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.

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Decolonizing Heritage

_Time to Repair in Senegal_

Ferdinand de Jong
University of East Anglia

International African Institute, London

and

Cambridge University Press
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

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.

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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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