

I Never Left

Senegal is not only the gateway to the Atlantic, but the center of the human spirit and the heart. Historically its ports and city have been used administratively and as a transshipment point for commerce and slave trade which attracted colonists and plunderers who left behind their ruins, diseases, imperialists past and way of life. The slave trade demonstrated the marketing and degradation of a race.

*Is it class or race?
How come
They dance in the moonlight while we toil
They plan at night while we sleep,
They bathe in the ocean while we fish
They sun bathe while we dance,
They shop while we mend our nets.
They peruse the villages while we tend to cattle,
They adapt our ways while we flaunt
They integrate while we sell,
They mimic -- while we speak
They militarize while we meditate,
They condition the mind -- to see through
Their eyes,
How come?*

The spirit and heart of Senegal is deep rooted in its people and traditions which withstood the domination of its colonial past. The society embraces traditional values, egalitarianism, varied ethnic groups, market economy, Christianity, Moslem, sorcery and other belief systems.

On a typical day dawn is welcomed by perching birds, grazing animals as well as fishermen laying their fish pots and nets. Women gather firewood, prepare millet, instruct and nurture children and they demonstrate their skills in hand crafting and food preparation. To complete this picture, vibrant children play in abandonment in the yards reflecting nature at its best with a variety of voices, moods and choices. Dogs bark, cocks crow intermittently and one feels at home while exploring the colourful spectacle of landscapes palm groves, farming communities, food crops, coconut trees, forts, Saint Louis, Slaves House on the island of Goree, Cayar-one of the main fishing centers, Joal--the village where Leopold Sedar was born, the shellfish cemetery, the peoples of Fadiouth. The wooden bridge at the latter location presents a spectacle when school children are returning from school. Places of interest include the resorts of Saly, Casamace in the South, Sine Saloum, the Retba Pink Lake. Other towns, villages, markets, wildlife, parks, the university, monuments, the cathedral, mosques, museums, national theatre as well as medicine men and women bear testimony to the past and modern development.

Dakar, the capital, situated on the tip of the "Cap Vert" peninsula is like any modern city. During the day it is bustling and hot with street vendors, hustlers, pick pocketers, beggars, handymen, gaily dressed

women, cars, trucks and dray carts. One can take time out to snack and have a drink of coconut water or local beverage to quench the thirst and wet the palate before engaging in the marketing structure and methods utilized by aggressive persistent entrepreneurs who do not take "no" for an answer. Self education or group education on the market culture, street discipline, respect for the way of life is a welcome and useful tool in alleviating fears among tourists, exchange groups and those on educational tours.

Tourism brings certain ills to a society and some escape the market place by going to Saly 'Cap Vert' or exclusive clubs and hotels which are equipped with the necessary facilities that will keep one in contact with "the world", mixing tranquillity and business with pleasure. Here the vibrant nightlife is filled with gaiety and the food is gourmet or local. Recreation is stimulating: from horseback riding, golf, disco, jazz clubs, to ladies and men of leisure.

The French and European presence is deep rooted and the colonial past is ever present in the super structures, laws, military and para military forces. Is Dakar polluted? I do not know, but industry and factories are present in Senegal and the skyline will speak for itself. I understand that hospital care, early education and university training are free but not compulsory. However, at the University there is a small stipend required for either room or board or both. Since many youths spend quality time in the market places and with tourists, I wonder how university enrollment levels will be maintained. It is good to note that most of these youths speak several foreign languages and their respective indigenous languages. They understand international issues, domination, music, the necessity of acquiring economic survival skills and the plight of the people of colour.

Visiting Senegal can be perceived as a return to one's roots or for others simply a means to enjoy the hospitality and country of a people who have risen above their inhumane past. For me, the historical analysis and briefings of the educational tour guide, Alpha Dibba, lingers and gives renewed hope for a better tomorrow. I salute you Brother Alfa. This is not a promotional piece but Senegal is home. I never left.

"I" Never Left

The waves beat on the shores

The wind gushes,

The sun radiates with exuberance

The moon remonstrates,

The stars retaliate.

"I" never left.

The heart symbolizes the drum,

The breath gravitates the mourning of the ancestors--

"GOREE".

The stench -- Lingers

"I" never left.

The eyes magnified the atrocities universally

The hands are un-latched,

The mouth spills fire--

The legs traversed the universe with messages of rebirth--

Revolution and revelation--the 21st century

"I" never left.

The blood nurtures and sustains the fountains of truth --

The Empires

The flesh reflects the harsh realities of the

Oppressed -- people of colour.

"I" never left.

"I" 'ME' "YOU" : FIRST PRINTED 1979, 1981 AND 1999

©Arnold Bathersfield 1979