

were planted and soils rapidly exhausted. He also discusses how British rule opened more land for farming and private ownership. In part, that process occurred through the spread of ideas (supported by ‘oral traditions’) about communal land and claims to it by appointed chiefly families, who alienated it. Here, as in various sections of the book, a gendered perspective would have been useful.

Islam, Power, and Dependency speaks in valuable ways to Africanist historians and other scholars, as well as to individuals who have absorbed rarely challenged ideas about Africa. Unfortunately, studies located in smaller, weaker present-day countries often are not as widely read as studies located in powerful states or those favored by western donor agencies. Hopefully, that trend will not affect the reception of Assan Sarr’s book, which deserves wide and serious attention.

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CITIZENSHIP IN THE FRENCH ATLANTIC EMPIRE

To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France’s Atlantic Empire.

By Lorelle Semley.

New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xxi + 362. \$32.99, paperback (ISBN: 9781107498471).

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Key Words: West Africa, colonialism, citizenship, Atlantic World.

Lorelle Semley argues that people of African descent in the French Atlantic empire were central actors in the development and enactment of notions of citizenship. She considers geography and temporality broadly, and she both focuses closely on individuals and also considers wide systems of empire. Unlike most studies of French colonialism, the book spans the first and the second French empires, from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, and covers the Caribbean, Africa, and France itself. Through an unwavering attention to colonial spaces and subjects, she demonstrates not only that men and women of color engaged in the struggle for citizenship, but also that, through their actions and their identities, they defined it.

Semley surmounts the methodological challenges of writing a trans-imperial history by weaving the stories of individuals into each chapter. Some are well-known, such as Toussaint Louverture or Gerty Archimede, and some are more obscure, such as Anne Rossignol, a free woman of color from Africa who lived in pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue, and Jean-Jacques Alin, a free man of color born in Martinique who entered the French colonial administration in Senegal. These biographical vignettes by no means form the entirety of each chapter, yet these stories play a significant dual purpose: they both anchor what otherwise could be a narrative that ranged too widely, and they demonstrate with striking clarity the specific ways in which people of color contested, negotiated, and created citizenship in the French empire. They also show the interconnectedness of the empire. The peripatetic individuals Semley highlights circulated around the

Atlantic in complex ways: among colonies, and back and forth between colonial and metropolitan spaces. By highlighting such journeys, Semley makes Africa a point of departure and of return. Nothing in the French Atlantic world, she emphasizes, went in a straight line, whether from enslaved to free, subject to citizen, or colony to metropole. Rather, connections and multiplicities defined empire, and also citizenship.

One of the most important interventions that Semley makes is to demonstrate the array of identities claimed by the colonial citizens she highlights, and to show how this heterogeneity predated and influenced the emergence of the concept of citizenship during the Age of Revolutions. The fascinating chapter ‘*Signares* before citizens’ investigates the political, economic, and cultural roles played by *signares*, a term that applied to certain elite women in and around Senegal during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the primary property holders on Gorée, Semley argues, these women made politically radical petitions to the French government that played local officials against metropolitan ones, and that also advanced their own interests. In doing so, they suggested that ‘Africans make good Frenchmen’, thus highlighting the simultaneity of their Frenchness and their Africanness while also complicating assumptions about gender and citizenship (91). Yet people of African descent, Semley claims, could, in the end, only assert their rights through the language of particularities (208). They could and did claim a broad spectrum of identities that pushed citizenship’s boundaries, but in accessing those rights they unintentionally reframed themselves as what Semley terms ‘unnatural citizens’ (204).

Throughout the book, Semley disrupts assumptions of a monolithic French universalism that stretches unbroken from the French Revolution to the present. In fact, she shows that men and women of color continually articulated and challenged concepts of citizenship, the form and content of which changed over time. Chapter Three, ‘When blacks broke the chains in the “Little Paris of the Antilles”’ strikes at the heart of this question by analyzing the moment of emancipation in Martinique in 1848, which demonstrated with vivid clarity that Antilleans ‘could be seen as legally French, yet remain second-class citizens (119). Here and elsewhere, Semley makes the timeliness of her historical intervention clear by connecting the past and the present. In Martinique, for example, tensions surrounding citizenship continue to play out in controversies about the present relationship between France and its *départements d’outre-mer*, and through debates over how to commemorate abolition. Semley’s use of oral history allows her to carefully historicize ongoing local disputes throughout.

The book is divided into three sections which roughly correspond to the first empire, abolition and the second empire (a slightly uneasy but intriguing pairing), and post-colonialism. While each chapter could be read or assigned separately, together they build a convincing case that men and women of African descent argued that colonial residents embraced multiple identities as an alternative to universality. Individuals used this multiplicity as a way to claim full citizenship and reject colonial subjecthood. They often made these claims based on their own particularities, for example, as free people of color, landowners, or well-educated elites. Even so, the implications are broad, and these challenges to citizenship prompted French officials — and provoke us — to ‘reimagine who could access rights, in political and in basic human terms’ (314). This book is

important reading for scholars of Africa, France, and its empire, transnational history, slavery, intellectual history, human rights, and citizenship.

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MUSLIM INTERPRETERS IN COLONIAL SENEGAL

Muslim Interpreters in Colonial Senegal, 1850–1920: Mediations of Knowledge and Power in the Lower and Middle Senegal River Valley.

By Tamba M'Bayo.

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. Pp. xxvii + 205. \$85.00, hardback (ISBN: 978-1-4985-0998-5).

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Key Words: Islam, colonial intermediaries, colonialism, Senegal.

This book's protagonists are Muslim interpreters who worked for colonial administrators in Saint Louis, Senegal, during a time of French territorial expansion and intensifying conflict with local rulers (c. 1850–1920). As previous studies have shown, interpreters and other intermediaries carried out complex work as cultural brokers and mediators between Europeans and other Africans.¹ They exercised considerable power to shape not only decisions made on both sides, but also to produce knowledge about Africans in colonial contexts.

M'Bayo's goal is to contribute a full-length, empirically grounded study of interpreters — a group largely neglected in academic literature and plagued by a reputation for dishonesty (largely due to the duplicitous interpreter characters in Amadou Hampâté Bâ's *The Fortunes of Wangrin*). M'Bayo's study illuminates the complexity of the interpreters' positions. Neither collaborators nor resisters, he argues, Muslim interpreters in French colonial Senegal reveal a paradox: 'while employed by a French colonizing regime they not only looked after the interests of their local community, but also strived to maintain some degree of autonomy' (1). The book complements David Robinson's *Paths of Accommodation* (2000), which covers roughly the same geographical and temporal space and similarly focuses on the agency of Muslims who forged relations of accommodation with the French. But while Robinson's principal subjects are prominent Sufi leaders such as the founder of the Muride brotherhood, Amadou Bamba, M'Bayo focuses exclusively on the interpreter corps.

Chapter One reconstructs the biographies of some of the administration's most influential Muslim interpreters: Hamat Ndiaye Anne (1813–1879), Bou El Mogdad Seck (1826–1880), his son Mahmadou Seck (1867–1943), and Mambaye Fara Biram Lô (1869–1926). These portraits are drawn primarily from sources generated by and

¹ See, for example, B. N. Lawrance, E. L. Osborn, and R. S. Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African employees in the making of colonial Africa* (Madison, WI, 2006).