

MAKING AND REMAKING MOSQUES IN SENEGAL, ISLAM IN AFRICA SERIES, VOL. 13, CLEO CANTONE, (2012)

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Marketed as the first major study on contemporary Senegalese architecture, as well as the first major study of mosque space from a gender perspective, the five main chapters of *Making and Remaking Mosques in Senegal* are divided into three broader divisions: 'From Conversion to Construction' (Chapter 1); 'The Quest for an Appropriate Aesthetic' (Chapters 2 and 3); and 'Discourse, Gender and Identity' (Chapters 4 and 5).

The first chapter is primarily concerned with identifying precolonial mosque architecture in Senegal, which is difficult to reconstruct because of a paucity of extant examples and the inadequacy of textual sources in describing built spaces. The scanty accounts of Arab geographers and early European visitors are attributed to the lack of monumentality in precolonial prayer spaces, erected in materials similar to those of the average residence. This chapter secondarily focuses on a group of six earthen mosques in the Futa Toro region thought to have been built in the mid to late nineteenth century in the wake of the jihad of al-Hajj Umar Tall (c.1794–1864) and constituting a peripherally related set of precolonial works. The main question raised is whether these mosques constitute a regional variation of the Sudanese style as represented by the monumental mud Great Mosque of Jenne in Mali. Despite significant stylistic differences, the common use of earth as a building material suffices for the author to identify and thus recategorize these as neglected regional examples of the Sudanese style, although such would characterize the vast majority of architecture across the continent.

The second chapter focuses on the early colonial period in Senegal until 1920, particularly in the cities of Dakar and Saint Louis, with an emphasis on typologies of building. French patronage of mosque building until World War I is understood in terms of the French programme of assimilation (1833–1920s) particularly represented by the cathedral-type mosque with pitched roofs, triangular pediments, twin towers on the western side and crenellations. A second group of mosques, the veranda style, seems to have been built primarily by shaykhs of the Sufi brotherhoods who came to dominate Senegalese Islam and were generally constructed on a smaller scale, employing verandas and stocky 'mirador-minarets'. The author suggests that the latter mosque type may derive from the Afro-Brazilian style. The third chapter examines the introduction of the neo-Sudanese style, formulated at colonial expositions in Paris during the 1920s to the 1950s as an aesthetic created specifically to represent African Islam, in distinction most significantly to Algeria. The introduction of this new style was also the result of a new French emphasis on association in the 1920s in which African colonial subjects were expected to maintain their cultural distinctiveness, rather than assimilation policies that anticipated wholesale conversion to French culture. Mosques built without colonial support incorporated aspects of the cathedral mosque, veranda mosques and an initial turn toward emulation of North African exemplars in the use of horseshoe arches, domes and tall

square minarets. Though not clearly stated, the implication is that locally sponsored works resisted the stylistic identity imposed by the colonial regime.

The turn toward North Africa, signified through the use of the aforementioned stylistic elements, is more pronounced in the fourth chapter, reflecting the search for a postcolonial idiom after 1960. Mosques founded by the Tijaniyya Sufi order in particular employ a North African style as a result of this brotherhood's origins in Morocco and Algeria. The mosques associated with the second most popular Sufi movement, the Muridiyya, borrow from North African architecture in a more eclectic and creative manner. The author suggests that the divergence from strictly mimicking North African works denotes the movement's founding by a Senegalese shaykh. In contrast to Sufi mosques, a new group of more austere mosques has emerged in connection with the youthful Ibadou, or Sunni reformist, movement. In addition to their austerity, these foundations incorporate institutions for education and other charitable functions, largely absent from Sufi mosques.

The place of women in Senegalese Islam, and the gendering of mosque architecture, forms the basis of the fifth chapter. Cantone points out that it is generally unacceptable for women in Senegal to pray in the mosque. Only in Ibadou mosques have women begun to claim this right, leading the author to assert that the traditional absence of women in mosques is based on the patriarchy of local Wolof culture. The chapter ends with several examples of Ibadou mosques that have made allowance for women worshippers, either through the creation of a separate prayer space or through separation of the sexes by a physical barrier.

This book was originally the author's 2006 doctoral dissertation at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and would have benefited from more revision. The first chapter, for example, seems to have little bearing on the rest of the book. Its main original contribution, that the Futa Toro mosques derived their restrained style from military architecture, is of interest but not convincingly argued. Likewise, the epilogue promises to explore the potential for sustainable mosque architecture in Senegal; but after briefly weighing the advantages of cement versus earthen mosques, the author abandons that objective and concludes with a summary of the previous five chapters.

A good editor would have been helpful. There are numerous instances of run-on sentences, missing subjects, extraneous words and contradictory statements. Of greater concern are the serious theoretical shortcomings. The unproblematic acceptance of the work of Cheikh Anta Diop and A.M. Lam, Afrocentrist scholars who championed ancient Egypt as the source of African civilization, leads the author to affirm an ancient Egyptian origin for West African mosque architecture, and an ethnic basis for architectural style, completely out of step with contemporary scholarship. The last chapter on gender, which promised to be the most thought provoking, was also theoretically problematic. The author spent significant effort in decrying what she describes as 'a Western liberal feminist perspective bent on exposing the oppression of Muslim women and their subordination to men' (301). Yet, she seems to be committed to the very positions that she critiques, on two occasions even apologizing to the reader for using feminist terminology and ideology to explore the gendering of space (334, n. 110; 342). Ethnographic and historical problems are also evident, particularly in reference to the Fulbe, Hausa and to northern Nigeria:

... Hausa – with its connections to Arabic, Berber and Hebrew rather than to 'Black' African language – is one of the most widely spoken

sub-Saharan languages whose speakers are mostly black and sedentary, Fula, is spoken by the Fulbe, Fulani and Tukulor and is related to Wolof and Sereer as well as to other Senegalese 'Black' languages.

(4-5)

In fact, it is difficult to support the contention that Hausa is more or less of an African language than Fulani, especially when the author has not made it clear by which criteria she determines what makes any language black as opposed to some other hue. The Fulbe and Fulani, furthermore, are simply different terms for the same people. The former is the plural endonym while the latter is the Hausa exonym. Another inaccuracy is the assertion that 'The Hausa state of northern Nigeria was overtaken by the Fulbe during their jihad in the 19th century ...' (72). There was never political unity in northern Nigeria, but rather a plurality of Hausa states, until the formation of the Sokoto Caliphate starting in 1804.

In summary this work promised much that was not accomplished. It is an unfortunate shortcoming in that the subject matter does indeed break new ground and study on these topics is sorely needed. Novel subject matter, however, does not excuse what reads as hasty and contradictory scholarship, nor can stylistic analysis and dichotomous reactionary politics provide a sufficient theoretical basis for exploring the gendering of religious space.

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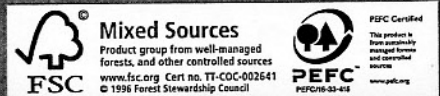
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