1 History and Testimony at the House of Slaves

> A profound emotion, a symbol of the dignity of each being, or a dignity of each being. Of a dignity denied from Gorée to Auschwitz.
>
> Quotations collected by Joseph Ndiaye, curator of the House of Slaves[1]

The House of Slaves on Gorée Island, just off the coast of Senegal, was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978, one year before Auschwitz Birkenau concentration camp and the Elmina and Cape Coast castles of Ghana were added to the list. The *Maison des Esclaves*, as the House of Slaves is called in Senegal, was the first UNESCO World Heritage site in Senegal. Globally, the House of Slaves was one of the first memorial museums, that genre of museums in which the transmission of memory serves the political agenda to commemorate past atrocities (Williams 2007; Logan and Reeves 2009). As a memorial to the slave trade, the House of Slaves is a rather diminutive structure; it is in fact an eighteenth-century house. Built at the height of the transatlantic slave trade, the house is presented as an important historical trading centre in African slaves, hence its name. That an ordinary house functioned as an important centre in the transatlantic trade contributes much to its efficacy as a memorial.[2] Indeed,

[1] Taken from *The Slave House of Goree-Island* brochure (Ndiaye nd: 31). The brochure contains texts by different authors and is published in English; it consists of stapled and photocopied paper sheets. It opens with a title page, followed by a word of thanks by President Senghor (dated 1967). After a biography of the author, there is a text on the history of the slave trade and a section on key sites on Gorée Island, with a list of constructions on the island; the authorship of the latter is attributed to A. Bregoire and M. Parent, 'UNESCO Consultents [sic]'. It also has a section titled 'Quotations' (pp. 24–31), which closes with the words 'Quotations collected by Joseph Ndiaye, Curator of the Slave House', and from which the above quotation is taken. I acquired this brochure in 2020 through eBay from a bookseller in South Africa. There is no doubt about its authenticity.

[2] My research among the visitors to the island and the House of Slaves was difficult and limited to some extent by the sensitivity of the subject matter. The mobility of tourists and pilgrims has been another factor restricting possibilities for conversation. Although I have visited and observed visitors on many occasions, the House of Slaves is not a setting where one approaches them to engage in conversation. Conversations were had with visitors when I met them in other settings, such as restaurants and hotels.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

its contemporary function as a museum owes much to its historical functions. As a memorial museum it shares the responsibility of representing untold human suffering with the Jewish Museum Berlin (Young 2000), a museum known for its extraordinary architecture that represents the absence of the departed. As a place to commemorate the Jewish population that is no longer 'at home' in Berlin, the Jewish Museum is a haunted place where the ghost of the Holocaust dwells. The author James Young has qualified the museum as *unheimlich*, that appropriate German adjective that translates as 'uncanny' in English. In a literal and figurative sense, this uncanny character captures the spectrality of modernity; the House of Slaves shares this responsibility to remember the dark side of modernity. Placed on an island in the Atlantic, the House of Slaves hosts the spectres of the slave trade: it, too, is a haunted house. This uncanniness is obliquely, and somewhat summarily, referenced in the characterization of the houses on Gorée Island by UNESCO:

The island of Gorée lies off the coast of Senegal, opposite Dakar. From the 15th to the 19th century, it was the largest slave-trading centre on the African coast. Ruled in succession by the Portuguese, Dutch, English and French, its architecture is characterised by the contrast between the grim slave-quarters

Figure 1.1 Guide pointing to the 'Door of No Return' in the House of Slaves. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the elegant houses of the slave traders. Today it continues to serve as a reminder of human exploitation and as a sanctuary for reconciliation.[3]

Memorial museums convey historical knowledge to transmit the historical traumas that we, collectively, have decided to remember. They shoulder the responsibility of reminding us of modernity's dark side and seek to offer repair through reconciliation. In this process, museums often appeal to our empathy. They work by evoking emotions. As this chapter will show, the House of Slaves also works through affect (Tolia-Kelly et al. 2017; Mourre 2020). By revisiting the suffering of the slaves as they were incarcerated in this house, the House of Slaves appeals to our implicated subjectivity. The photographs by Mamadou Gomis reproduced in this chapter illuminate the emotions experienced by the visitors to the House of Slaves (Figure 1.1, for example).

The most important reason why the House of Slaves has become the principal site in the commemoration of the slave trade was the interpretation provided by its first curator. Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye (1922–2009) started working in the House of Slaves when it was established in the immediate post-war years by the colonial administration; he served as curator from 1967 until his death. Trained as a typesetter, this amateur historian crafted a dramatic speech on the House of Slaves that he delivered to his audiences throughout his long career as curator. While evoking the suffering of the enslaved, Ndiaye also frequently compared the slave trade to the Holocaust. Moreover, he used inflated numbers to quantify the slave trade and exaggerate the historical significance of the House of Slaves in the trade. This resulted in a major controversy about his interpretation of the House of Slaves in the 1990s, a controversy that still seems to affect the authenticity of the museum (Araujo 2014: 212). As a controversial museum for the interpretation and commemoration of the slave trade, the House of Slaves continues to produce different affects. Depending on its public, it arouses grief, guilt, anger, or a sense of reconciliation. This house of multiple and contrary emotions is truly an archive of affect. As the controversy around its significance continues, the interpretation of the House of Slaves offered by its first curator has undoubtedly contributed to its notoriety. For such a small place, it has attracted a great many cultural and political figureheads, including James Brown, Jimmy Cliff, US President Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, French First Lady Danielle Mitterrand, and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

[3] Welcome text panel from the pages on the island of Gorée, UNESCO World Heritage List, at https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/26/ (accessed 26 March 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Araujo 2012: 61). More recently, US President Obama visited the house with his family in 2013. Many African American pilgrims have visited the site as a way of commemorating their ancestors (Ebron 1999).

This chapter addresses the making of the House of Slaves as a site for the commemoration of the slave trade. As observed by Rothberg (2009) and Ana Lucia Araujo (2012), the making of a memoryscape of the transatlantic slave trade started after the Second World War and is both informed by and indebted to the global recognition of the Holocaust as a crime against humanity. In his highly acclaimed study on multidirectional memory, Rothberg (2009) claims that the spread of Holocaust memory and consciousness around the world has set the stage for a competition between different victimage memories. There is no doubt that the disproportionate claims made by curator Joseph Ndiaye indeed attest to this competition. However, Rothberg claims that victimage memories need not necessarily be in conflict and compete for recognition. He suggests that the acknowledgement of Holocaust memory has in fact enabled the articulation of other histories of victimization, implying that victimage memories work in different directions. His model of multidirectional memory proposes that memories and commemoration of the slave trade, colonialism, and the Holocaust have enabled each other's recognition beyond national identifications and narrow political affiliations. Following this line of reasoning, one may argue that the tragedy of the slave trade also owes its recognition to the multi-directionality of Holocaust memory (Araujo 2014).

There are different ways in which the rise of slave trade commemoration can be framed. The literature on the slave castles in Ghana and other sites of commemoration in West Africa focuses on their place in the imagination of African Americans, who visit them to honour their ancestors who left Africa through these sites (Hartman 2007; Tillet 2012). Indeed, many have argued that these sites of memory afford a temporality of repair through a discourse and practice of 'return' (Ebron 1999; Schramm 2010). Although African American authors generally situate the significance of the slave castles in a post-civil rights context, the making of memorials to the slave trade can be placed in several aftermaths. This chapter demonstrates that the making of the House of Slaves at Gorée Island can be understood as part of a transnational debate on commemoration triggered by the Holocaust. Situating the making of the House of Slaves in a post-Holocaust context, I argue that curator Joseph Ndiaye inflected the commemoration of the slave trade with the voice of Negritude. How exactly Holocaust memory and Negritude intersect in the making of the House of Slaves as a memorial to the slave trade is one of the questions that this chapter seeks to answer. But before addressing the history of the heritagization of Gorée and its House of Slaves, let us briefly

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

revisit the wider context of the making of a transatlantic memory of the slave trade. After all, it is in the aftermaths of slavery and its abolitions that this wider memoryscape emerged.

Post-Civil Rights Melancholy

The French Revolution famously proclaimed freedom, equality, and brotherhood, but it excluded the enslaved in its colonies from its implementation; at this foundational moment in Europe's history of emancipation, the enslaved were not entitled to equality. Consequently, the abolition of slavery in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (later known as Haiti) required a revolution against French colonial power. Under the military leadership of Toussaint Louverture, himself a former slave, slaves and free people of colour vanquished the French and established the island's independence in 1804. That same year, slavery was abolished. Haitians' struggle for emancipation later inspired twentieth-century national liberation movements in Africa, contributing to the emergence of a counter-modernity that Paul Gilroy (1993) has called the 'Black Atlantic'.

The acquisition of national independence in the Black republic of Haiti coincided with the abolition of slavery, but such isomorphism would not be the rule everywhere. Slave trade, colonialism, and transnationalism were entangled in unpredictable ways in the making of the African diaspora, the abolition of slavery, and the 'return' of freed slaves to Africa (Vergès 2001). When the British abolished the slave trade in 1807, the campaigns waged by the British navy to intercept slave ships crossing the Middle Passage resulted in the arrival of many manumitted Africans in London. They were 'returned' to Sierra Leone, the strip of land on the West African coast purchased by the British to settle the freed slaves. Sierra Leone developed into a hub for Black transnationalism, with Edward Wilmot Blyden disseminating his Pan-African ideals from its capital Freetown (Frenkel 1974). Meanwhile, mounting anti-Black violence during the Reconstruction era in the USA drove emancipated slaves to seek alternative livelihoods elsewhere. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Quaker-led American Colonization Society initiated the settlement of emancipated slaves from North Carolina in Liberia. Clegg (2004) demonstrates the highly varied motivations and contradictory aspirations of those involved in this society, driven by an 'emancipatory impulse'. A future in Liberia certainly helped ignite the imagination of a Black diasporic consciousness among African Americans, resulting in the short-lived Black Star Line shipping company project to repatriate African Americans to Liberia, led by the Haitian citizen Marcus Garvey. As the project of emancipation became entangled with a project of

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

colonization, the 'return' to Africa was not devoid of contradictions. During the nineteenth century, much of the 'colonization' movement by African Americans was couched in the terms of a 'civilizing mission', and returnees' views on moral superiority created frictions between Africans and African Americans over the latter's 'return' to the motherland.

In the USA, slavery lasted until a bloody Civil War was fought over the issue of its abolition, which remains 'unfinished business' to this day (Berlin 2006). Not only did racism persist, the abolition failed to grant full citizenship to the formerly enslaved, to whom the programme of reconstruction did not offer the means to establish themselves as economically independent citizens. At the independence celebrations of the state of Ghana under the Pan-African leader Kwame Nkrumah, several Pan-African activists from the USA undertook the journey to Accra to settle permanently in what they perceived as an African motherland devoid of racism. In the transatlantic pilgrimages in the wake of abolition, W. E. B. Du Bois was among the first African Americans to travel to Africa. In 1961 he settled in Ghana and even renounced his American citizenship, strengthening the connections between American and Ghanaian Pan-Africanism (Schramm 2010: 66). Many descendants of slaves, such as Du Bois, defined 'Africa' as a site of racial equality and imagined their return to Africa to be permanent. African American actress and writer Maya Angelou spent several years in Ghana, and Malcolm X, considered an enemy of the state in the USA, was given a warm welcome in Ghana, where he felt at home (ibid.: 68–9).

However, after the civil rights movement, the 'Back to Africa' discourse underwent a significant transformation. In a US context of continuing racial disparities and disenfranchisement, African Americans replaced their civic alienation at home with a Black citizenship that they celebrated at the slave forts in Ghana. According to Salamishah Tillet (2012), the establishment of the slave forts in the African American imaginary as a possible origin marked a transformation in their conception of both Africa and their future in America: 'National yearning now becomes diasporic membership, civic alienation replaced by transnational citizenship.' The development of the slave forts in Ghana as tourist destinations should thus be understood as a response to the transatlantic pilgrimages that were already marked by the tragedy of unfulfilled citizenship.

In the abundant literature on the slave castles as sites of roots tourism, many publications note the tensions between the Ghanaian citizens, who seek to make a profit from tourism, and the African American pilgrims, who define their roots trips as a form of 'homecoming' (e.g. Holsey 2008). On the one hand, Ghanaians refer to African Americans as *obruni* (strangers); on the other, they address them in a sly commercial language

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. These tensions in the experience of the Pan-African homecoming are painstakingly explored in Saidiya Hartman’s (2007) *Lose Your Mother*, a travel account of the author’s year-long sojourn in Ghana. Hartman is not seeking to be welcomed as an African ‘sister’ yet admits that she is not insensitive to the welcome extended to her in those terms. The travelogue is an examination of her contradictory feelings of belonging and alienation experienced during her stay, set against a summa of the existing literature on slavery and the slave trade in West Africa. Intimately familiar with the day-to-day experiences of race in nineteenth-century America (Hartman 1997), the author’s auto-ethnography of ‘return’ sensitively captures the tragedy of the commodification of race in the ‘spectacles of return’ staged in Ghana. Ultimately, Hartman seems undecided about the merits of a visit to the slave castles and their re-enactments of slavery: ‘As we remember those ancestors held in the dungeons, we can’t but think of our own dishonoured and devalued lives and the unrealised aspirations and the broken promises of abolition, reconstruction, and the civil rights movement’ (Hartman 2002: 767). To her, a visit to the slave castles only returns her to the present: ‘Racial subjection, incarceration, impoverishment and second-class citizenship: this is the legacy of slavery that still haunts us’ (ibid.: 766) (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Visitors in the House of Slaves. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Home tours may represent an abandonment of the struggle for civil rights, but to take this as the exclusive frame for the significance of the monuments to the slave trade is to ignore the radical visions articulated at the House of Slaves, whose history differs from that of the Ghanaian slave castles. Let us return once more to Haiti and its place in the history of the abolition of slavery in France. After the first abolition of slavery in 1792 as a response to the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue, Napoleon reinstated slavery in French law in 1802. However, inspired by the British abolition of the slave trade, the abolitionist Victor Schoelcher kept campaigning in France. In 1848, the French Republic abolished slavery for the second time. In West Africa, the new legislation applied only to the trade posts of Gorée and Saint-Louis, where the law was not applied with much rigour; many inhabitants of these towns continued to own slaves. The abolition of the slave trade nonetheless provided an important justification to the public in the metropolis for the military expansion of the colony by General Faidherbe. He organized his most important troops for the conquest of West Africa, the *Tirailleurs sénégalais*, by recruiting slaves: transforming slaves into soldiers. This did not help abolish slavery, though, as his military campaigns often made slaves who were then distributed among the soldiers as a reward. In his ambition to expand French colonial control, 'Faidherbe developed a formula that permitted France to ally itself to slavers and to tolerate slavery while seeming to be hostile to it' (Klein 1998: 242). This policy did not fundamentally change during the nineteenth century, as military and commercial interests usually required the state to make compromises with slave traders and slave owners. The French anti-slavery measures of 1903 and 1905 that were introduced in the newly colonized territories in West Africa 'were limited in scope, as their intention was not to free slaves overnight but rather to prevent any new enslavement from taking place' (Conklin 1998: 425). As a result, emancipation remained a largely unaccomplished project at Senegal's national independence. Even though it had enjoyed more political support in the metropolis than in the colony and the effects of the abolition of slavery were limited, the eradication of slavery nonetheless remains an important legacy of the colonial humanist policy (ibid.). And this legacy would be taken up, as Derrida would have put it, by French and Black heirs to the French Revolution. The establishment of the House of Slaves should be considered a monument to that Republican legacy.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Nelly Schmidt (1989) informs us, the centenary of the French abolition of slavery (1848) was commemorated on the occasion of the passing of a law on the departmentalization of Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, and La

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Réunion. On 27 April 1948, Gaston Monnerville, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Sédar Senghor gave lectures on the abolitionist Victor Schoelcher to the Sorbonne.[4] They looked back to 1848 to encourage the French public to honour and complete the history of emancipation. The commemoration of the abolition was employed by these three Black speakers hailing from the colonies to critique colonialism and thus became entangled with the politics of self-determination, but it also inspired a re-engagement with the legacy of abolition. Césaire announced, 'Racism is here. It is not dead … The colonial problem confronts us, it is waiting to be resolved' (Césaire cited in Wilder 2004: 33). The commemoration led to a rethinking of the legacy of abolition and Césaire reclaimed the Schoelcherian legacy of emancipation as an 'unrealised historical possibility' (Wilder 2015: 121). There is no evidence to suggest that the commemoration of the 1848 abolition influenced decisions on the conservation of the House of Slaves, but, as I argue throughout this book, this temporality of a return and a reclamation of an unrealized historical possibility was intrinsic to Senghor's Negritude philosophy and quite possibly introduced to the House of Slaves by him. We are unlikely to find traces of it in the archive because it was not a conservation policy, but as a technique of temporality we can find the principle demonstrated in the curation of the museum. The commemoration of the slave trade demands not only commemoration of the tragedy of the ancestors but remembrance of the future of emancipation.

The memoryscape of Gorée is the product of a history of heritagization (*patrimonialisation*) begun under French colonialism and accomplished under the presidency of Senghor. Although the idea that the House of Slaves has become the exclusive property of the African American heritage tourist (cf. Tillet 2012: 97) is fitting in some respects, this chapter argues that the memorial significance of Gorée was not determined by African Americans, but that it carries the legacy of a radical Republican tradition that seized the House of Slaves and transformed it into a monument of reparatory justice.

The House of Slaves

Gorée Island's strategic location – only two miles from the coast – made it a pivotal base for Europeans to set up trade with African traders on the mainland while protecting them from possible attacks by African rulers

[4] Remarkably, Schmidt concludes that 'not any historical movement emerged from all these events' (2012: 114).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Thioub and Bocoum 1997).[5] For these reasons, European nations frequently fought over Gorée. Following its 'discovery' by Portugal in 1444, the island was bought by the Dutch for a handful of nails from the Damel Biram of Kayoor and named 'Goeree' (after an island in the Dutch Republic). In 1621, the Dutch West India Company obtained a commercial monopoly, before losing it to the French, who conquered the island in 1677 and occupied it until the English took possession in 1693. Thereafter, the island repeatedly changed hands, until the English finally handed it to the French in 1817 (de Moraes 1997; Camara and de Benoist 2003). When European trade companies established themselves on the island, they issued trade regulations; however, they never managed to monopolize trade in the region and competing companies continued to operate. The slaves traded on the island hailed predominantly from the mainland polities Kayoor, Baol, and Sine, all within easy reach of Gorée, but the slave trade at Saint-Louis and on the Gambia River was not controlled from Gorée (Camara and de Benoist 2003). The slave trade was formally abolished by the British in 1807. However, the illegal trade continued well into the nineteenth century.

During the era of commercial competition between the European contenders, the island's defensive works served primarily to defend the island against rival Europeans. The Dutch constructed two forts; these were destroyed by the French, who replaced them with new forts in 1677 (de Benoist 1997). The French also built most of the *captiveries* or slave depots on the island. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these forts and slave depots were the most important permanent constructions on the island, but from the mid-eighteenth century onwards more houses were built, possibly due to the burgeoning slave trade. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, many new houses were owned by mixed-race female traders or *Signares*, who constituted an important class of indigenous property owners (Camara and de Benoist 2003). The house now called the House of Slaves was built on the defensive ramparts. Construction had previously been forbidden on the ramparts by a royal edict of Louis XIV, but, in 1779, the English

[5] Studies of Gorée's history include Camara and de Benoist (2003) and Samb (1997). The island's archaeological remains have been examined by Thiaw (2003; 2008; 2011a; 2011b). The history of the House of Slaves has been examined by architectural historian Hinchman (2006; 2015) and the former director of the Department for National Patrimony of the Ministry of Culture, Dr Hamady Bocoum (Bocoum and Toulier 2013). The representational economy of the island has been addressed by Ebron (2002), Thioub and Bocoum (1997), Thiaw (2008), Quashie (2009), Araujo (2012; 2014), Mourre (2020), Katchka (2004). For a comprehensive survey of the academic work on the relationship between slavery and the making of the modern world, see Thiaw and Mack (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

occupied Gorée, sold the ramparts, and authorized private constructions on condition that they included embrasures (de Benoist 1997: 127). Built between 1780 and 1784, the house now called the House of Slaves was owned by a member of one of Gorée's mixed-race families and was known in its time as *Maison Pépin* (de Benoist and Camara 2003: 108–10; Hinchman 2006: 167) (Figure 1.3).

The ground floor of the *Maison Pépin* consisted of rooms for servants and storage while the more elevated and aerated living rooms on the first floor accommodated offices for the owners. In the era of the slave trade, these houses were inhabited by traders and their storage rooms would have been used to hold export slaves alongside the more prevalent domestic slaves. Many of these houses were not properly preserved when political and economic circumstances changed due to the gradual abolition of slavery and the colonization of Senegal, and they slowly fell into ruin. During the colonial era, most of Gorée's established families left the island and settled on the mainland. As the island turned into an economic backwater and there was little new construction, the architecture of Gorée became a time capsule of the island's economic, political, and cultural heyday in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Hinchman 2006: 186; 2015).

Figure 1.3 'A residence at Gorée' (the house of Anna Colas), drawing by Adolphe d'Hastrel de Rivedoux, 1839.
Source: Number 8, 'Colonie française du Sénégal' collection, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The island was a picturesque ruin when European expatriate researchers of the then Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) took the initiative to turn the *Maison Pépin* into a memorial to the slave trade. The legal framework within which this was pursued was provided by a 1937 act to protect natural monuments and historical sites in the colonies. The proposal to classify the principal buildings of Gorée, including the house known as the House of Slaves, was adopted in 1944 (Bocoum and Toulier 2013: 5–6). In 1948, the centenary of the abolition of the slave trade, IFAN also purchased a house situated opposite *Maison Pépin* to accommodate a museum focusing on the history of French West Africa. Inaugurated in 1954, this museum also provided an interpretation of the history of the slave trade (ibid.: 4–5). Based on the establishment of several museums and their official classification as monuments, the colonial government thus initiated a politics of 'patrimonialization' of the slave trade (ibid.: 6).[6] Although the term 'patrimonialization' may imply a process of reification, we should be aware that certainly in the post-war French context patrimony designated not only legacy but responsibility. The post-war devastation that led to the foundation of UNESCO acknowledged the significance of the Holocaust, even though its commemoration had not yet properly begun. At this time, the legacy of the Second World War was yet to be established, the vectors of remembering and forgetting still to be drawn. Colonial soldiers who had served under French colours gained hope that the colonies might soon obtain self-determination. The anti-colonialism that took hold of UNESCO inflected the struggle for self-determination and inspired the conservation policy that would lead to the World Heritage programme that was to consolidate the commemoration of the slave trade.

After independence, the Senegalese state continued the conservation policy inaugurated by the colonial government and assumed responsibility for the interpretation of the House of Slaves. President Senghor nominated Joseph Ndiaye as the 'watchman' of the museum. Born in Rufisque into a family hailing from Gorée, the young Ndiaye had been called to arms in 1943. Enrolled in the colonial army as a *Tirailleur sénégalais*, he participated in the liberation of France and continued to serve the army in its operations in Indochina. After a stint of married life in France, Ndiaye returned to Senegal and started to act as a tour guide at the House of Slaves, a house that had been his family's heritage. After

[6] Restorations of the ruins of the House of Slaves were carried out in the early 1960s (Thiaw 2008). In the 1980s, the house underwent another two restoration initiatives (de Benoist and Camara 2003: 110). See the documentation on these restorative works on the UNESCO website at https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/26 (accessed 26 March 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966, when the slave trade was commemorated in various performances on the island of Gorée, President Senghor confirmed Ndiaye's role at the house by formalizing his position as curator, a position he retained until his death in 2009.

At the House of Slaves, Joseph Ndiaye lectured with passion on the plight of the slaves and the horrors of the slave trade; due to his persuasive guided tour and sponsorship by UNESCO, the House of Slaves became a major pilgrimage destination for African Americans. In no uncertain terms, Ndiaye proclaimed the importance of the House of Slaves to the world at large:

> The House of Slaves is an African sanctuary that has been a principal site of tears and suffering because many innocents passed away here, victims of the time of shame. If these walls could speak, they would testify. But these walls have been shut up forever; now I make them speak.[7]

The message that Joseph Ndiaye conveyed in the House of Slaves would not have resonated so widely if it had not coincided with a pivotal moment in the emancipation of African Americans. In the immediate post-civil rights era, the struggle of African Americans to define a new, positive identity received a boost from the publication and subsequent mediatization of Alex Haley's novel *Roots*, published in 1976 and adapted and screened on American television in 1977. In this epic novel, the author traces the genealogy of his family to the apical ancestor Kunta Kinte, who, having survived the Middle Passage, lived through slavery's horrors in the American South. Kunta Kinte hailed from a small village in The Gambia, but, as this country had not yet developed the infrastructure to receive African American pilgrims in pursuit of their ancestry when Haley published *Roots*, the author presented Gorée Island as the gateway to Africa – at the expense of the village that was later identified by Gambian authorities as Kinte's place of birth (Bellagamba 2009). The House of Slaves became the site African Americans identified as the home of Kunta Kinte. Curator Joseph Ndiaye welcomed the visiting African Americans at the House of Slaves and offered them an account of the slave trade that marked the house as the site from where their ancestors had started the journey across the Middle Passage. By linking

[7] Taken from a French television Channel 1 documentary on Joseph Ndiaye, recorded at the House of Slaves. The documentary includes excerpts of the lecture spoken by Ndiaye, as delivered at different sites in the House of Slaves. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz9SF9YNhIA (accessed 26 March 2020). In interviews, Ndiaye often repeated phrases from his memorized lecture as if it had become the authoritative account of the slave trade that he could not deviate from. YouTube offers a range of videos recording the House of Slaves as a backdrop to Ndiaye's performances, interviews with Ndiaye, and the island of Gorée.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1.4 Visitor in the House of Slaves. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

the search of African Americans for roots to a site from which Africans had historically been traded as slaves and taken across the Middle Passage, Ndiaye made the connection that enabled the making of a site of memory (Figure 1.4).

Joseph Ndiaye successfully promoted the House of Slaves and played a key role in the designation of Gorée as a UNESCO World Heritage site (Austen 2001; Bocoum and Toulier 2013). Senegal ratified the 1972 Heritage Convention and proceeded to obtain UNESCO classification for the island of Gorée as a historical monument in 1978, a year before the concentration camp at Auschwitz was classified.[8] In his role as

[8] The UNESCO World Heritage List can be found online. The site lists all the World Heritage sites in Senegal, including Gorée Island. For the island, there is a description, access to digital documents relating to its nomination, authorization by ICOMOS, technical assistance offered, etc. This website also gives access to the annual preservation reports, which include requests to the Senegalese state to take note of the potential threats of coastal erosion and its effect on the architectural heritage. In successive reports, a range of buildings on the western side of the island are identified as being subject to degradation; as a result, the island has been subject to an international safeguarding campaign. For years, UNESCO reported that the site lacked a management structure and ICOMOS was repeatedly asked to advise on placing the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger. See https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/ (accessed 26 March 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

curator, Ndiaye helped establish the House of Slaves as a principal *lieu de mémoire* of the slave trade. Over the years, several world leaders have visited the House of Slaves. During his visit, Pope John Paul II apologized for the role of the Catholic Church in the slave trade, while George W. Bush condemned slavery as 'one of the greatest crimes in history' (Berlin 2004: 1254; Palmié 2010; Vivian 2012). Supported by President Senghor and authorized by UNESCO, Ndiaye's tours were witnessed by tens of thousands of Senegalese pupils, European tourists, and African American pilgrims. As the curator of a tiny museum on a small island off the African continent, Ndiaye gave the House of Slaves a remarkable visibility in the international memoryscape. It is possible that his tours have meant more for the recognition of the slave trade as a crime against humanity than any academic work. For this achievement, Joseph Ndiaye was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Paris 8 in 2004. When he passed away in 2009, Ndiaye was celebrated as a national hero. His significance in the struggle for the recognition of the horrors of the slave trade cannot be overestimated. As a result of his work, the island has become the 'memory island' (*l'île mémoire*) of the slave trade as authorized by UNESCO.

Theatre of Memory

The House of Slaves looks like many other houses in the rue Saint Germain – one of the island's most picturesque streets – but its front door singles it out as a *lieu de mémoire*. Signs on the door provide information on opening hours, admission fees, and dress codes for visitors, setting it apart as a memorial. Through a short passage, the visitors reach the central courtyard where they find themselves in front of the iconic façade of the House of Slaves, consisting of two curved stairways leading to a gallery composed of six bays. The curved stairways frame the view of the infamous 'Door of No Return', situated at the end of the corridor and leading from the courtyard to the back of the house. Its name references the idea that slaves were allegedly deported through this door to the slave ships anchored in front of the house. The view of the Door of No Return is the most iconic image of the slave trade in the global visual economy of slavery, perhaps due to its capacity to signify the trade. While the curved stairways to the gallery can be seen to signify the elevation of the White inhabitants over the slaves held in the ground-floor cells, the view through the Door of No Return invokes the departure of the enslaved onto the ships.[9] When they enter the house, many tourists instantly

[9] I am indebted to Simon Dell for this interpretation, which seems strikingly apt for the significance of the museum's architecture to its many, global publics.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

photograph this iconic perspective, which signifies the racialized structure of the Middle Passage, but the presence of other visitors sometimes disturbs the uninterrupted view through the Door of No Return and photographers will occasionally gesture to these wandering visitors to move on. In the iconography of the House of Slaves, the Door of No Return stands for the *absence* of the departed slaves. By adding this iconic view to the digital memory card of their cameras and mobile phones, the tourists store the absence of the departed in their personal archive. For many tourists, photographing the Door of No Return is the most significant act of commemoration enacted during their visit to the House of Slaves; their photographing of this iconic site conveys their commitment to the memorial politics of UNESCO.[10]

Those who take the tour will be told a story that is likely to affect them more viscerally. When he was the curator of the museum, Joseph Ndiaye himself provided the tours, a task now assumed by the successors he trained. In these tours, the amateur historian Ndiaye did not so much attempt to provide a balanced, historical account of the slave trade but related an unsettling, gripping story through snapshots of slave life in the House of Slaves. By focusing on emblematic stories of maltreatment, Ndiaye turned the house into a metonym for the oppression of African slaves and a metaphor for the horrors of the slave trade. Throughout the almost 50 years of his curatorship, Ndiaye's talk was the single most important discourse on the slave trade delivered at Gorée. Before his death, the curator transmitted the narrative to his successors, who continue to tell it in almost the same way as Ndiaye once did, although some parts seem to have changed.[11] Even though its recording was forbidden at some stage, Ndiaye's talk circulated widely on tape on the black market; in fact, a visit to the House of Slaves was not even required to hear Ndiaye's narrative. Parts of it were incorporated in the 'Interlude

[10] It is hard to do justice to the wide variety of experiences among European day trippers to the site, who spend the rest of their holiday in one of Senegal's resorts; Senegalese schoolchildren, on a compulsory museum visit; and African American pilgrims, for whom this may be the apogee of a trip they have anticipated for years. These experiences can hardly be generalized among the different categories of visitors or even among visitors of the same category. For an excellent inventory of the differences between the motivations of African American pilgrims to embark on a homecoming journey and their experiences in Senegambia, see Parry (2018). For a complex account of a homecoming journey in which the author rejects the spectacle of return and explicitly states that one should not seek redemption for slavery in an African identity, see Saidiya Hartman (2007).

[11] The most significant change is that the role of African intermediaries in the slave trade is currently acknowledged more prominently and that their role is compared with that of contemporary African elites in resource extraction, which benefits the elites but not the general population.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Joseph Ndiaye', followed by the track 'Gorée' on the album *Xalima* (The Quill) by Daara J, the most celebrated Senegalese hip-hop group of the twenty-first century.[12] Due to its wide dissemination, many Senegalese have heard Ndiaye's speech by listening to its recordings on YouTube.[13] At present, it is undoubtedly the best-known Senegalese speech – better known than Senghor's poetry or political speeches. It is no exaggeration to claim that this lecture surpasses the significance of Senegal's national hymn in the national imagination, as nobody knows the lyrics of the latter while Ndiaye's words need no explanation. Ndiaye's lecture has been formative in shaping Senegal's historical consciousness of the slave trade and it is hard to overestimate the impact it has had on a global scale; the UNESCO World Heritage List website featured parts of the lecture for decades, although more recently they have been removed.[14]

I visited the House of Slaves a number of times. Each time the curator would address the visitors with a word of welcome before introducing the place to them as 'The House of Slaves'. Remembering the tour vividly, let me describe how Ndiaye rendered the tragedy of the slave trade in a dramatic performance. Emphasizing Gorée's strategic position in the slave trade, he suggested that the House of Slaves constituted a veritable slave market and then focused on the slaves' sojourn there. Walking past the cells at the ground-floor level marked with the labels 'men', 'women', and 'children', he reminded the visitor that 'every cell has its history' (Figure 1.5).

The audience learned how 15–20 slaves were incarcerated in atrocious, unhygienic conditions and how female slaves attempted to seduce their owners, as pregnancy with their master's offspring offered the only window to freedom. The curator also explained that slaves weighing less than 60 kilograms were subjected to a dietary regime to fatten them up.

[12] Daara J was formed in 1997 when all its members were in secondary school. *Xalima* was their second album, released in 1999 by Déclic Communication.

[13] The original text as related by Joseph Ndiaye, adapted for Daara J, can be heard on YouTube in a video entitled 'L'histoire de L'ile de Gorée du Sénégal. Recit de Joseph Ndiaye. Extrait de l'Album "Xalima" de Daara J'. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bPeMPlNMEA (accessed 29 March 2020). The video 'Gorée, la porte du voyage sans retour' by Institut du Tout-Monde gives a view of the lecture delivered in the House of Slaves itself. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMchSdnJCBw (accessed 29 March 2020).

[14] The presentation on the House of Slaves on the UNESCO World Heritage List website consisted of a sequence of photographs available as icons on its Gorée Island pages. Clicking on the icons showed the full photograph in the central pane, including captions derived from Ndiaye's lecture. The texts were not identified as being taken from Ndiaye's lecture and so could be understood as having been provided and authorized by UNESCO. Why the lecture was removed is not known, but I presume that it may be related to the controversy over its content (see the section in this chapter on 'History Versus Testimony'). At present, the site shows a video produced by UNESCO TV, which provides a basic narrative on the island and the House of Slaves. See https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/26 (accessed 26 March 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1.5 Rooms in the House of Slaves are labelled 'men', 'women', and 'children'. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

Let me quote a passage from a guidebook that was sold at the House of Slaves to present part of Ndiaye's lecture, translated from French into English:

The present-day slave house dates back to 1776, built as it were by the Dutch [sic]. It is the last-built slave station on the Island, for the first ones go back to 1536, built by the Portuguese who were the first Europeans [to] have trodden on the soil of the Island in 1444.

The total establishment varied between 150 and 200 human beings (men, women and children) kept in separate cells. They would be sitting with their backs to the wall and with shackles around the necks and arms. They were freed only once per day to enable them to relieve themselves.

Generally, the slaves were living in such a despicable health status that the first plague epidemics that ravaged the Island in 1779 started from this sanctuary.

Often times in this very house, one could find one whole family: father, mother and child separated. Their departure to the Americas depended on potential purchasers, the father would be going to Louisiana, in the USA, the mother to Brasil or Cuba and the child to Haïti or the West Indies.

They would be leaving Goree not with their African names but with mere registration numbers. Once in the plantations, they would be taking the names of their respective white masters. This is why the blacks in the US have English names whereas those in Brazil doned Portuguese names and those in Cuba

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Spanish names where those in Haïti or the French West Indies took French names or surnames.

The value of a child depended on his tooth growth and that of a woman on her bosom. A young girl would be considered a maiden only if her breast held up firm, an ancient African custom which the Slave Traders, at the time, borrowed for the sake of their business in order to sell better their human merchandise.

Time again, many girl slaves had intercourse with the Slave traders and when pregnancy occurred out of such commerce, they would be set free on the Island or at Saint-Louis of Senegal.

Under the two horse-shore [sic] shaped staircases, are the oubliette-cells of those who would be reluctant to accepting their plight.

There was also the weighing room, for the price of a man was commensurate with his weight and muscle strength, once weighed, the men were sent to be auctioned in front of the horse-shoe shaped stairs where they would be fingered like cattle so as to allow the European buyer and trader, leaning over the balcony, to évaluate [sic] the strength of each and every Slave.

Each African ethnic group had their own quotation and specialization, just like cattle or horse, the highest bidden race was the 'Yoruba' from Western Nigeria and Eastern Benin (former Dahomey). The 'Yoruba' were considered as good breeders for reproduction purposes and they were often called 'stud slaves' or 'stallions'. (Ndiaye nd: 15–16)[15]

Through such gruelling details, the curator conveyed the inhumanity of the trade to an attentive audience. He would also draw attention to the fact that the dark and damp rooms of the ground floor were reserved for the storage of slaves, while the cool and well-ventilated rooms on the first floor served as offices and living rooms for the inhabitants. This arrangement had the additional benefit that the house owner could survey the slaves set on domestic chores in the courtyard. Standing in the courtyard while listening to the curator, the audience could thus easily imagine how the architecture of the house reflected the information provided. The curator knew how to impart an object lesson. At one lecture I attended, an apprentice of the curator illustrated the organization of slavery in the house by addressing a random White visitor standing on one of the stairways: 'Hey there, you look just like a slave trader!' With another joke, the historical identification was reversed and the visitor reassured, but through such transhistorical comparisons the House of Slaves constituted – and

[15] For a brief description of the brochure *The Slave House of Goree-Island*, see footnote 1. The quotation here is from the section about life in the House of Slaves, which is similar to the speech Ndiaye used to deliver in the House of Slaves. The speech is not marked as such in the text but follows on neatly from the section on the history of house construction at Gorée. Spelling mistakes in this excerpt are reproduced from the original.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

still constitutes – a theatre of memory that blurs linear time. The interpretation of the House of Slaves was naturalized in its very architecture, which materialized the curator's historical account. Interestingly, although the curator always told the audience that the house was built in 1776, he never dwelled on its different uses throughout history or its renovations in the 1960s and 1980s.[16] The house was thus set in a specific moment – the apogee of the slave trade – enabling the curator to freeze it as the scene of the trauma to which he gave testimony.

This 'de-historicization' is one of the requirements for the House of Slaves to work and to offer the various visitors the possibility of suturing past and present in temporalities of reconciliation. One of the most important devices in this technique of temporality is the Door of No Return, which, as already noted, provides the iconic image of the House of Slaves. During his tour, the curator takes the visitors to the door and informs them that it once provided access to a pier where the slave ships moored.[17] This assertion belies the logic that Gorée derived its maritime function from its quiet bay, which is situated on the northern side of the island. But this curatorial intervention has enabled African Americans to identify the last bit of African soil their ancestors touched before they embarked on the Middle Passage, a possible origin, in the memorial museum itself (cf. Ebron 1999).[18] The threshold of the Door of No Return is worn by many footsteps. Here, the curator used the materiality of the house to fit his 'historical' narrative in a way that raised concerns with various historians.

If the gate of Auschwitz is the iconic image of the Holocaust, the Door of No Return is the equivalent for the slave trade. Several slave castles along the West African coast have their designated 'door', providing a generic, codified image of the slave trade. The iconic image may originate in the Ghanaian fort of Elmina, where a door has been used for roots tours for a

[16] I assume that the two restorations of the House of Slaves were driven by an agenda to establish historical verisimilitude, but I have not been able to ascertain which historical period the current house reflects. I have been informed, but unable to verify, that this restoration involved decisions that were contested. (See also Bruner (1996), who discusses the highly controversial restoration of Elmina Castle in Ghana.) The curator never referred to any restorations of the house.

[17] Joseph Ndiaye's (2006) children's book *Il fut un jour à Gorée … L'esclavage raconté à nos enfants* (Once upon a time on Gorée … Slavery told to our children), published after he had retired as curator, includes a drawing of the pier. This imaginary construction serves to support the idea that slaves would have passed through the Door of No Return when embarking the slave ships, which historically would have moored in the quiet bay on the northern side of the island.

[18] The fact that this 'origin' is situated in the House of Slaves, in the slave depot from which the ancestors left, makes it a place that will always invoke mourning and can never be a straightforward site of healing. See Hartman (2002; 2007) for very incisive reflections on this.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

considerable time (Bruner 1996), but, in the literature on Gorée, the invention of the Door of No Return is always attributed to Joseph Ndiaye. The Door of No Return shares a museological function with the Jewish Museum Berlin, designed by Daniel Libeskind, in which the annihilation of Jews and their absence from Berlin are represented through voids in the museum space (Young 2000; Huyssen 2003). The voids in both the Jewish Museum Berlin and the Door of No Return signify the absence of the departed. And just as the visitor to the Jewish Museum Berlin engages with the Holocaust by entering the vacant space of the Holocaust Tower, the narrative emplotment of the door depends on visitor engagement. Many African Americans are photographed in front of the Door of No Return as the door their ancestors passed through to embark on the Middle Passage. While White tourists photograph the Door of No Return as a *historical* passage to the New World that signals absence, African American pilgrims disrupt this historicizing perspective on the passage *by posing in front of it.* Turning their backs to the door, they block the perspective on the Atlantic and displace the iconic absence of the departed with their own presence, asserting their ancestors' survival of the Middle Passage and their own homecoming by inserting themselves in the image (Figure 1.6) The resulting photograph conveys their overcoming of the atrocities of the Middle Passage and the plantation economy and

Figure 1.6 Visitors to the House of Slaves are photographed in front of the 'Door of No Return'. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

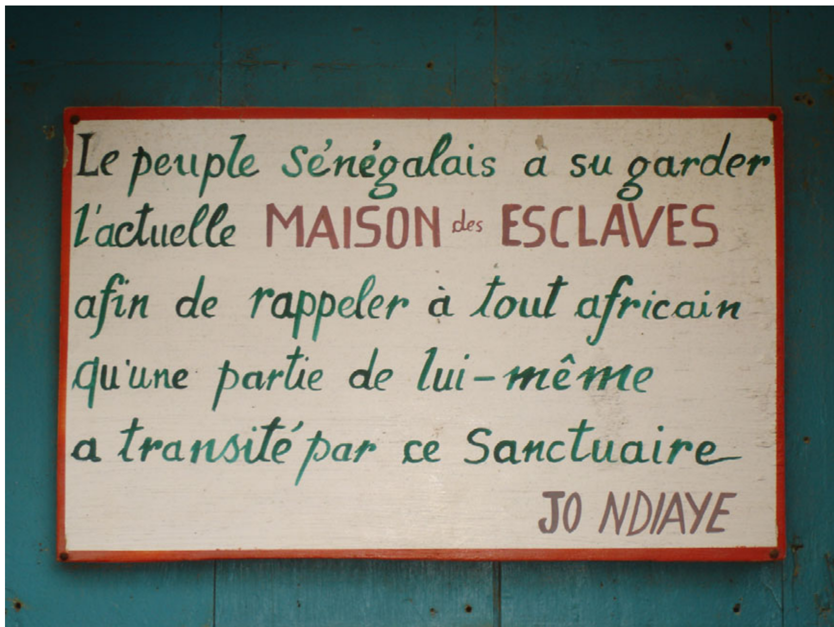

Figure 1.7 Sign attached to the front of the House of Slaves.
Photographer: Ferdinand de Jong

may serve as a souvenir of their survival and homecoming once they have returned to America. The commemoration of the slave trade in the House of Slaves by African Americans thus relies on the technology of photography to replace absence with presence and to capture a temporality of return in a single image. By engaging with the door, African Americans stage a temporality of overcoming – not unlike the Marches of the Living organized by Jewish pilgrims in Auschwitz.[19]

While the House of Slaves serves as a technique of temporality that enables African Americans to return and experience overcoming, the Door of No Return is framed in another register in the sign that has long marked the entrance to the House of Slaves (Figure 1.7):

[19] Both Holsey (2008) and Tillet (2012: 104) think that the Door of No Return has redemptive qualities. Writing about a visit to Cape Coast Castle, Ghana, and the presentation of the Door of No Return as a gateway to Africa, Holsey (2008: 189) says: 'African American visitors often applaud at this point in the tour. It represents the climax of the tour; after the demoralising experience of the dungeons, the Door of Return brings a redemptive quality to the story of enslavement.'

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Senegalese people have safeguarded this house to remind every African that part of him has passed through this sanctuary (J. Ndiaye).[20]

It is significant that this statement should be on display over the entrance door to the House of Slaves, the house identified here as having been rescued by the Senegalese people. While the house is thus presented as a monument, the Door of No Return, at the opposite end of the house, is presented in a narrative mode known as 'historical realism' (Handler and Gable 1997). Pointing to that door, the curator used to state: 'This is the door through which the enslaved embarked the slave ships.' These different registers – representation versus realism – serve to make the House of Slaves work as a memorial museum in which the visitor is not only acquiring knowledge but remembering. Comparing the front and back door of the House of Slaves helps us understand how the house frames the experience it provides between these doors as an essentially Black experience. The entrance door to the Black Atlantic is framed as a door that 'every African has passed through', a phrase to be understood as a Pan-African statement that exonerates the Africans who were implicated in the slave trade and admonishes the visitors to 'forget' who delivered the slaves at that front door. Rather than addressing the unspeakable African complicity in the trade, the entrance commemorates every African visitor as a victim of the slave trade. The House of Slaves thus provides a Pan-African interpretation of the slave trade, not dissimilar to the way in which the slave trade is remembered in other African countries such as Ghana (Schramm 2007; Silverman 2015b).

Placing the front door and the back door in different registers, the House of Slaves operates as a technique of memory that produces a sense of global brotherhood between Africans and those forced into the Middle Passage. Invoking the French historian Renan, Benedict Anderson (1991) has reminded us that the citizens of a nation need to remember that they have a great deal in common, but they also need 'to have forgotten' past atrocities in the proto-history of the nation.[21] The complicity in the slave trade is thus forgotten in the making of Pan-African solidarity. As Araujo (2012) has noted, in many memorials to the slave trade a victimhood narrative prevails over any acknowledgement of the

[20] My translation.

[21] In the literature on homecoming journeys, occasional emphasis has been placed on the disjunctures in the encounter between Africans and African American pilgrims in which the latter are often not recognized as Africans, but as Whites, Americans, *Toubab*, or *Obruni* (strangers). See the discussions in Bruner (1996), Hartman (2007), Holsey (2008), Schramm (2010), and Parry (2018). As all these authors point out, this identification of African Americans shatters the Pan-African sense of solidarity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

historical implication of African elites. But, one may ask, at what expense? As Achille Mbembe reminds us:

> The appeal to race as a moral and political foundation for solidarity will always depend, in some way, on a mirage of consciousness so long as continental Africans have not reconsidered the slave trade and other forms of slavery, not only as a catastrophe that befell them, but also as the product of a history that they actively helped shape by the ways in which they treated each other. (Mbembe 2001: 26)

The House of Slaves functions as a site of expiation that narrates a history from which Africans are exonerated, transforming African visitors into victims of the trade notwithstanding the roles historically played by African elites. Due to this emplotment, African complicity in the slave trade remains the haunting spectre at this uncanny house. However, Joseph Ndiaye's successor, Éloi Coly, has inserted a new element in the narration of the house, one in which he draws a parallel between the slave-trading elites of Africa's past and the exploitation of the continent's riches by Africa's contemporary elites, accusing both of enriching themselves at the expense of African populations. The denunciation of comprador elites has been an enduring element in the radical Pan-African critique of Walter Rodney (1972), and it is significant that this Marxist critique is now given a home in the House of Slaves. The House of Slaves thus functions as an archive of Afro-radicalism, in which empathy for the plight of slaves is mobilized for contemporary political struggles.[22]

History versus Testimony

Although Joseph Ndiaye would acknowledge African complicity in the slave trade, in many ways his account of the slave trade was not in keeping with prevalent historical interpretations. For instance, one of the claims Ndiaye used to make was that 15–20 million slaves were traded from Gorée and that 6 million died in the Middle Passage. In the brochure that was sold at the House of Slaves, Ndiaye states:

> Slavery will have lasted three centuries at Gorée: from 1536, date of the first Portuguese slave stations to 1848, date of its abolition by France. Three centuries during which, 15 to 20 million Negroes coming from the whole of West Africa left Goree [sic] for the Americas, out of whom 6 million died of various deprivations or ill treatment. (Ndiaye nd: 16)

[22] I cannot substantiate the claim that Coly has inherited Senghor's and Césaire's earlier reclamation of the radical legacy of Schoelcher's republicanism at the centenary of abolition in 1948, but it seems a distinct probability.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

These figures greatly exceed the total number of slaves traded from Africa, which are currently estimated to be around 12.5 million for the entire transatlantic trade from Africa, not from the island of Gorée alone. In terms of the total numbers of slaves traded, slave trade ports in Ghana and Benin were historically much more important. The exaggeration in Joseph Ndiaye's account of the history of the slave trade severely impacted the reception of his lectures. In 1995, the American historian Philip Curtin, author of an authoritative census on the Atlantic slave trade (Curtin 1969), contradicted Ndiaye's claim that millions of slaves passed through the Door of No Return before embarking on the slave ships headed for the Middle Passage. His intervention resulted in a controversy that spanned the Atlantic world.[23] It began when Curtin posted a note at the newly founded internet listservs H-Slavery and H-Africa, stating that Ndiaye's project was a 'scam'.[24] The ensuing discussion was picked up by the journalist Emmanuelle de Roux, who published an article in the French newspaper *Le Monde* summarizing Curtin's criticisms of Ndiaye's narrative.[25] Referring to the House of Slaves as a 'myth', the French journalist stated: 'The legend of the House of Slaves is the product of the talented Joseph Ndiaye, who has dedicated a dozen years to forging a myth which today has become truth.'[26] When Senegalese scholars learned about the controversy, they organized a conference, with the proceedings swiftly published in a volume edited by the historian Djibril Samb (1997). Although they failed to produce the evidentiary basis for Ndiaye's claims, the Senegalese historians who participated in the conference vindicated the curator. Their most important argument made in his defence was that 'the discourse that commemorates that function of the island [i.e. as a way station in the slave trade] never pretended to follow the rules of academic production of knowledge and, consequently, cannot be measured by them' (Thioub and Bocoum 1997: 200, my translation).

Ndiaye continued to authorize his claims by framing his tours with the provocative statement '*L'Histoire ne ment pas*!' (History doesn't lie!).

[23] This controversy has been critically discussed by Samb (1997), Austen (2001), Palmié (2010), and Hinchman (2015). See Hinchman (2006; 2015: 303–28) for a characterization of the antagonistic atmosphere in which this debate took place.

[24] The listservs H-Slavery and H-Africa cannot be searched for any posts dating back to the 1990s but accounts of the exchanges can be found in Austen (2001), Hinchman (2006; 2015), and Palmié (2010).

[25] Emmanuel de Roux, 'Le mythe de la Maison des Esclaves qui résiste à la réalité', *Le Monde*, 27 December 1996.

[26] Ibid., my translation. The original text is: '*La légende de la Maison aux esclaves doit tout à l'indéniable talent de Joseph N'Diaye qui a mis une douzaine d'années à forger un mythe qui, aujourd'hui, a force de loi.*'

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although this statement demonstrates that memory requires authorization by history, the historical 'truth' on the slave trade produced at Gorée is authorized by UNESCO rather than by professional historians.[27] Historians may question the epistemological value of Ndiaye's claim that 'history doesn't lie' in relation to his claims, but at the House of Slaves audiences never questioned this statement, which was presented with panache by Ndiaye.[28] It is important to acknowledge that Ndiaye's lecture exaggerated the numbers of slaves deported from the island. However, his lecture was not so much a history lesson – and, in that sense, the Senegalese historians were correct – but a testimony, which needs to be understood as a register of speech that has a different relation to evidence compared with history (Derrida 2005). Holding up reproductions of shackles and an iron ball that he claimed were once used to prevent slaves from escaping, Joseph Ndiaye *performed* his testimony. The sonority of his voice intonated how slaves must have suffered – and with his agonized expression, his performance assumed even more veracity. Giving testimony to 300 years of the slave trade, his authority was derived not only from his own testimonial re-enactment; a range of celebrities and political leaders from around the world supported his account. Holding up the chains, Ndiaye stood in front of a wall to which he had tacked numerous testimonies of leading African American Hollywood actors and performers as well as Black poets and politicians who had visited the house – as witnesses to Ndiaye's performance. On little snippets of paper these celebrities had scribbled their testimonies to the horrors of the slave trade and to the significance of Joseph Ndiaye's work in the struggle for human rights. Holding up the shackles while standing in front of this wall, Ndiaye was backed up – literally – by an archive of testimonies from the world's leading Black entertainers and politicians.[29] In the conflict about the numbers Ndiaye used in his lecture, the

[27] See footnote 7 for details of the UNESCO website on Gorée Island and how it authorized Ndiaye's account. See https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/26 (accessed 26 March 2020).

[28] For a good overview of the epistemologies of history and testimony as they are theorized in relation to the experience of slavery, see Chivallon (2012; 2016); for discussions about the role of the archive and its limits for the production of a history and memory of slavery, see Trouillot (1995), Vergès (2005), Rice (2010), Rice and Kardux (2012), and Forsdick (2014). For a critical analysis of historicism as a mode of representation of the slave trade, see Palmié (2010).

[29] Testimony can be opposed to the archive as embodied memory to forms of inscription (cf. Connerton 1989), although some have argued that the archive is also embodied (Taylor 2003). This opposition is addressed in a special issue of *Social Anthropology* (Basu and De Jong 2016), in which the performativity of the archive is examined. In that issue, my own contribution seeks to understand the performativity of prayer as testimony (De Jong 2016b), here examined in Chapter 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1.8 The basalt ramparts on the ground level of the House of Slaves. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

historians focused on the content of the narrative and its historical accuracy, but Ndiaye used numbers precisely for their affective impact.

Drawing attention to the contrast between the luxury of the first floor and the austerity of the dungeons, Joseph Ndiaye used the architecture of the House of Slaves to enable its visitors to *witness* the conditions of the slave trade, set in the stones of the house and performed in his agony. The dark, damp rooms seemed haunted by the ghosts of the suffering slaves – and they enabled visitors to empathize with their oppressive experiences and calamitous fates. When I visited the House of Slaves with a Senegalese friend, I noticed how impressed she was with the black basalt blocks that were once part of the island's defence works and that constituted the ramparts on which the house was built; to her, they conveyed the living conditions and agony of the slaves (Figure 1.8). Ndiaye made the materiality of the House of Slaves speak and argue with the discursive assertions of the most authoritative historians from across the Atlantic. Activated by curator Joseph Ndiaye, the house is a *material* witness to the slave trade.

Multidirectional Memory

In a dissertation on the history of the House of Slaves, the Senegalese historian Pape Chérif Bertrand Bassène (2011) has analysed its function

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1.9 Visitor in the House of Slaves. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

in Senghor's wider cultural politics. Shortly after independence, Senghor established the Cultural Archives, which were to collect Senegal's oral traditions. His nomination of Joseph Ndiaye as curator of the House of Slaves should be understood as a pivotal element in his policy on the preservation of oral traditions. By deciding to appoint Ndiaye, Senghor privileged *orality* as a mode of transmission of the memory of the slave trade (ibid.: 385). Senghor made a distinction between inscribed and embodied memory, and, in his philosophy of Negritude, orality was a form of communication superior to written language (Bâ 1973: 101). Rationalized by Senghor's philosophy, orality inserted a value of Negritude into the remembrance of slavery in a UNESCO World Heritage site. Ndiaye indeed conveyed what Bennett (2007) has termed sense memory. For this reason, the House of Slaves became one of the earliest sites recognized by UNESCO as a memorial museum (Williams 2007: 9). It achieved this status largely due to Joseph Ndiaye, whose striking testimony affected his audiences. With the force of his baritone, Ndiaye assumed the role of witness in a museum turned into a courtroom.

Wieviorka (2006) argues that the Eichmann trial was a pivotal moment in the recognition of the Holocaust as a crime against humanity, as it gave rise to the public figure of the witness, a new authority in the legal process who offered testimony to the atrocity perpetrated by the Nazis. In this

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

unique speech act, Agamben (1999) has argued, the witness utters the unspeakable. Indeed, while holding up the ball and chains, Joseph Ndiaye conveyed the unspeakable horrors to which the enslaved were subjected. In the absence of live witnesses, Ndiaye performed a testimony as if he himself had survived the slave trade (Araujo 2014: 64). One thus begins to see to what extent the commemoration of the slave trade was entangled with the Holocaust. Ndiaye always declared the slave trade to be the 'most important genocide that humanity has ever known'. By estimating the number of slaves who died in the Middle Passage at 6 million, the well-understood implication was that the collateral damage of the slave trade equalled the total number of Jewish victims in the Nazi concentration camps.[30] In his speech, the island of Gorée was presented as the equivalent of Auschwitz.[31] But what made his speech speak directly to the Holocaust was the affect it caused by invoking the number of 6 million. One can only speculate what impact this figure will have had on untold numbers of visitors, but horror might approximate it best. One visitor to the House of Slaves left this comment in the visitor book: 'Thank you, Mister Curator, for this visit brought back to life the Horrors of Nazi concentration camps. May whites and blacks do everything possible to avoid repeating this gloomy past.'[32] Clearly, a visit to the House of Slaves generated memories of several traumas. In his collected 'Quotations', Ndiaye made the comparative nature of his commemoration explicit:

GOREE …

DACHAU

THE GULAG

What a long way we have yet to tread before becoming humane? (Ndiaye nd: 26)[33]

[30] This raises questions about historical referentiality that were addressed by Caruth (1996) and were subsequently widely discussed in debates about trauma (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). Assmann (2006) has suggested that victim testimonies should be situated *between* history and memory, but as Ndiaye's case demonstrates, historians have squarely situated his testimony in the realm of subjective memory. Bennett (2007) posits that traumatic memory has not been experienced in the past but is experienced in the present. Kesselring (2017) has examined the transmission of trauma as embodied memory and its testimony in the context of court cases in the post-apartheid state of South Africa.

[31] In his PhD thesis, Pape Chérif Bertrand Bassène (2011: 397–402) gives an account of the various instances in which Joseph Ndiaye explicitly compared the slave trade to the Holocaust, often in ways that questioned the singularity of the Holocaust and sometimes in inflammatory wordings.

[32] This testimony is signed by Hans Christopher Buch, a German writer of Haitian origin (Ndiaye nd: 32).

[33] Typo in the original.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ndiaye's comparisons between Auschwitz and Gorée remind us of the work by Rothberg (2009), who claims that the spread of Holocaust memory and consciousness around the world has set the stage for a competition between different victimage memories. The claims made by Ndiaye certainly attest to this competition and call for attention.[34] In this respect, Araujo (2014: 10) has argued that:

> when the victims and witnesses of the horrors of slavery are silenced, the constant references to the Holocaust in public discourses about the Atlantic slave trade can also be understood as a way to legitimise the memorialisation of slavery, which is far from being recognised in the public landscape of former slave ports.

Even though the position taken by Joseph Ndiaye seemed firmly entrenched in a competition of victimizations, the tragedy of the slave trade clearly owes its recognition to the multi-directionality of Holocaust memory in which comparison serves to generate recognition.

In his attempt to decentre the hegemonic position of the Eichmann trial and to provide an alternative account of the emergence of testimony that privileges an 'exclusivist national identity [i.e. Israel's identity] premised on a unique suffering', Rothberg admirably demonstrates how Holocaust memory was part of 'a multidirectional network connecting it to movements of decolonisation' (Rothberg 2009: 178). Indeed, the commemoration of the Holocaust and the anti-racism it generated contributed to the policy of self-determination adopted by UNESCO, while African Americans such as W. E. B. Du Bois certainly contributed to the recognition of the significance of the Holocaust. In this context, I would like to decentre Holocaust memory in another direction by suggesting that, while Eichmann's trial provided the foundation for the witness as a figure of authority, Joseph Ndiaye's performance established the figure of the witness in the memorial museum. With Ndiaye, testimony entered the museum as a space for memorial justice. By the same token, his struggle for the slave trade to be recognized also gave an *African* voice to the authentication and authorization of a Pan-African trauma. But Ndiaye's performance not only embodied an African voice; it also authorized an African mode of historical transmission in a UNESCO World Heritage site. Senghor formalized Ndiaye's role as curator just after the Eichmann trial (in 1961) and the publication of Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition: a study in historical methodology* (1965). Senghor's museological intervention drew on the new status for orality

[34] For an incisive analysis of the competition of victimage memories in France in the early twenty-first century, opposing the memories of *shoah* and slavery, and its implications for the political organization of Black citizens in France and its overseas dominions, see Camus (2006).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and realized an epistemological shift that privileged African techniques of transmission over history as a discipline based on archival documents. Hence, the appointment of Joseph Ndiaye signalled a decolonization of Western epistemology in a state-orchestrated reappropriation of the African past. In the dungeons of the House of Slaves, African memory was reclaimed to stand up and defy White history. The UNESCO website published Ndiaye's testimony and continued to do so even after the 1996 controversy, until it was finally removed when the site was refurbished. The performance by Ndiaye, formalized by Senghor and authorized by UNESCO, established him as a witness to the slave trade and orality as a mode of African transmission. Moreover, it established the memorial museum as an archive of affect to be mobilized for political emancipation and reparatory justice.

Speaking from the Past

Presenting the history of the slave trade as counter-modern narrative, Ndiaye's performance was well received by African Americans escaping America's everyday racial violence, but his performance was not conceived merely to reiterate the depravities of slavery. As Ndiaye recalled in the introduction to his children's book, *Once Upon a Time at Gorée*:

> The tragedy of slavery represents our shared history. On all continents, its memory is necessary to construct the future. We have never built anything on oblivion and silence. (Ndiaye 2006: 12, my translation)

By enacting a *devoir de mémoire* (the Duty to Remember), Ndiaye made it his mission to remind visitors of the dangers of racism. As we know, the duty to remember often has a pedagogic aim (see Figure 1.10). Reading Ndiaye's account of the historical struggles for the abolition of slavery, it seems that his interpretation of the slave trade was meant to speak to the future. The tour that Ndiaye provided through the House of Slaves established a discourse of African victimhood and contributed to the global recognition of the slave trade as a crime committed against humanity. But as utopia is often imagined as a mirror of dystopia (Gordin et al. 2006), Ndiaye's invocation of the dystopia of slavery also served to proclaim universal human rights.

Today, Joseph Ndiaye's performance is no longer required to establish the duty to remember the slave trade. On many websites and in many newspapers, in films, documentaries, and works of art across the world, Gorée is presented as the most important harbour in the Atlantic slave trade and its Door of No Return as the door through which millions were forced into the Middle Passage. These positions are still authorized by

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 1.10 Students visiting the House of Slaves. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

the Slave Route Project on the UNESCO website, which, until recently, included a selection of photographs documenting Joseph Ndiaye's performance at the House of Slaves.[35] While many tourists still rely on the narrative told at the House of Slaves, virtually all travel guides available on the market include a warning against the tour provided by Ndiaye and his successors. The French *Guide Evasion Sénégal* presents the House of Slaves thus:

> Without denying its value as a symbol of human tragedy, the House of Slaves was one of many of the island's merchant houses, where one traded Arabic gum, ivory and gold. Its first floor – which is accessed through double stairways – housed apartments and offices, while its basement served as storage and servant rooms. Like all such merchant houses it has occasionally lodged transit slaves, but it never was the 'slave depot' that it is often made out to be. Let the curator relate the house's sad moments, but do not forget that it was not at Gorée that slaves were packed in small cells and that the door that gives access to the sea did not serve to embark slave ships … which would have broken on the rocks. (*Guide Evasion Sénégal*, 2008, pp. 92–4, my translation)

[35] The UNESCO website for the Slave Route Project included a virtual tour of the House of Slaves from 2000 onwards, but when I checked in June 2017 the video had been removed and replaced with another in which Ndiaye no longer figured. See footnote 6 for a website that still provides fragments of his lecture.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although the text firmly rejects the narrative related by curator Joseph Ndiaye, this rejection does not amount to negationism of the slave trade and it accepts the value of the House of Slaves as a memorial. The visitor is warned to distrust the history related by the curator, but the House of Slaves retains its unequivocal status as a *lieu de mémoire*. In my experience, tourists visiting the House of Slaves may be familiar with the controversy it stirred up in the 1990s and they may even disqualify the house as a 'myth' – borrowing the terminology coined by the journalist de Roux – yet they will nonetheless visit the House of Slaves and pay their respects. Today, the House of Slaves is one of the highly visited and sacred monuments to the slave trade (Tillet 2012: 102). De-authenticated as a historical site, the House of Slaves has nonetheless become an authoritative site of memory. African Americans come to mourn at a site that is sacred to the memory of their African ancestors and marks their departure into the Middle Passage. Meanwhile, the House of Slaves represents a place of atonement to European visitors. In keeping with UNESCO's original intention to bring about reconciliation, the House of Slaves materializes a shared racial history acknowledged by the descendants of the implicated subjects who made this history and who recognize each other as perpetrators and victims (see Figure 1.11).

Figure 1.11 Visitors leaving the House of Slaves. Photographer: Mamadou Gomis

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

At this place where the past remains unresolved, a utopia founded on a struggle for civil rights remains a compelling vision charged with a legacy of abolition. In 2013, US President Barack Obama, his wife Michelle, and their children visited the House of Slaves. The White House recorded their journey in a video that captured the Obamas arriving at the island, visiting the House of Slaves, listening to the guide, and looking through the Door of No Return. From the way in which Michelle Obama spoke of her visit, it can be gleaned how she transformed the past into a source of hope.[36] In the video, Michelle Obama recapitulates in words and spirit the lecture given by Joseph Ndiaye, this time spoken by a descendant of the enslaved. Returning to the Door of No Return, she gives testimony to her experience of visiting the House of Slaves:

Today, we boarded a ferry to Gorée Island, which is just off the coast of Senegal. Now, for roughly 300 years, until the mid-1840s, millions of men, women, and children from Africa were kidnapped from their homes and communities and brought to this island to be sold as slaves. Now, on the island, we saw cells where dozens of people were packed together for months on end. We saw the courtyard where they were forced to stand naked while buyers examined them, negotiated a price and bought them as if they were nothing but property. And we saw what is known as the Door of No Return, the doorway through which these men and women and children passed on their way across the ocean to a life of slavery, a brutal journey many of us know as the Middle Passage. Standing there, I thought about the terror and grief these people must have felt as they took their last steps through that doorway, knowing they would never again see their families or their country.

Standing right there, the First Lady remembered a struggle for emancipation:

There is no way to undo what happened on Gorée Island, and no way to erase the stain of slavery from our nation's past, but there is also no denying the course that history has taken since that time. Since then, we've seen so many brave men and women rise up against slavery and segregation and injustice and inequality of all kinds. People who came through this island would never have imagined how history would unfold, and they certainly could never have imagined that someone like me, a descendant of slaves, would come here, and look back through that door of no return. Maybe in the end, that is an argument for hope even in the face of the most unspeakable horrors, because time and again, both in America and around the world, we have seen that cruelty and oppression are no match for people of conscience who commit themselves to the cause of freedom.[37]

[36] Michelle Obama's engagement in the struggle for human rights, based on her public acknowledgement that her ancestors were enslaved at slave plantations, is unprecedented for a First Lady (see Araujo 2014).

[37] 'On board: behind the scenes with the President & the First Lady at Gorée Island', YouTube video, 28 June 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=69T24RQgZ9Y&t=68s (accessed 26 March 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086189.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press