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### PROJECT

## Slavery in Daily Life of Saint-Louis, Senegal: 18th-19th centuries

L'abolition de l'esclavage en avril 1848 n'a pas reçu le même accueil dans les différentes possessions françaises outre-mer. A Saint-Louis du Sénégal, le décret a certes suscité un réel mécontentement des propriétaires d'esclaves qui estimaient que les pouvoirs publics avaient attenté au droit sacré de la propriété privée. L'importance des indemnités qui leur fut accordées n'a pas apaisé leurs ressentiments et ils ont opposé une fin de non-recevoir à toute coopération avec les pouvoirs publics dans la gestion des conséquences négatives de la mesure abolitionniste. Du côté des esclaves, s'est exprimée, de manière festive mais sur une courte durée, la joie de recouvrer la liberté. Nombre d'entre eux sont au demeurant restés au service de leur ancien maître, à titre de salarié. L'étude du statut et des fonctions des esclaves dans la société saint-louisienne de la période esclavagiste, du XVIIIe siècle à 1848, permet de rendre compte de cette situation qui contraste radicalement avec celle plutôt violente qui a prévalu dans les autres colonies françaises en particulier aux Antilles. Outre l'emploi des esclaves dans les activités économiques, seront étudiés leur rôle dans les relations sociales et leurs expressions juridiques dans les espaces privés et publics. Cette étude s'inscrit dans une perspective historique en accordant une importance particulière aux mutations inscrites dans le temps de la ville et de son environnement.

Lecture recommandée :

Thioub, Ibrahima. *Patrimoines et sources historiques en Afrique*. Union académique internationale, UCAD, 2007.  
-. " Regard critique sur les lectures africaines de l'esclavage et de la traite atlantique critique. " En *Les Historiens africains et la mondialisation*, édité par Issiaka Mandé et Blandine Stefanson. Paris, Karthala, 2005. [traduit en italien " Letture africane della schiavitù e della tratta atlantica ", *Passato e Presente*, 62, 2004 : 129-146].  
-. " L'historiographie de " l'École de Dakar " et la production d'une écriture académique de l'histoire. " En *Le Sénégal contemporain*, édité par M. C. Diop, 109-153. Paris, Karthala, 2002.

## Slavery and Daily Life in Saint-Louis, Senegal, in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

The company, always slow in its operations, still didn't have its ships ready when we saw the Bric and the Furet arrive. The same day that it appeared before the fort it entered the river. We proceeded to immediately discharge its cargo. It was repaired and we loaded it for the trade. I left Fort Louis on this ship on 16 August 1785 at eight in the morning.

My ship of seventy tons, but a light sailing vessel, had a crew composed of twenty-four laptots, four gourmets, an interpreter, a carpenter, a first mate, six pileuses, and a dozen or so rapasses. Laptot is the term for a negro sailor; the gourmets are the officers, or rather the helmsmen.

At the start of his voyage for the country of Galam, center of the slave trade on the Senegal River, Saugnier detailed his crew of some sixty members without making clear the fact that it consisted almost entirely of slaves. Up until the nineteenth century, the trade of the upper river-forming the spinal column of economic activity of this island-city founded in 1659, opening onto the Atlantic and abutting an African hinterland that completely evaded its political control-was entirely dependent on the labor of slaves. The masters, blacks or mulattoes, hired out their manpower to the company to whom France had awarded monopoly of the slave trade in Senegambia or practically entrusted the fate of their enterprise to them without the slightest supervision. In fact, it was more frequently a case of mistresses rather than masters, for at Saint-Louis the slaveholders were more often than not grande dames, the Signares, or their descendants. They had acquired their riches by virtue of temporary husbands, as it were, namely European employees of the company, which forbade European females from sojourning in the colony.

Thus, the domestic slaves, known as *de case*, were in charge of purchasing and conducting-this activity called *de traite*-those slaves destined for export to the Americas so as to profit the habitants of the colony and the company. This responsibility opened up to them the opportunity of themselves acquiring slaves, but without leaving behind their slave status. One can understand why, throughout the two centuries under study, more than half the population of Saint-Louis consisted of these *captifs de case*, who occupied the same residence as their masters, carried out the domestic tasks, participated in supplying foodstuffs for the city's two districts-the Muslim quarter in the north and the Christian quarter in the south-and came to defense of the island in case of attack. It was not uncommon for European employees of the company to take a wife in that style of marriage known as *à mode du pays* and allowing their chosen one access to the status of Signare. Yet this slave population was itself merchandise that circulated on the occasion of those multiple economic (as collateral, as pawned objects) and social transactions (as part of the dowry of the master's daughter) which served as a nexus for the village's free inhabitants.

The type of relations that linked masters and slaves at Saint-Louis explains the very real discontentment felt by those proprietors opposed to the decree of 27 April 1848, which abolished slavery, as the law was attacking their private property; while on the part of the slaves, there was a festive expression of joy at regaining their liberty-but it was of short duration. A number of them in fact remained in the residences of their old masters. Through a close reading of the many accounts still extant that have been left to us by travelers of the time, through an equally close reading of the notarized minutes introduced by the French legal tradition, and through a meticulous examination of both administrative and private archives, one can gain insight into the role of slaves in the daily life of the town. I will then examine the model employed to control the slaves-a model that certainly contributed to attenuating tensions between masters and slaves but which paradoxically engendered major difficulties in implementing the long process of emancipation which only had its epilogue in 1905, when a new decree of abolition was issued.

Thiou, Ibrahima (Paris,2021)

Covid-19 : tour du monde

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Thiou, Ibrahima (2020)

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<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1759813192>

Thiou, Ibrahima (2010)

L'esclavage à Saint-Louis du Sénégal au XVIIIe - XIX-siècle

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670716952>

Thiou, Ibrahima (Dakar,2007)

Patrimoine et sources historiques en Afrique

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=574698450>

Thiou, Ibrahima (2005)

Savoirs interdits en contexte colonial : la politique culturelle de la France en Afrique de l'ouest

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=896014851>

Thiou, Ibrahima (2002)

L'École de Dakar et la production d'une écriture académique de l'histoire

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