

Exploring African and African Diaspora Losses to the Atlantic: Heritage tourism and future imaginations in Gorée Island (Senegal).

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From both African and African Diasporic perspectives, the history of Atlantic slavery is fundamentally that of a loss. On the African side, that loss is quantified in economic terms that upheld the continent in its current state of “underdevelopment”. From the Diasporic standpoint, what is lost is more generally evaluated in term of memory and identity. Consequently, the re-encounter between Africa and its Diaspora within the context of growing heritage tourism from the 1980s onward resulted in contradictory demands and different imaginings of the future. Heritage tourism in Gorée Island developed in a general context of economic crisis and unpopular structural adjustment plans in Senegal. In North America, this coincided to a period of an emerging African American middle class enjoying relative economic prosperity at a time of improved civil rights liberties. The shared traumatic experience of Atlantic slavery with its subjective memories and collective identity forged at the crossroads of the Atlantic ocean then coalesced with the commodification of culture, new technologies of corporate marketing and global consumerism. This paper argues that this disjuncture is the product of a lack of conversation between Africa and its Diasporas that each ignores the utopic ideals of the other. Desire for a better life than the difficult Atlantic past is key to inspiring imagining of future possibilities. Through the historicities of the individuals and of the collective memories of the various groups of belonging who claim the Island today, either for its imagined Atlantic heritage or, the new economic opportunities it offers, it is

argued in this thought-provoking paper that, Gorée Island is a fertile ground for utopian and dystopian African and African Diasporic futures.