

BOOK REVIEW

Ferdinand de Jong. *Decolonizing Heritage: Time to Repair in Senegal.* The International African Library. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 292 pp. List of Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$99.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-316-51453-5.

An interdisciplinary perspective linking anthropology and history is adopted by Ferdinand De Jong in *Decolonizing Heritage: Time to Repair in Senegal*, a book in which he takes an integrated and wide-ranging view of the history of decolonization in Senegalese heritage. His analysis turns on a reassessment of how museums and memorial sites are a form of reparation for the injustices of slavery and colonization. The prologue addresses the public debate generated by the fall of the statue of colonist general Louis Faidherbe on the night of September 4 to 5, 2017, which coincided with the commemoration of the anti-colonialist and pacifist marabout Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. For several weeks, young activists and anti-colonialists defy state power and call for a decolonization of the public space of Saint-Louis that recalls the colonial past of this first French city in Senegal.

In the introduction, de Jong traces the history of the decolonial movement after World War II. He returns to the role of the pan-Africanist movement and Négritude in the decolonization of African history. Even if pan-Africanism clashes with the construction of the nation-state on the eve of independence, the “myth of return to origin” advocated by an Afro-radical nostalgia seeks to repair the colonial trauma.

Chapters 1 and 2 address the decolonization of the history of the Maison des Esclaves de Gorée through the victimization discourse of its first curator, Joseph Ndiaye. De Jong shows how postcolonial Senegalese power draws on the universalist politics of the poet president Léopold Sédar Senghor to construct a memorial discourse that makes the Maison des Esclaves a place of memory, where tragedy, forgiveness, miscegenation, reconciliation, and censorship (African slavery) intersect.

Chapter 3 highlights the controversy of the cultural heritage of the *Signares* (métis) of Gorée, which hides their role in the slave trade and slavery, and that of the Signares of Saint-Louis, which, through the Fanal, shows the nostalgia for a time when domestic slaves constituted the power of the

Signares. It was in this same city of Saint-Louis, the capital of French West Africa, that on September 5, 1895, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, a Sufi marabout, peaceful resister to French colonization, and founder of the *Tarikiya Muridiyya*, prayed two *Rakhas* in the governor's office in defiance of colonial authority (Chapter 4). Every year in the days leading up to September 5, the *Murids* occupy public spaces, particularly Faidherbe Square, to remember the heroic act of their anti-colonialist hero. De Jong makes an important comparison between the colonial and the postcolonial in terms of the forms of defiance of political authority. The banning of the communist party shaped a Black Afro-nationalist Islam that found salvation in the invention of the commemoration of the two *Rakhas* as a form of resistance.

In Chapter 5, De Jong immerses readers in the world of memorials dedicated to the *Tirailleurs sénégalais*. Often forgotten and unrecognized by the “metropole,” these valiant African soldiers of the French colonial army are lionized in Senegal by the creation of a monumental commemoration with the aim of repairing the wrongs they suffered (discrimination and inequality), claiming their recognition, and uniting the Senegalese around the mother country.

Chapter 6 examines the memories of education. It examines Abdoulaye Wade's pan-Africanist project to build the University of the African Future on the ruins of the colonial school of excellence William Ponty. The author takes us back into the world of Afro-Nostalgia, where the colonial past feeds the future.

Chapter 7 deals with the Museum of Black Civilizations as a cultural space dedicated to the decolonization of knowledge in Senegal, which must put the Black man back on the world stage, in particular by giving him back his works of art which were looted by the colonists.

Decolonizing Heritage: Time to Repair in Senegal is a valuable contribution to the growing field of research on colonial cultural legacies in an era when contested history is toppling statues and decolonizing public space that is deemed too colonial. The seven chapters of the book illustrate the wide range of topics and approaches that make up this field of research. In particular, this volume provides an excellent foundation for understanding the rather confusing ways in which postcolonial Senegal is seeking to decolonize its own cultural heritage.

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