

## Decolonizing Heritage

Senegal features prominently on the UNESCO World Heritage List. As many of its cultural heritage sites are remnants of the French empire, how does an independent nation care for the heritage of colonialism? How does it reinterpret slave barracks, colonial museums, and monuments to empire to imagine its own national future? This book examines Senegal's decolonization of its cultural heritage. Revealing how Léopold Sédar Senghor's philosophy of *Négritude* inflects the interpretation of its colonial heritage, Ferdinand de Jong demonstrates how Senegal's reinterpretation of heritage sites enables it to overcome the legacies of the slave trade, colonialism, and empire. Remembering and reclaiming a Pan-African future, De Jong shows how World Heritage sites are conceived as the archive of an Afrotopia to come, and, in a move towards decolonization, how they repair colonial time.

Ferdinand de Jong is Associate Professor at the University of East Anglia. He is the author of *Masquerades of Modernity: power and secrecy in Casamance, Senegal* (2007), and, with Michael Rowlands, editor of *Reclaiming Heritage: alternative imaginaries of memory in West Africa* (2007). He has published widely on the colonial archive and the need for its decolonization.

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# Decolonizing Heritage

*Time to Repair in Senegal*

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Ferdinand de Jong

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*and*



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Lord God, forgive White Europe! Léopold Sédar Senghor, 'Prière de paix'

Truly, there are sins for which no one has the power to make amends  
and which can never be fully expiated.

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

There is no inheritance without a call to responsibility.

Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

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## Acknowledgements

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This book has taken a rather long time to write. Working on a decolonial perspective, I spent considerable time in conversation with the demons of our shared past. As the ghosts of empire keep on haunting us with their persistent presence, writing the present requires a reckoning with the past. Engaging this belated return of the colonial past, this book examines the narratives of progress as they were conceived in the context of empire. Undoubtedly, the colonization of time is one of the most spectral yet durable legacies of empire, a legacy materialized in its colonial heritage. Anthropologists contributed much to the making of colonial time, yet they were also among the first to critique the conceptualization of time in the constitution of our discipline. The discipline shared that epistemic concern with postcolonial literature as it set out to decolonize our minds – and to reconfigure relations between past and present. Examining the legacies of Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Négritude* philosophy and politics, this book investigates the ongoing project of decolonization in Senegal. Documenting the appropriation of colonial heritage, it demonstrates that the decolonial promise of Negritude continues to inspire Senegal’s engagement with the past as a technique to repair the ravages of colonial time.

This book was meant to settle my debts to a few ghosts – but while writing this book I have instead accumulated a few more. Let me first acknowledge the institutions that have financially supported this project. The British Academy granted me a Small Research Grant and a Mid-Career Fellowship (2012–13) that enabled me to conduct one year of fieldwork in Senegal. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) supported this project with research grants that paid for additional research leave and fieldwork. Finally, through its generous scheme, the University of East Anglia afforded several periods of study leave. I would like to express my gratitude for such firm institutional support.

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This book is illustrated with the wonderfully evocative imagery of two photographers with whom I have had the privilege to work over the last decade. With a long-standing career in documentary photography, Senegalese photographer Mamadou Gomis remains one of Senegal's outstanding artists. His series 'Panaficanisme' documents the experiences of visitors to the House of Slaves on Gorée Island (Chapter 1). With considerable experience in Senegal, Judith Quax explores the vicissitudes of transnational migration in her sensitive work. In the two series published here, Quax documents the Fanal festival in Saint-Louis (Chapter 3) and the ruins of the *École normale William Ponty* and the University of the African Future in Sébikotane (Chapter 6). The work of both photographers depicts these atmospheric sites with a sense of respect for the ghosts that haunt them to this day.

Parts of this book have appeared as articles but were substantially rewritten to be republished in this context. Chapter 3 is a much improved version of an article that was previously published as 'Shining lights: self-fashioning in the Lantern Festival of Saint Louis, Senegal' in *African Arts* 42 (4): 38–53. Chapter 4 is a revised version of an article that was previously published as 'Remembering the nation: the Murid *magal* in Saint Louis, Senegal' in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 197: 123–51. Chapter 5 is a revised version of an article that was previously published as 'Recycling recognition: the monument as *objet trouvé* of the postcolony' in the *Journal of Material Culture* 13 (2): 195–214. An earlier version of Chapter 7 appeared as 'Infrastructures of utopia: ruination and regeneration of the African future' in *Africa* 88 (2): 232–51, authored by Brian Valente-Quinn and myself. I kindly thank Brian for allowing the reuse of this work, and I fully acknowledge Brian's contribution to the substance and ideas expressed in this chapter. I also thank the editors of the above journals for their permission to reprint the revised versions here.

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