Afrique*, July 10, 2020.

³⁷ Aïssatou Diallo, & Jules Crétois, “Faïdherbe Doit Tomber” : Des Collectifs Français et Sénégalais à l’Assaut du Mythe du Colon Bâtisseur.” *Jeune Afrique*, April 10, 2018.

³⁸ Survie, “FAÏDHERBE VU DU SÉNÉGAL”. *Survie*, April 10, 2018.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Donal B. Cruise O’Brien, *The Mourides of Senegal. The Political and Economic Organisation of an Islamic Brotherhood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

the statue's fall with the ceremony, resulting in demands from the pilgrims to replace the statue, the international media, on the other hand, disregarded the role of the commemoration and pointed to the 'dream opportunity' it created to vandalise the statue. For instance, the *Nouvel obs* reported that the statue 'was trampled on, like a hunting trophy, by tens of Senegalese who struck warlike poses, placing their foot on the general's head, and posted photos on social media.'⁴¹

From the local authorities' point of view, the protest was simply a 'spontaneous' protest caused by the religious commemoration. As a result, they disregarded the widespread debate on social media and the mayor hastily addressed the collapse of the statue in a statement, announcing it would be placed back.⁴² Supporting the decision of the mayor, Seydina Ababacar Biteye, the mayor's chief of staff, justified the decision, stating that one cannot 'deny a part of Senegalese history.'⁴³

While the mayor hoped to end the controversy, his statement sparked a greater reaction than the fall of the statue. The protest turned into a public one, encouraging more press articles and debates on social media. For instance, the philosopher Khadim Ndiaye published an open letter to the mayor on the Senegalese news website Ndarinfo on September 7, 2017, and at the same time on the website of the French association *Survie Nord* for the *Faidherbe doit tomber* (Faidherbe must Fall) campaign, in which he criticised the authorities' decision.⁴⁴ On social media, especially Facebook, Ndiaye's letter was forwarded more than 300 times, triggering an intense debate.⁴⁵ Still on Facebook, contrasting opinions were shared. For instance, the satirical journalist Ibrahima Fall supported the local authorities' decisions on his personal page, stating that '[the statue] must be put back at once. It would be much too easy, if we're rewriting history, to reduce the response of the descendants of the victims of colonialism to a mere caprice of the weather.'⁴⁶ Similarly, the administrator of the page *Senegalmétis*, followed at the time by more than 20,000 followers, spoke out in favour of keeping the statue, arguing that:

Changing the name of a street (or taking down a statue) is justified only when the individual honoured has absolutely no connection with Senegal. By contrast, when he is part of our history, let's have the courage to respect him, since then it's a matter of our shared past.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Nathalie Funes, "Sénégal : faut-il déboulonner Faidherbe, symbole du colonialisme?," *Nouvel Observateur*, October 26, 2018.

⁴² Xalima, "Faidherbe ne bouge pas," *SenePlus*, September 6, 2017.

⁴³ Alexandre Capron, "Au Sénégal, la statue d'un colon français s'écroule et provoque des réactions hostiles," *Les Observateurs*, September 5, 2017.

⁴⁴ Khadim Ndiaye, "Lettre ouverte au maire Mansour FAYE : le sanguinaire Général Faidherbe ne mérite pas d'avoir une statue au Sénégal," *Ndarinfo*, September 7, 2017 ; "Les sanglantes expéditions militaires de Faidherbe au Sénégal (1855–1864)", *Faidherbe doit tomber!*

⁴⁵ *Intelligences.Info*, "La statue de Faidherbe remplacée malgré la polémique," *Intelligences.Info*, September 22, 2017.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

The historian Abdoul Hadir Aidara was in favour of the statue's removal, stating that Faïdherbe had been 'given too much honour.'⁴⁸ Additionally, the coordinator of the Faïdherbe must fall campaign, Thomas Deltombe, claimed that Senegal could no longer represent 'an urban landscape vitrified in the Third Colonial Republic.'⁴⁹

Journalist and screenwriter Boubacar Boris Diop believed that while the contestation of the statue would not disappear overnight, he held the conviction that 'the statue of Faïdherbe will disappear.'⁵⁰ He found the debate over the removal of the statue 'desolate', saying that after 60 years of independence, the statue should have been removed a long time ago.⁵¹ Diop later went on to discuss how the process of the removal of Faïdherbe's commemorated presence in Saint-Louis was underway and that it would lead to the statue's disappearance.⁵²

Former journalist Elhadj Tall was against the removal of the statue, believing it to be part of Senegalese heritage: 'There are things, nevertheless, that we must not touch! We have a history that links us with France and dates back more than 300 years. This story, however, must be told to our children and grandchildren!'⁵³

Eventually, the statue was reinstalled under heavy police guard on September 21, 2017. This provoked yet more protests on social media, leading to the creation, in April 2018, of the Collectif sénégalais contre la célébration de Faïdherbe, which worked with the French Faïdherbe Must Fall campaign to excoriate the authorities' decision.⁵⁴ Thus, the spontaneous protests became more organised, along with a more intense debate. Opinions were divided in Saint-Louis and in Senegal as a whole. Some of Saint-Louis's inhabitants, notably among the older generation, felt that the statue must be preserved. However, most young people interviewed said it should be destroyed and replaced by a historic Senegalese figure. Young people question the role and relevance of such statues in today's public space. While colonialism is not celebrated in Saint-Louis, people fear the political and even economic consequences if the statue is removed, since the city, classified by UNESCO as a *World Heritage Site*, attracts many tourists.

⁴⁸ Laurent Ribadeau Dumas, "Saint-Louis du Sénégal et Lille: faut-il déboulonner le général Faïdherbe?" *France TV Info*, May 27th, 2018.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Rose-Marie Bouboutou, "Faut-il déboulonner les statues des colons en Afrique?". *BBC Afrique*, July 10th 2020.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Théa Ollivier, "Sénégal: La Société Civile Mobilisée pour Retirer les Symboles du Colonialisme". *RFI*, June 15th, 2020

⁵⁴ "Collectif sénégalais contre la célébration de Faïdherbe," *Facebook*, accessed June 3, 2021.

Decision-Making Processes

On September 21, two weeks after the mayor's statement, the statue of Faidherbe was placed back in its original location, supervised by a police guard and without any of the local press being informed. The statue had been enclosed and stayed under police guard the entire day. Noteworthy to mention, the statue was raised by several metres, which contributed to further criticism from protesters, such as blogger Amadou Dicko.⁵⁵

The statue was described to have been reinstalled under 'strong police escort', something which Khadim Ndiaye felt did not bode well for his campaign: 'This is proof that the protest is beginning to take shape. Faidherbe belongs to the past, but his statue is the symbol of the prolongation of colonial relations.'⁵⁶

The mayor of Saint-Louis, Mansour Faye, explained that:

The fate of the Faidherbe statue has not been the subject of any decision of the City Council. The statue will always remain in its place, because the final decision to move it or not, will remain the exclusive business of the sons of Saint-Louis and without any influence from wherever it comes. It is the sons of Saint-Louis who will decide.⁵⁷

When the mayor announced that the statue would be replaced, he did not go through a democratic process. The mayor did not call for a study, nor did he consult with representatives from civil society organisations or associations.⁵⁸ No official debates took place regarding the question of the preservation of the statue, or the possibility of removing it and replacing it with a Senegalese historical figure.⁵⁹

At one point, the mayor implied that this debate over the statue was not currently relevant as his office had more important things to look after. He called on the citizens of Saint-Louis to focus on what was necessary, 'It's not our priority. My priority is not to epilogue in irrelevant debates. We have to take responsibility for our history. And as long as I am mayor in this city, I will assume my responsibility. We must consistently embrace our colonial heritage.'⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Alexandre Capron, "Au Sénégal, la statue d'un colon français s'écroule et provoque des réactions hostiles," *Les Observateurs*, September 5, 2017.

⁵⁶ Aïssatou Diallo, & Jules Crétois, "Faïdherbe Doit Tomber" : Des Collectifs Français et Sénégalais à l'Assaut du Mythe du Colon Bâtisseur." *Jeune Afrique*, April 10, 2018.

⁵⁷ Fatoumata Bintou Ndour, "Saint-Louis: la place Faïdherbe s'appelle désormais place "Baya Ndar". *PressAfrik*, September 28, 2020.

⁵⁸ Xalima, "Faïdherbe ne bouge pas," *SenePlus*, September 6, 2017.

⁵⁹ Abdoul Aziz Guissé, email message to Dr. Sokhna Sané, May 12, 2020.

⁶⁰ Amos Traoré, "Statue de Faïdherbe : Le maire de Saint-Louis refroidit les pro déboulonnage". *La Nouvelle Tribune*, June 30, 2020.

The director of Cultural Heritage in Senegal, Abdou Aziz Guissé, issued a statement arguing that the statue was part of the cultural heritage of the Saint Louis World Heritage Site.⁶¹ As such, the decision was also made to put it back on its pedestal, as 'we cannot dismember or remove axes from this heritage.'⁶² Guissé claimed that the statue was maintained out of 'duty of remembrance'⁶³ rather than to celebrate the colonisation of Senegal.

When it was revealed that the statue had been reinstalled, demands to remove the colonist by activists did not lessen. On April 10, 2018, the Senegalese Association Against the Celebration of Faïdherbe was established and collaborated with the French Faïdherbe Must Fall campaign to challenge the presence of the statue.⁶⁴ However, the protests were condemned by a heritage administrator, who pointed out that the mayor had a duty to protect and safeguard the statue and reminded that 'Louis Faïdherbe is part of our history. Whatever happens, we can't, and will never be able to, expunge him from our past. Whether you think him good or bad makes no difference.'⁶⁵

From the perspective of the municipal authorities and the state, safeguarding the statue was perceived as necessary to secure Saint-Louis's UNESCO world heritage status, which was seriously threatened in 2017. The Faïdherbe monument, along with the Place Faïdherbe, was included among the elements justifying Saint-Louis's inclusion in UNESCO's world heritage of humanity in 2000.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the city of Saint-Louis was part of an agreement between Senegal and the French Development Agency (AFD) established in 2012, providing 15 billion CFA francs to protect Saint-Louis's heritage.⁶⁷ In 2015, the mayor announced the beginning of 'works to develop, embellish and restore the Place Faïdherbe and its surroundings, to make them more attractive.'⁶⁸ However, works did not begin until September 2019, and the statue of Faïdherbe was later moved to the Senegal Research and Documentation Centre (CRDS) in Saint-Louis for the duration of the renovation of the Place, leading to rumours of a potential permanent removal.⁶⁹

In 2020, the contested question regarding the statue of Faïdherbe was addressed by Mary Tew Niane, a former minister of higher education, who announced his intention to challenge the mayor in the next municipal elections on his Facebook page in June 2020.⁷⁰ In his post, he stated that, if

⁶¹ La Libre Afrique, "Sénégal: une statue coloniale contestée sera bien réinstallée à Saint-Louis". *La Libre Afrique*, September 8, 2017.

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Aïssatou Diallo, & Jules Crétois, "Faïdherbe Doit Tomber" : Des Collectifs Français et Sénégalais à l'Assaut du Mythe du Colon Bâtisseur." *Jeune Afrique*, April 10th 2018.

⁶⁴ "Collectif sénégalais contre la célébration de Faïdherbe," *Facebook*, accessed June 3, 2021.

⁶⁵ Yankhoba Sané, "Saint-Louis: Les raisons de la remise de la statue Faïdherbe à sa place," *SansLimites*, September 25, 2017.

⁶⁶ "41st session of the World Heritage Committee," *UNESCO*, Last modified July 2, 2017.

⁶⁷ Bob Bigue, "Abdoul Aziz Guissé: 'La place Faïdherbe est un symbole,'" *EnquetePlus*, October 4, 2017.

⁶⁸ APS, "Saint-Louis: le maire annonce des 'travaux de requalification' de la Place Faïdherbe," *SeneWeb*, May 21, 2015.

⁶⁹ Sene.news, "La statue Faïdherbe rasée? La vérité autour de la polémique qui secoue Saint-Louis!," *Sene.News*, June 15, 2020.

⁷⁰ Sene.News, "Marie Teuw Niane : 'Si je suis élu Maire de Saint-Louis, la statue de Faïdherbe sera enlevée...'," *Sene.News*, June 15, 2020.

he is elected mayor, he would proceed to remove the statue and transfer it to the Senegal Research and Documentation Centre (CRDS). During the same month, the imam of Saint-Louis' great mosque also addressed the Faidherbe statue, using it as the theme of his Friday sermon, during which he called for the statue to be pulled down.⁷¹ The local and national authorities did not comment on the protest.

In September 2020, the mayor announced the historical decision to rename the square in which Faidherbe's statue is located, Place Faidherbe. The square is now called Baya Ndar, meaning "Ndar Square" in Wolof. Ndar is the Wolof name for Saint-Louis. It is still being decided whether or not to reinstall the statue in the square after the completion of the renovations.⁷²

Summary and Conclusions

Should the statue of Louis Faidherbe be removed or preserved in Saint-Louis? Responses to this question reveal that the figure of Louis Faidherbe remains a contested figure in Senegal. While the older generation seems to favour the preservation of the memory of Faidherbe, a historical figure who contributed to the development and improvement of the city of Saint-Louis, younger generations view the statue as a colonial symbol. According to them, the preservation of the statue is a humiliation and an insult to their ancestors, those who fought against French colonial power. These feelings brought forward by younger generations expose the difficulty for the Senegalese state and people to come to terms with their colonial history.

Despite protests organised over the years, journalistic attention, and online debates addressing the issue of the standing statue, local authorities have ignored the depth of the contestation. Their quick response to reinstall the statue revealed their haste to resolve the matter, but also their reluctance to address the possibility of removing the statue from the square. Their reticence can be explained by their rising fear of losing their UNESCO *World Heritage Site* status and subsidies from the French government in an effort to safeguard Saint-Louis' heritage.

In 2020, the debate about Faidherbe's statue was triggered once more following the Black Lives Matter protests in the US. In September of that year, the local authorities decided to change the name of the square on which the statue is located. Baptised Place Faidherbe, it was renamed Baya Ndar, commemorating the local name of Saint-Louis.

⁷¹ Thiebeu Ndiay, "Retrait de la statue de Faidherbe : La fatwa de l'imam ratib de la ville de Saint-Louis," *Seneweb*, June 20, 2020.

⁷² AFP, "Senegal renames Central Square in former colonial capital," *CGTN Africa*, September 29, 2020.

Research contributed by Marilyn Santos, Sherilyn Bouyer, Freya McMorrow and Sarah Hoog-Favasuli

Last updated December 2025

References

- AFP. "Senegal renames Central Square in former colonial capital." CGTN Africa, September 29, 2020.
<https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/09/29/senegal-renames-central-square-in-former-colonial-capital/>
- APS. "Saint-Louis: le maire annonce des « travaux de requalification » de la place Faidherbe." Seneweb, May 21, 2015.
https://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/saint-louis-le-maire-annonce-des-travaux_n_155524.html
- Bal BA, Amadou. "Faidherbe statues to be unbolted". Le Club de Mediapart. June 23rd, 2020.
<https://blogs.mediapart.fr/amadouba19gmailcom/blog/230620/faidherbe-des-statues-de-boulonner-par-amadou-bal-ba>
- Bigue, Bob. "Abdoul Aziz Guissé: 'La place Faidherbe est un symbole'." EnquetePlus, October 4, 2017.
<https://www.enqueteplus.com/content/abdoul-aziz-guisse-directeur-du-patrimoine-culturel-%E2%80%98la-place-faidherbe-est-un-symbole%E2%80%99>
- Bintou Ndour, Fatoumata. "Saint-Louis: la place Faidherbe s'appelle désormais place "Baya Ndar". PressAfrik, September 28th 2020.
https://www.pressafrik.com/Saint-Louis-la-place-Faidherbe-s-appelle-desormais-place-Baya-Ndar_a221822.html
- Barrows, Leland C. "The Merchants and General Faidherbe. Aspects of French Expansion in Sénégal in the 1850's." *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 223, no. 61 (1974): 236-283. <https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.1974.1757>
- Bobin, Florian. "In Senegal and France, Faidherbe Must Fall." *Review of African Political Economy*, July 2020. <https://roape.net/2020/07/07/in-senegal-and-france-faidherbe-must-fall/>
- Bouboutou, Rose-Marie. "Faut-il déboulonner les statues des colons en Afrique?". BBC Afrique, July 10th 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-53342062>
- Calvin-Smith, Georja. "Senegalese city of Saint-Louis divided over French colonial statue." France24, June 5th 2018.
<https://www.france24.com/en/20180605-across-africa-siya-kolisi-rugby-south-africa-madagascar-kidnappings-senegal-colonial-statue>
- Capron, Alexandre. "Au Sénégal, la statue d'un colon français s'écroule et provoque des réactions hostiles." *Les Observateurs*, September 5, 2017.
<https://observers.france24.com/fr/20170905-senegal-statue-faidherbe-colon-francais-saint-louis-colonialisme>

- “Collectif sénégalais contre la célébration de Faidherbe.” Facebook. Accessed June 3, 2021.
https://www.facebook.com/CollectifSenegalaisContreFaidherbe?_rdc=2&_rdr
- Dakaractu. “France : Le collectif « Faidherbe doit tomber » met la pression sur Martine Aubry.”
 Dakaractu, May 24, 2018.
https://www.dakaractu.com/France-Le-collectif-Faidherbe-doit-tomber-met-la-pression-sur-Martine-Aubry_a152254.html
- “Déboulonnons cette statue honteuse.” Facebook. Accessed June 3, 2021.
<https://www.facebook.com/D%C3%A9boulonnons-cette-statue-honteuse-64044597274016/>
- Diallo, Aïssatou & Crétois, Jules. “Faidherbe Doit Tomber” : Des Collectifs Français et Sénégalais à l’Assaut du Mythe du Colon Bâisseur. *Jeune Afrique*, April 10th 2018.
<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/549816/societe/faidherbe-doit-tomber-des-collectifs-francais-et-senegalais-a-lassaut-du-mythe-du-colon-batisseur/>
- Diouf, Aliou. “Bradage du littoral : l’audit du foncier réclamé.” *Emedia.sn*, June 15, 2020.
<https://emedia.sn/BRADAGE-DU-LITTORAL-L-AUDIT-DU-FONCIER-RECLAME.html>
- Diop, Fatoumata. “Saint-Louis : La mairie va remettre la statue de Faidherbe ‘à sa place’.”
Homeview Senegal, September 9, 2017.
<http://homeviewsenegal.com/index.php/2017/09/05/saint-louis-la-mairie-va-remettre-la-statue-de-faidherbe-a-sa-place/>
- L’Essentiel. “Saint-Louis: La statue Faidherbe transférée provisoirement à Rognât Sud.” *L’Essentiel*, September 7, 2017.
https://www.lessentiel.sn/Saint-Louis-La-statue-Faidherbe-transferee-provisoirement-a-Rognat-Sud_a3664.html,
- “Faidherbe vu du Sénégal.” *Faidherbe doit tomber*. Accessed August 18, 2020.
<https://faidherbedoitombler.org/faidherbe-vu-du-senegal/>
- Funes, Nathalie. “Sénégal : faut-il déboulonner Faidherbe, symbole du colonialisme?”
Nouvel Observateur, October 26, 2018.
<https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/afrique/20181026.OBS4546/senegal-faut-il-deboulonner-faidherbe-symbole-du-colonialisme.html>
- Grailles, Bénédicte. “Louis Faidherbe, Général Republicain et Fils du Nord. Entre Image d’Épinal et Culte Régional (1870-1914).” *Association Revue du Nord*, no. 350 (2003/2): 359-378.
<https://www.cairn.info/revue-du-nord-2003-2-page-359.htm>
- Intelligences.Info. “La statue de Faidherbe remplacée malgré la polémique.” *Intelligences.Info*, September 22, 2017.
<https://intelligences.info/article-1362-la-statue-de-faidherbe-replace-malgr-la-polmique.html>.
- de Jong, Ferdinand. “Remembering the Nation: The Murid Maggal of Saint-Louis Senegal.” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 50, no. 197 (2010): 123-151. DOI: 10.4000/etudesafriaines.15810
- La Libre Afrique. “Sénégal: une statue coloniale contestée sera bien réinstallée à Saint-Louis”. *La Libre Afrique*, September 8, 2017.
<https://afrique.lalibre.be/8341/senegal-une-statue-coloniale-contestee-sera-bien-reinstallee-a-saint-louis/>

- Leral.net. "La statue de Faidherbe s'écroule et provoque des réactions hostiles." Leral.net, September 6, 2017.
https://www.leral.net/La-statue-de-Faidherbe-s-ecroule-et-provoque-des-reactions-hostiles_a209740.html
- "Les sanglantes expéditions militaires de Faidherbe au Sénégal (1855-1864)." Faidherbe doit tomber. Accessed August 18, 2020.
<https://faidherbedoitmonter.org/les-sanglantes-expeditions-militaires-de-faidherbe-au-senegal/>
- France24. "À Saint-Louis du Sénégal, la statue de la discorde." Les Observateurs, September 23, 2014.
<https://observers.france24.com/fr/20140923-saint-louis-senegal-statue-louis-faidherbe-polemique-colonialisme?fbclid=IwAR0SSvx518qlhJ9DlELzrV9usPHgFOA5ORRaK40AKxcCTzFjOsBLtiMVks>
- Capron Alexandre. "Au Sénégal, la statue d'un colon français s'écroule et provoque des réactions hostiles." Les Observateurs, September 5, 2017.
<https://observers.france24.com/fr/20170905-senegal-statue-faidherbe-colon-francais-saint-louis-colonialisme>
- Ndarinfo. "Effondrement de la statue de Faidherbe : chute spectaculaire ou déboulonnage." Ndarinfo, September 5, 2017.
https://www.ndarinfo.com/Effondrement-de-la-statue-de-Faidherbe-chute-spectaculaire-ou-deboulonnage-Video_a19820.html
- Ndiaye, Khadim. "Cheikh Anta Diop et Sembène Ousmane contre Senghor : « on ne décolonisera pas l'Afrique avec les langues étrangères »." Facebook. Accessed June 3, 2021.
https://web.facebook.com/notes/khadim-ndiaye/cheikh-anta-diop-et-sembene-ousmane-contre-senghor-on-ne-d%C3%A9colonisera-pas-lafrique/998245823555241/?_rdc=1&_rdr
- Ndiaye, Khadim. "Lettre ouverte au maire Mansour FAYE : le sanguinaire Général Faidherbe ne mérite pas d'avoir une statue au Sénégal." Ndarinfo, September 7, 2017.
https://www.ndarinfo.com/Lettre-ouverte-au-maire-Mansour-FAYE-le-sanguinaire-General-Faidherbe-ne-merite-pas-d-avoir-une-statue-au-Senegal_a19832.html
- Ngalamulume, J. Kalala. "Leisure in Colonial Saint-Louis (Sénégal), 1850–1920." In *Leisure in Urban Africa*, edited by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Cassandra Rachel Veney. Africa World Press, 2003.
- O'Brien, Donal B. Cruise. *The Mourids of Senegal. The political and Economic organisation of an Islamic Brotherhood*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
- Ollivier, Théa. "Sénégal: La Société Civile Mobilisée pour Retirer les Symboles du Colonialisme". RFI, June 15th, 2020.
<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200615-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9-civile-mobilis%C3%A9e-retirer-symboles-colonialisme>
- Perchet, Dominique. "Monument au général Faidherbe – St-Louis du Sénégal." E-Monument.net. January 15, 2012.

- <https://e-monumen.net/patrimoine-monumental/monument-au-general-faidherbe-st-louis-du-senegal/>.
- Le Quotidien. "ENQUÊTE – Avenues ou rues Faidherbe, Jean Jaurès, Carnot, Félix Faure, boulevard Général de Gaulle,... : Les symboles du colonialisme au cœur de Dakar". Le Quotidien, June 22, 2020.
<https://lequotidien.sn/enquete-avenues-ou-rues-faidherbe-jean-jaures-carnot-felix-faure-boulevard-general-de-gaulle-les-symboles-du-colonialisme-au-coeur-de-dakar/>
- RFI. "Sénégal: la société civile mobilisée pour retirer les symboles du colonialisme." RFI, June 15, 2020.
<http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200615-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9-civile-mobilis%C3%A9e-retirer-symboles-colonialisme>
- Ribadeau Dumas, Laurent. "Saint-Louis du Sénégal et Lille: faut-il déboulonner le général Faidherbe?" France TV Info, May 27th, 2018.
https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/societe-africaine/saint-louis-du-senegal-et-lille-faut-il-deboulonner-le-general-faidherbe_3055373.html
- Saint-Martin, Yves-Jean. Le Sénégal sous le Second Empire. Naissance d'un empire colonial (1850-1871). Paris: Karthala, 1989.
- Sané, Yankhoba. "Saint-Louis: Les raisons de la remise de la statue Faidherbe à sa place." SansLimites, September 25, 2017.
<https://sanslimites.sn/saint-louis-raisons-de-remise-de-statue-faidherbe-a-place/>
- Sene.News. "La statue Faidherbe rasée ? La vérité autour de la polémique qui secoue Saint-Louis!" Sene.News, June 15, 2020.
https://www.senenews.com/actualites/la-statue-faidherbe-rasee-la-verite-autour-de-la-polemique-qui-secoue-saint-louis_313809.html
- Sene.News. "Marie Teuw Niane : « Si je suis élu Maire de Saint-Louis, la statue de Faidherbe sera enlevée... »." Sene.News, June 15, 2020.
https://www.senenews.com/actualites/marie-teuw-niane-si-je-suis-elu-maire-de-saint-louis-la-statue-de-faidherbe-sera-enlevee_313769.html
- Survie. "FAIDHERBE VU DU SÉNÉGAL". Survie, April 10, 2018.
<https://survie.org/billets-d-afrique/2018/277-mai-2018/article/faidherbe-vu-du-senegal>
- Traoré, Amos. "Statue de Faidherbe : Le maire de Saint-Louis refroidit les pro « déboulonnage ». La Nouvelle Tribune, June 30, 2020.
<https://lanouvelletribune.info/2020/06/statue-de-faidherbe-le-maire-de-saint-louis-refroidit-les-pro-deboulonnage/>
- Voa Afrique. "Le Sénégal décide de réinstaller à Saint-Louis la statue de Faidherbe". Voa Afrique, September 8th 2017.
<https://www.voaafrique.com/a/une-statue-coloniale-contestee-au-senegal-sera-bien-reinstallée/4020700.html>
- Xalima. "Faidherbe ne bouge pas." SenePlus, September 6, 2017.
<https://www.senepus.com/societe/faidherbe-ne-bouge-pas>
- "41st session of the World Heritage Committee." Last modified July 2-12, 2017.
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/41com/>

Figures

HaguardDuNord, Saint-Louis : Statue de Faidherbe. Wikimedia Commons, January 7, 2013.

Accessed September 22, 2025.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint-Louis_-_Statue_de_Faidherbe.JPG (Cover Image).

mostroreddo, Statue de Louis Faidherbe à Saint-Louis, Sénégal. Wikimedia Commons, October 2, 2006. Accessed March 30, 2021. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Faidherbe.jpg> (Figure 1)

About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

Contact information

Paula O'Donohoe
Program Director

Institute for Historical Justice &
Reconciliation
contestedhistories.org

EuroClio - European Association of
History Educators
Bankplein 2, 2585 EV
The Hague, The Netherlands
+31 70 3817836
contestedhistories@euroclio.eu

To cite this publication:

Contested Histories, "Faidherbe Statue in Saint Louis, Senegal", Contested Histories Case Study #135 (July 2026), Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) at the European Association of History Educators (EuroClio), retrieved from [link], [CC BY 4.0](#).

Contested Histories is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.