

Introduction

A battle raged in the summer of 1884 between the parish priest and the mayor of Rufisque, a bustling port town on the throat of the Cap Vert peninsula in French Senegal. It began on Bastille Day, when the mayor, Monsieur Sicamois, approached the priest, Father Strub, and asked him to hang the tricolor flag on the Catholic church in honor of the newly minted French republican holiday.¹ Strub flatly refused, so Sicamois attached the republic's banner to the church tower himself. Infuriated, Strub tore it down and threw it in the mud.² A month later, tempers flared again on the occasion of the first "prize day" at Rufisque's new secular public school. School prize days were a highlight of the annual calendar in Senegal's coastal towns and always featured solemn speeches by municipal and colonial officials to the assembled students and their parents. Yet this celebration of secular education was unusual because Catholic congregations ran most of Senegal's urban public schools. As Father Strub bristled in the audience, Mayor Sicamois used his address to praise the laic instruction at the school as the best way to "break down the old ramparts of superstition and intolerance that separate our minds from those of the natives in whose midst we live." He went on to argue that Muslim Lebu, who composed much of the local African population, harbored a "fierce antipathy" for Christianity, which had prevented them from sending their children to the colony's Catholic schools. It was necessary, however, he argued, to "convert" Africans to "our language and our mores [*moeurs*]," and secular education provided a way forward. Now, Sicamois claimed, Lebu children would come to school when their parents saw that religion was not part of the curriculum, and the result would be the extension of French language, influence, and "civilization" in the region.³

Father Strub interpreted Sicamois's speech both as a condemnation of Catholicism and a personal attack. Fuming, the priest went home after

the festivities and scribbled an indignant letter to the mayor, accusing him of portraying Catholicism as mere superstition. He also suggested that Sicamois had privileged Islam over Christianity in his address. "You said," he wrote, "that the instruction in your school is completely secular and excludes every sort of *superstition*. You could not have intended to say that your instructor would not teach Muslim superstitions, since you seem to have founded the school for Muslim protégés. When you spoke of expunging superstition from your curriculum, you must have meant the Christian religion." Strub expressed incredulity that the mayor would say such things in front of a priest, who, he wrote sarcastically, is "paid by the government to spread superstition in Rufisque." Moreover, he continued, Rufisque's Christians had not been aware that they were engaging in "superstition" as they practiced their religion. Strub said he had accepted the official invitation to attend the prize day because he thought that a new school, even a secular one, could be completely compatible with "our holy religion." He professed regret that he had been wrong and that he had inadvertently scandalized the population of Rufisque by attending an event that treated Catholicism in such an insulting fashion.⁴

Deeply offended in turn, Sicamois expressed his complete astonishment at Strub's reaction in a defensive letter of his own. The mayor asserted that he sincerely respected Catholicism and had been referring to the Lebu when he mentioned "superstitions and intolerance" in his speech. He wrote that he was too well bred to insult individuals or Catholicism, the religion in which he had been raised, and that Strub had let himself be blinded by emotion.⁵ The priest backed down, apologizing and thanking the mayor for pointing out that he had let himself get carried away.⁶ This was not enough for Sicamois, however. The mayor denounced the priest to Rufisque's municipal council and the Catholic authorities in the colony and asked the French colonial administration, Strub's employer in his official capacity as parish priest, to transfer the excitable cleric out of Rufisque.⁷ Bishop Richl, head of the French Catholic mission in Senegal, ultimately sent Strub to a rural mission post, away from other Europeans, where he was just a simple missionary and not a state employee.⁸ The bishop did not display much sympathy for Strub, faulting the priest for committing "two very reprehensible acts vis-à-vis the civil authorities." Richl prioritized the maintenance of good relations with the colonial administration and Senegal's municipalities and told his religious superiors in Paris that he felt fortunate that Strub had not provoked an even bigger scandal.⁹

The clash between Strub and Sicamois in Rufisque appeared to echo the bitter struggle that was then taking place in France between republicans and the Catholic Church. After the conservative, pro-Catholic regime of "Moral Order" had governed the Third Republic for most of the 1870s,

republicans had come to power in 1879 and had immediately tackled what they called the “religious question,” or the place of religion in French public life.¹⁰ They launched a campaign to curtail Catholic influence in the public sphere, in France’s classrooms in particular. Among other legislative measures, Jules Ferry’s initiative to create a national system of free, compulsory primary education for both girls and boys showed the republican regime’s determination to wrest control of public instruction from the church.¹¹ Indeed, a tableau featuring a priest and a mayor engaging in a tug-of-war over a tricolor flag and trading insults about secular education would have accurately captured the mood in many towns and villages across metropolitan France in the 1880s. At first glance, it would thus seem as though avowedly anticlerical republican minister Léon Gambetta’s oft-quoted dictum that “anticlericalism is not for export,” uttered in support of French missionary activity in Tunisia in 1881, did not hold true in colonial Senegal.¹²

Despite their apparent parallels with metropolitan developments, the incidents in Rufisque reveal that the religious landscape was far more complicated in Senegal than it was in France. Indeed, analyzing these episodes chiefly as evidence of the “export” of metropolitan squabbles obscures the much more important interplay of local actors and conditions that shaped the controversy in Rufisque, and religious politics and policies in Senegal as a whole. While Strub’s violent reactions to Sicamois’s acts and words may well have been informed by concern about church and state relations in France, unique colonial circumstances, and, specifically, varied French attitudes toward the colony’s diverse African population, lay at the heart of the misunderstanding.¹³ Sicamois argued in his prize day speech that the French minority in the colony should view its African neighbors primarily through the prism of their religion and tailor its approach to them accordingly. His further contention that secular French education could reach Muslim Africans in ways that Catholic instruction could not exposes how religious questions in Senegal were inextricably linked to conceptions of a French “civilizing mission” in Africa. At stake were rival French visions of the African population’s relationship both to the Europeans in their midst and to the French colonial state.¹⁴

The development and subsequent resolution of the controversy in Rufisque also points to the diverse cast of characters who shaped religious policy and, by extension, colonial rule in Senegal. Senegal was unique in French sub-Saharan Africa in that after 1879, the *originaires*, or adult males born in its coastal communes (there were four communes by 1887, including Rufisque), enjoyed the right to vote for municipal officials, a General Council that helped to govern the colony, and a deputy to represent them in the French legislature.¹⁵ This meant that the majority of the

voters were African, and most of them were Muslim. In addition to European colonists, who were in the minority, the electorate included an influential métis population, born of two centuries of liaisons between French traders and African women. Sicamois was not a colonial administrator but a politician and elected official who aimed his message at his urban constituency.¹⁶ Strub, however, was both a private member of Senegal's Catholic mission and a paid state functionary who answered both to his bishop (who was also on the state payroll) and the colonial authorities. Their dispute thus had repercussions in the colony's political circles, as well as up and down the administrative and Catholic hierarchies. In urban Senegal, the French colonial administration could not make policy without reference to the political power wielded by civilians. It was somewhat freer to act outside the towns in the colony's rural interior, where Africans were colonial subjects and could not vote, but this book will show that the colonial administration's authority was always constrained by local forces there as well. Indeed, the administration was just one of a plethora of power brokers that helped shape colonial rule in French Senegal.

Framing the Inquiry

Faith in Empire investigates the interactions between these power brokers around questions of religion and authority in Senegal between 1880, the year after the colony's electoral institutions were definitively established, and the French defeat of 1940.¹⁷ It is therefore about colonization under the French Third Republic, though the metropole is often at the margins of the story. Instead, this book highlights how French colonial officials; French Catholic missionaries; métis traders and politicians; and Muslim, animist, and Christian Africans in Senegal navigated and shaped particular aspects of French colonial rule. This case study of the relationship between religion and colonial rule in one place over a span of sixty years offers a corrective to French colonial historiography of the Third Republic that takes a top-down, metropole-centric approach to empire by privileging official (or unofficial) discourses over negotiations on the ground. It examines how empire actually worked in practice by looking not only at French policies but also at how they were implemented, modified, bastardized, or ignored by French and African civilians and the officials charged with carrying them out. In doing so, it offers insight on the practice and limitations of French colonial rule, the nature of the relationship between the French Third Republic and its colonies, and competing and contradictory French approaches to African populations, while demonstrating the importance of local agency in forging the colonial order.

One of the key themes that emerges from the examination of religion and empire in Senegal is the heterogeneity of French colonial rule, even within a single colony. In Senegal, various French and indigenous groups enjoyed particular historical, legal, and administrative relationships with the colonial state and modified its actual power in a multitude of ways. While the specifics are of course unique to this case study, the model of the French Empire as a heterogeneous patchwork of communities with unique, negotiated relationships to French authority, shaped as much, if not more so, by civilian indigenous and French actors as colonial officials, is widely applicable.

Indeed, the heterogeneity and local agency emphasized here suggest a new analytical lens for conceptualizing French rule in Senegal during the Third Republic, which also applies to the empire more broadly. Because of its legislative institutions and its African voters, historians of French colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have tended to place Senegal within a republican frame of analysis that stresses France's purportedly signature universalist and assimilative impulses as a nation and as a colonizer.¹⁸ Yet this reading of the evidence highlights the case of a small minority who gained voting rights in particular legislative battles over who would wield commercial and political influence in the colony. After 1914, African voters and their representatives' employment of the language of republican universalism to cement their standing deepened the resonance of that language in narratives of French colonialism, further obscuring the unique historical contingencies of their position. To escape a republican lens, this book employs a more holistic approach to colonial Senegal that views the colony as a collection of differentiated spaces and populations where varying layers of law, administrative prerogative, and what French officials called "custom" held sway, depending on an individual's physical location, gender, status as citizen or subject, and, frequently, his or her confessional identity as Muslim, animist, or Christian. This takes French governance of all of Senegal's inhabitants into account and more accurately reflects the variegated nature of French colonial rule.

Rather than a republican frame, therefore, the French Old Regime, so often ignored by scholars of modern France, provides a useful analogy to the modern colonial empire, in so far as it was a polity composed of a variety of territories and categories of individuals who related to the state in different ways.¹⁹ The key to the Old Regime was privilege—literally "private law"—an extensive array of distinct laws and regulations that applied to particular groups and territories. To quote historian William Doyle, privilege was "the hallmark of a country without uniform laws or institutions,"²⁰ which made "the whole of pre-revolutionary society a chaotic, irrational jungle of special cases, exceptions and inequalities."²¹ While the

structure of privilege was perhaps not as complex or extensive in Senegal as it was in Old Regime France, the fundamental comparison still holds. And, much like the Old Regime monarchy, the colonial administration in Senegal tried to centralize and concentrate its power over time yet simultaneously contributed to the proliferation of special exceptions and legal pluralism within its domain. For example, in the interior of the colony, the *indigénat*, or administrative code of summary justice, coexisted uneasily with a complex legal regime based on “customary” law.²² Even the legislative institutions of the Four Communes are better understood as examples of privilege common in differentiated politics rather than as beacons of republican egalitarianism. After all, Muslim African voters in the communes were not entirely assimilated to French norms: they enjoyed a unique status that allowed them to vote as French citizens yet regulate their personal affairs according to Islamic law.²³ In that respect, they actually enjoyed more options than their French neighbors, or even French male citizens in the metropole. And when extended all across the metropole and the empire together, this model reflects the bewildering intricacies of Old Regime privilege. For instance, when French officials considered extending the republic’s hallmark anticlerical laws of 1901, 1904, and 1905 in the empire, they debated universal application but ended up recommending an elaborate set of exemptions and partial measures, based on the historical and religious context in each colony.²⁴

This book’s application of an Old Regime frame to Senegal, and the modern French Empire more broadly, as well as its close focus on actors within the colony, does not mean that the Third Republic disappears entirely from the story, however. The following chapters will show that there were key moments when metropolitan politics, policies, and exigencies had an impact in Senegal. And, as other scholars have skillfully demonstrated, a discourse of “republican” colonialism animated high-level official rhetoric in France and colonial capitals, though there has been some debate about the precise meaning and scope of “republicanism” in this context. Alice Conklin’s pathbreaking *A Mission to Civilize* argues that French republican ideology shaped a civilizing mission that the governors general of West Africa pursued as they ruled the federation between 1895 and 1930. Though it evolved over time and harbored deep internal tensions and contradictions, this republican civilizing mission established constraints within which the colonial administration formulated and defined policy.²⁵ Even though the practice of colonial rule appeared to repudiate the universal ideals on which the republic was founded, Conklin takes republicans’ discussion of a civilizing mission seriously, arguing that these paradoxes need to be investigated to illuminate the relationship between republican France and its empire.

In his subsequent work on colonialism in West Africa between the wars, Gary Wilder warns against setting up a dichotomy between republican ideals and practice in the empire. Such an approach, he argues, preserves those ideals themselves from rigorous examination and cements a “canonical narrative of republican universalism that remains as undisturbed as the national paradigm that is its starting point.”²⁶ Wilder, who suggests historians view Third Republic France as an “imperial nation-state,” emphasizes that republicanism cannot simply be equated with universalism, in France or in its colonies. Rather, he maintains, “universalist” and “particularist” impulses were at work simultaneously both in metropolitan France and its empire. The colonies were therefore not merely a site of republican failure to implement lofty ideals in place in the metropole, or marked by an absence of what existed in France, but embodied the nature of the imperial polity as a whole, including France and its possessions abroad.²⁷ Indeed, the limits of universalism within Third Republic France have been amply illustrated by a variety of scholars who have tackled gender, race, and immigration.²⁸ While Wilder’s analytical frame usefully treats the metropole as part of the wider empire, the Old Regime model of a polity differentiated by webs of privilege may be more apt than the concept of an “imperial nation-state.” The term “imperial nation-state,” when applied to France, still conjures up conceptions of French exceptionalism, which rest on claims about France’s unique “nationhood” that are, in turn, often linked to republican narratives of French history. Though very carefully qualified and contextualized, “republican” discourse still looms large in his text.²⁹

Indeed, discourses, whether republican, universalist, or particularist, tell only a small part of the story of French colonial rule.³⁰ Moreover, *Faith in Empire* suggests that a tangible, definable “republican colonialism” may be a myth, except in the discursive realm. Over the course of sixty years, metropolitan initiatives or ideologies played a relatively insignificant role in shaping developments in Senegal, though the colony is often treated as the epicenter of “republican” values in the empire. Again, the metropole was not irrelevant: It had an important effect on the colonial sphere at particular moments, as in the case of the desperate conscription of Africans during the First World War. Yet much of the time its impact was limited, and often by its own agents’ determined efforts to preserve their autonomy on the ground. Moreover, meaningful echoes of metropolitan political ideologies were rarer still. While senior colonial officials in Dakar may have paid lip service to republican ideals, they and their subordinates tended to say one thing and do another, depending on the exigencies on the ground, and often improvised in response to particular challenges that arose on the spot. Moreover, they often invented principled explanations for the particular pragmatic outcomes they desired.³¹

Faith in Empire suggests that historians of French colonialism should be wary of limiting themselves to an increasingly specialized dialogue about republicanism and empire that still tends to preserve older narratives of French national exceptionalism and extend them to the colonial sphere. Its reevaluation of and recalibration of the relationship between metropole and colony decenters the French Republic (and the French nation-state) in the history of the French Empire and may, by downplaying French uniqueness, open the field to more findings about the way modern European colonial empires were similar rather than different.³² More such studies may show that at a local level, French colonial rule, in its heterogeneity, its negotiated character, and its varying degrees of efficacy, was more akin to that of its fellow European colonial powers than its particular justifying discourses, especially during the Third Republic, would suggest. Such comparisons are beyond the scope of this particular book but hopefully may animate future research in the field.³³ Indeed, studies that involve missionaries are particularly well suited to a transimperial approach, as they frequently served in religious jurisdictions that crossed colonial frontiers.

While this book is careful not to overstate the importance of the metropolitan republic, it also approaches the reach of the colonial state with a critical eye. Its focus on religious questions allows for the incorporation of a wide variety of actors into an examination of colonial rule on the ground. Studies of colonization that limit themselves to colonial officials can overemphasize both the agency of those officials and the impact of their policies, thereby understating the importance of European and indigenous civilians in shaping colonial rule. Though colonial administrations wielded real authority over indigenous populations, the reach and scope of that power were contingent on a variety of factors, forces, and actors. Much as William Cunningham Bissell has suggested in his recent work on British urban planning in colonial Zanzibar, scholars have too readily accepted the reach and efficacy of colonial states. Instead, he argues, in language that echoes Doyle's categorization of Old Regime France, that the colonial regime and its policies were "marked by contradiction, confusion, even chaos."³⁴

Bissell's doubts about the coherency and effectiveness of colonial policy find echoes in the stories presented here, which illustrate the limits of what colonial officials could impose in Senegal. French administrators were consistent in their desire to consolidate their power in relation to both metropolitan and colonial rivals, yet they were often only partially successful. While the colonial administration definitely increased its control in Senegal after 1880, it faced continual competition from European, métis, and African power brokers who pursued their own priorities, and it also fended off interference from officials in France. Although the representative institu-

tions in urban Senegal facilitated some of these challenges to the colonial state, they do not fully explain its limitations, and some of the examples in this book reveal how local actors could thwart, shape, or redirect state policy outside the coastal communes. European activity in the colony comprised a wide range of projects that privileged different goals. People from a variety of backgrounds, including men, women, missionaries, soldiers, and traders, pursued disparate aims that often clashed with administrative policies.³⁵ Missionaries, for example, undermined administrative policy both by encouraging African resistance in Senegal and by appealing over administrators' heads to metropolitan officials and the French public at large. On the African side, an ethnically diverse array of urban voters, Sufi leaders, former aristocrats, animist villagers, and Christian converts also employed a range of strategies to deal with French rule, not easily reducible to simple paradigms of resistance and collaboration.³⁶ In some cases, this meant allying with French civilians against the colonial state, or vice versa. Indeed, even the colonial administration itself cannot be viewed as a monolithic entity or a consistently efficient bureaucracy.³⁷ Overall, *Faith in Empire* illustrates that there was no unified, ideologically consistent French colonial project in Senegal and that a number of actors shaped colonial rule in practice.

Thus, while this book is broadly a study of how colonialism worked on the ground, at a specific level it is an examination of the intersections between religion, politics, and authority in French Senegal. In this study, the term "politics" means two related things. In the narrowest sense, it means the formal electoral politics of the Four Communes, especially early in the story, when particular religious issues were important in the electoral arena. It also encompasses the politics of religion in a broader way: specifically, how religious questions and controversies shaped colonial policy and how it was (or was not) implemented. This understanding of the term includes how the colonial regime dealt with Senegal's citizens and subjects based on their confessional identities, as well as how the actions of Catholic missionaries and Muslim, Christian, and animist Africans, in their capacity as Catholics, Muslims, and animists, impacted the negotiation of authority.

Faith in Empire is therefore an examination of the way religious questions and particular groups of co-religionists shaped local politics and colonial rule. It is not a close analysis of the nature or content of religious belief among the people studied, except in cases where that nature or content (or, more commonly, official perceptions of it) directly impacted colonial policy. In the Old Regime-style colonial polity, religion was a key category of differentiation and privilege. It determined how the French regime dispensed justice among its citizens and subjects, recruited indigenous personnel, and organized local administration over time. As noted previ-

ously, Muslim citizens enjoyed the privilege of regulating private affairs according to Islamic law in the Four Communes. In the interior, French administrators relied increasingly on what they termed “indigenous custom” to settle controversies or disputes between subjects, drawing on advice from “native assessors.” In practice, “custom” was nearly synonymous with “religion,” except in the notable case of African Catholic converts. Because French officials did not consider Christianity to be an African custom, frustrated converts often found themselves judged according to local Muslim or animist practice. Finally, religion was also important at the level of French perception of Africans, which in turn shaped how colonial authority worked locally. French officials and missionaries viewed Muslims, animists, and Christian converts in particular ways at particular times. For example, officials relied heavily on Muslims as agents and lieutenants along Senegal’s Petite Côte in the 1880s and 1890s, considering them to be more capable and civilized than the animists of the region, whereas missionaries saw the animists as potential converts and the Muslims as enemies of France, a discrepancy that gave rise to violence and heated controversies among French and African opponents alike.

As the controversy along the Petite Côte and the Strub/Sicamois drama both reveal, French debates about religion in the colonial context often involved claims about “civilization”—what the place of religion was in French civilization, what indigenous peoples’ “level” of civilization was, or if the French had a duty to “civilize” subject populations and how they should go about doing so. This book’s findings complicate Conklin’s argument regarding a republican civilizing mission in French West Africa in this period.³⁸ While Conklin’s focus on French West Africa’s chief executives gives her unique insight into how policy was formulated at the top of the administrative hierarchy, it says less about how it was (or was not) applied in practice, particularly about how local French and African brokers may have shaped it. Governors general were in frequent contact with metropolitan superiors and thus had an incentive to describe policies and initiatives in language that resonated with republicans in France. Indeed, William Ponty, considered among the most “republican” of French colonial officials to govern French West Africa, was actually an expert at being all things to all audiences.³⁹ Conklin’s account, by concentrating on figures such as Ponty, may miss the extent to which executive rhetoric was out of step with reality on the ground.⁴⁰ Moreover, as she acknowledges, Conklin’s focus on secular, republican civilizing does not account for the activities of French Catholic missionaries, who elaborated their own version of a civilizing mission in Senegal and the empire more broadly.⁴¹

Indeed, because it concentrates on religion, *Faith in Empire* also contributes to a nascent scholarly literature regarding the place of missionaries

and the Catholic Church in French colonial endeavors. This scholarship reflects a renewed interest in the history of Catholicism in modern France, long scorned by secular republicans and historians as the antithesis of modernity and progress.⁴² Missionaries, who vastly outnumbered colonial administrators in the French colonies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are finally attracting rigorous scholarly attention outside the church, though they remain largely absent from the historiography of French West Africa.⁴³ The most important recent contribution to missionary historiography is J. P. Daughton's *An Empire Divided*, which examines the relationships between Catholic missionaries and French authorities in Indochina, Polynesia, and Madagascar between 1880 and 1914. *Faith in Empire* moves beyond the scope of Daughton's inquiry in two ways: it reaches into the crucial interwar period, and it examines a setting in which Islam dominated the religious sphere. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Senegal, the French colonial regime confronted missionary Catholicism and expansionist Islam simultaneously. Conflicting and competing French perceptions of Islam and its adherents always inflected debates about missionary activity, religious policy, and civilizing Africans. Was Islam compatible, as Mayor Sicamois argued, with a secular vision of French *moeurs*? Or perhaps, as some Catholic missionaries contended, Islam was not reconcilable with French civilization and values. Remarkably, current political debates in France about the compatibility of *laïcité* (secularism) and Islam echo conversations that took place in Senegal more than one hundred years ago as colonial officials considered whether to apply the 1905 separation of church and state to French missionaries as well as to Muslim and animist African populations.

Daughton uses his case studies to argue, in contrast to Conklin, that the French civilizing mission was not a straightforward product of republican ideology but rather emerged from the complex interactions of missionary and republican interests and was therefore neither exclusively Catholic nor exclusively republican in nature.⁴⁴ *Faith in Empire* supports his conclusion that missionaries in the French Empire developed a distinctly Catholic version of a civilizing mission. In Senegal, this was an assimilative mission, designed to mold Africans into loyal Catholic French subjects.⁴⁵ The evidence from Senegal does not support Daughton's contention, however, that this Catholic mission melded with a republican administrative variant to produce mutual accommodation and synthesis. He argues that missionaries and officials "abandoned some of their most cherished ideals" to find common ground. Missionaries proclaimed their allegiance to the French state, and administrators swallowed their distaste for Catholicism, "tacitly accept[ing] that a significant component of the rational, scientific, and secular civilizing ideology would in practice entail catechism, conver-

sion and the Church hierarchy.”⁴⁶ Catholic missionaries in Senegal did indeed proclaim their loyalty to France, continually arguing that their work served the French cause in Africa. They critiqued administrative policy on a number of fronts but were also careful to manifest their patriotism, most dramatically during the First World War, when they swallowed their horror at brutal French conscription of African soldiers. Yet their sixty-year campaign to have the colonial administration accept them as partners essentially came to naught, and what success they had, such as their triumphant erection of the Cathedral of the Souvenir Africain in interwar Dakar, was largely due to support in metropolitan, not in colonial official, circles.

Like Conklin, Daughton proceeds from the supposition that republicanism shaped French colonial rule. He writes of a “republican colonialism,” though he wants to show that it was both stoked and tempered by Catholic input.⁴⁷ In Senegal, however, colonial officials did not reject missionary overtures out of ideological conviction or a commitment to a republican civilizing mission, however carefully defined. Indeed, this study turned up very little evidence of such a commitment, though, as mentioned previously, colonial executives knew how to deploy rhetoric of republican civilizing in conversations with metropolitan superiors. Thus, the argument here does not rest on the assumption that France’s colonial administrators were animated by republican values and calls their civilizing intentions into doubt. Throughout the period under study, Catholic missionaries in Senegal pursued civilizing goals much more consistently than the colonial administration did.

It should be perfectly clear, however, that this book does not seek to praise missionary work or endorse the deeply problematic concept of a “civilizing mission.” Missionaries provoked violence and discord in many African communities, and their dedication to assimilation foundered on racism when it came to training an African hierarchy to lead the church in Senegal. Nonetheless, they pursued their ideological goals regarding Africans in a manner that contrasts starkly with the prevailing approach of their administrative counterparts. “Ideology” is defined here as a commitment to a particular set of philosophical principles, sometimes to the detriment of desired outcomes. Indeed, in the interwar period, senior Vatican officials criticized missionaries in Senegal for hampering evangelical efforts by being too exacting concerning their potential converts and encouraged the priests to relax their requirements in order to increase African baptisms.⁴⁸ By contrast, administrators were predominantly pragmatic, which means that they prioritized particular outcomes over philosophical principles. This led them to adopt a more flexible approach toward people and problems on the ground. Viewed from the bottom up, administrators’ goals seem far from idealistic, do not prioritize civilizing Africans, and do

not fit easily into a republican framework. Their primary concerns differed over time but included consolidating their authority in the face of African and French challengers, collecting revenue, maintaining order, and slowing the pace of change in African society after the First World War. The administration rejected missionary cooperation and assistance not because they did not align with republican ideals but because missionaries often threatened those particular goals.

Settings, Institutions, Brokers

This book's claims will be easier to follow if the reader has a clear grasp of the places, institutions, and people involved in the story, as well as a sense of the complex legal, political, commercial, and religious environment of colonial Senegal. In her exploration of the law and geography of early modern European empires, Lauren Benton writes that "empires did not cover space evenly but composed a fabric that was full of holes, stitched together out of pieces, a tangle of strings."⁴⁹ She points out that brightly colored territorial maps of European possessions overseas often obscure the complexity and nuances of the exercise of power on the ground, and colonial regimes frequently held sway in narrow "corridors" or "enclaves" within the broader regions they claimed. Some of these areas were legally demarcated from surrounding territory, but some of them were not well defined at all. By 1880, Senegal fit this description well: it was a curious agglomeration of towns whose indigenous populations enjoyed particular rights and institutions, coastal enclaves and river ports where French law held sway, and newer rural possessions that the French governed in a different manner altogether. After 1895, as the headquarters of the Government General of the French West African federation, the colony became the administrative nerve center of the rapidly expanding French presence in the African interior.

By the late nineteenth century, Senegal was thus a mixture of the very old and the very new in the French Empire. Its coastal settlements of Saint-Louis and Gorée (located on an island off the Cap Vert peninsula) dated to the seventeenth century, when they were founded as *comptoirs* (trading posts) under the purview of royally licensed trading companies.⁵⁰ Located at the mouth of the Senegal River, Saint-Louis was the colony's capital and remained its most important coastal settlement until it was eclipsed by Dakar in the early twentieth century. Beginning in the late seventeenth century and continuing well into the nineteenth century, Senegal furnished African slaves for the Atlantic trade. Saint-Louis and Gorée were the main departure points for slaves, though the French also purchased slaves at smaller coastal harbors such as Joal.⁵¹ The Atlantic trade also led to an increase in slavery

within the region, and slavery remained central to economic and political structures for decades after France officially abolished it in 1848, leading French governors in Saint-Louis to turn a blind eye to its persistence.⁵² In the nineteenth century, agricultural exports became increasingly important economically. Saint-Louis was a center for trade in gum and peanuts, the region's primary exports to France. Gum, derived from acacia that grew well in the Senegal River valley and used in Europe for alimentary, medicinal, and industrial applications, dominated Franco-African trade in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s. It gradually gave way to the peanut, cultivated in the so-called peanut basin, which encompassed much of western Senegal from Saint-Louis south to the Gambia. By the 1860s, the peanut became the colony's primary export to Europe, and from then on the brokers who controlled the trade wielded considerable influence in the colony.⁵³

Centuries of contact endowed the African populations near the coastal settlements of Saint-Louis and Gorée with experience of French language, culture, and governance and also gave rise to powerful Francophone métis families.⁵⁴ These families, many of whom were staunchly Catholic and linked by blood or business interest to prominent Bordelais trading firms, amassed considerable commercial and political clout in the colony in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They worked with networks of African traders, many of whom were Muslim and who also maintained headquarters in the coastal towns, especially in Saint-Louis.⁵⁵ These Muslims developed institutional ties to the colonial state: in 1857, Governor Louis Faidherbe created the official Muslim Tribunal, which dispensed justice according to Islamic law.⁵⁶ The administration salaried the court's personnel and also kept a *tamsir*, a person recognized by French authorities as "head of the Muslim religion," on the payroll.⁵⁷ And, as noted previously, thanks to intense lobbying from the Bordelais houses, who wanted to make sure their interests in Senegal would be represented in both colonial and metropolitan government, the *originaires* of the coastal communes gained the right to vote for municipal offices, the regional General Council, and a deputy to the French legislature in the 1870s. These concessions, granted in the metropole, limited the powers of the colonial administration in the coastal regions and gave the métis and the African voting majority the potential to wield a great deal of power in the colony.

Yet even as Saint-Louis entered its third century of French governance, France participated in the frenzied "scramble for Africa," that great spasm of the so-called new imperialism.⁵⁸ In the 1880s and 1890s, the French military conquered vast regions of the West African interior. As a result, thousands of Africans in Senegal and beyond encountered French rule for the first time in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. In contrast

to the *originaires* of the coastal communes, Africans inland did not enjoy political rights. Even though electoral institutions did not limit the French colonial administration in the interior, African power brokers and other French interests, such as the military, Catholic missionaries, and commercial traders, used their clout to shape the development of colonial rule. In most areas, conquest was only the beginning of a long process of elaborating and organizing a governing structure, frequently contested or influenced by various French and African players.

Because it concentrates on religious questions, particularly on the triangular interactions between Catholic missionaries, French officials, and Africans, this book focuses on certain colonial groups. The prominent *métis* of the coastal communes play an important role, especially until their political eclipse in the early years of the twentieth century. Religion was central to how the *métis* conceived of their political and social identities in colonial Senegal and impacted how they influenced colonial rule through municipal offices, the General Council, and the law courts in the communes. Though most of the *métis* were devout Catholics who allied themselves with French missionaries, there was also a faction, led by the powerful Devès family, that made strategic use of anticlerical rhetoric in the political arena.

The African populations who figure most prominently in this book are probably not the ones readers may expect. The African voters of the Four Communes are important to the book's political story, particularly once they built their own political machine and elected the first black deputy, Blaise Diagne, in 1914. Diagne was a skeptical Freemason, but he saw parallels between his aspirations for Africans and Catholic missionary approaches to civilizing. Outside the communes, however, the book focuses on locales where conflict erupted between missionaries, administrators, and African populations. These tended to be places with large numbers of animists, where French missionaries felt they could evangelize effectively and stem the spread of Islam. Missionaries had particularly high hopes for the Sereer populations of the areas south and east of Dakar and the Joola of the Lower Casamance region and invested a lot of energy and resources in trying to convert them. Missionaries took the side of the Sereer against Muslim Wolof chiefs appointed by the colonial administration in the late nineteenth century and thus became embroiled in long-standing local conflicts. In the interwar Casamance, they acted aggressively to stamp out animism and served as advocates for their Joola converts with French officials. In both places, missionaries posed as rivals to French authorities, affording Africans opportunities to challenge administrative rule.

Islam plays a crucial role in this book's excavation of religious questions and colonial governance, but this is not a history of Islamic movements

or leading Muslim figures in the Senegambian region. Numerous works devoted specifically to those subjects have given us a well-developed picture of them.⁵⁹ Though parts of Senegal had been Muslim for centuries, between 1880 and 1940 Islam was also an expanding faith in the colony.⁶⁰ Indeed, Islam proved to be much more compelling to potential converts than French-purveyed Catholicism in the period under study. Muslim Sufi brotherhoods, particularly the Muridiyya and the Tijaniyya, brought many animists into their folds and became increasingly economically and politically powerful in this period. The spread of Islam was cause for concern for Catholic missionaries and French administrators alike, but they tended to approach Muslims in different ways. Islam pushed them together in some circumstances but more often divided them as they each pursued their particular aims in Senegal.

A word on bureaucracy is necessary to round out this explanation of locations, populations, and institutions. The Catholic Church and the French colonial state each developed bifurcated yet overlapping bureaucratic structures to encompass the colony's coastal towns and its rural interior. In 1882, French colonial officials divided the colony into the Territories of Direct Administration and the Protectorate. Although these administrations functioned differently, they answered to the same authorities: the governor of Senegal and, after 1895, the governor general of French West Africa. In the areas of direct administration, French law applied and the General Council exercised the power to oversee the colony's budget, both of which constrained the administration's authority. In the protectorate, meanwhile, the French administration ruled by fiat, and Africans in these regions were French subjects who lacked political rights and were subject to administrative justice. Nonetheless, the colonial administration could not usually operate effectively or consistently in rural areas without the assent or assistance of African power brokers. Though direct administration originally applied to the entire coast south of Saint-Louis, as well as ports along the Senegal River and stops on the railway lines, the administration successfully fought to shrink the areas under direct administration in the 1890s. In doing so, it reduced the amount of territory where its authority was limited, thus expanding its discretionary power.

Mirroring the administrative system, the Catholic Church organized its personnel in Senegal via two bureaucratic institutions: the Prefecture of Senegal, which included the Four Communes; and the Vicariate of Senegambia, which comprised a vast area that included the British Gambia and extended east into what is now Mali. In both the prefecture and the vicariate, the missionary Congregation of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit, also known as the Spiritans, directed the church and its missions. The Spiritan congregation originated in France in the eighteenth century and had

played a role in the French Empire prior to 1789.⁶¹ In the mid-nineteenth century the Vatican designated Senegambia as the Spiritans' evangelical terrain. The bishop of Senegambia, who sat in Dakar, and all of the priests in the prefecture and the vicariate were thus members of the Spiritan congregation. A powerful executive priest known as the superior general directed the congregation from its headquarters, or "Mother House," in Paris. In conjunction with a vicar general, the superior general made personnel decisions for staffing missions and designated priests for promotion to bishop, though his nominations required final joint approval from the Vatican and the French government. The bishop of Senegambia answered directly to the superior general and sent him accounts of Catholic progress in Senegal every two to four weeks.

In the prefecture, the institutional ties between church and state resembled the system in place in metropolitan municipalities, except the French Concordat of 1801 was never officially applied in Senegal.⁶² (In yet another example of imperial exceptions and inconsistencies, the concordat did apply in other remnants of the eighteenth-century empire: the *vieilles colonies* of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion, as well as in Algeria.)⁶³ Until the first decade of the twentieth century, the prefect, parish priests, vicars, and the hospital chaplains in Senegal were listed on an official cadre and remunerated as government functionaries out of the colonial budget. They appeared at all official events, such as the arrival and departure of governors, and took their appointed place in processions and receptions as colonial bureaucrats. Like other employees of the colonial administration, they were entitled to paid vacations in France every few years and free repatriation in the event of illness. They also received state subsidies for their lodging. The prefect oversaw the priests and supervised two European female congregations, the Sisters of Saint-Joseph de Cluny and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of Castres, who worked in the colony's hospitals and ran schools and orphanages for girls, and the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel, a teaching congregation that directed the boys' schools in the Four Communes. Because there were no institutional ties between church and state outside the prefecture, the mission had to rely on funding from the Vatican, Catholic associations, and private donations for its endeavors in the interior, which included a seminary for training African priests at Ngazobil. In 1858, the Spiritans founded the exclusively African Congregation of the Daughters of the Holy Heart of Mary, the first of its kind, whose members assisted the priests in rural areas.⁶⁴

Even though the church and the state each utilized dual administrative structures to manage their urban and rural operations, common personnel and authorities muddled the urban-rural divide in both cases. Within

both the administrative and ecclesiastical hierarchies, the same officials made policy decisions for the Four Communes and the rural interior. For example, with one brief exception, one person always held the posts of prefect of Senegal and bishop of Senegambia simultaneously throughout the period under study, effectively conflating their administrative responsibilities. Chronic shortages of missionaries in the colony led the bishops to juggle responsibilities between the prefecture and the mission stations in the vicariate. In practice the bishops did not keep the cadre list in good order and frequently rotated personnel between the urban and rural settings. Thus, while the institutional differences between the coastal areas and the interior were real and meaningful, they did not create two hermetically sealed worlds. Officials, missionaries, and Africans alike frequently negotiated the physical and legal boundaries between them.⁶⁵

Structure

Faith in Empire includes six thematic chapters organized roughly chronologically over the period from the early 1880s until the late 1930s. Each examines an important moment, issue, or debate that illuminates the intersections between religion, politics, and colonial rule in Senegal. The settings range from the courtrooms, schools, and administrative headquarters of the Four Communes, to meeting rooms in Paris, to Sereer communities near Senegal's Petite Côte and remote Joola villages of the Casamance, among others. Viewed as a whole, they expose some of the dramatic changes that took place in Senegal during the course of the French Third Republic, demonstrating how particular French, métis, and African interest groups and power brokers gained or lost influence over time. Yet they also reveal some remarkable continuities in administrative attitudes toward religion and civilizing Africans and in Catholic missionary approaches to both Africans and French officials.

The first two chapters examine religion, politics, and policy in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This was a crucial time of transition in Senegal, when the French expanded their reach inland and a new civilian colonial administration tried to establish firmer control over the colony in the face of entrenched French, métis, and African interests. Chapter 1 explores the place of religion in Senegal's lively communal politics in the 1880s. It contextualizes the uproar provoked by the slander of a missionary nun in a colonial newspaper, which occurred in the context of a heated electoral campaign between métis factions. The chapter showcases the importance and power of Catholicism in the Four Communes but also examines new and formidable challenges to church preeminence. Chapter 2 moves to a rural setting to analyze fledgling French

colonial rule in the region south and east of Dakar, where two antagonistic African populations, the predominantly animist Sereer and the Muslim Wolof, skillfully exploited tensions between French Catholic missionaries and French colonial officials. Centered on the alleged murder of a Wolof agent of the French administration by a Sereer and the investigation and trial that followed, the chapter exposes the tenuous nature of the French administrative reach in the African interior and illuminates the bitter rivalry between French missionaries and colonial officials. Missionaries, who hoped to convert the Sereer, were horrified by the administration's employment of Muslim Wolof canton chiefs throughout the region and encouraged Sereer disobedience. The chapter reveals the vast gulf between missionary and administrative conceptions of a French civilizing mission and demonstrates that at this time both French groups were largely the tools of rival African interests.

Chapters 3 and 4 move past the turn of the century, when administrative rule was more firmly established in Senegal but newly challenged by metropolitan interference. Chapter 3 examines the moment when French anticlericalism touched the colony, in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair. It details how the French laic laws of 1901, 1904, and 1905 affected Senegal's Four Communes, where public Catholic schools closed and Catholic workers left public hospitals. The chapter also explores the mitigation of these measures by a determined resistance in the communes, led by nuns in particular and, somewhat surprisingly, by the skepticism of the colonial administration. Colonial officials ultimately balked in negotiations with Parisian officials over whether to apply French anticlerical legislation throughout French West Africa because of their fears of a Muslim reaction and a paramount desire to preserve their autonomy in the face of metropolitan law. Chapter 4 further explores the theme of metropolitan demands on the colony by examining the difficult position of both Catholic missionaries and colonial administrators during the wide-reaching metropolitan effort to recruit African soldiers to fight for France in the First World War. Administrators resented the disorder provoked by recruitment and conscription, especially as time went on. Catholic missionaries harbored deep misgivings about the brutal methods and manner of French recruitment of Africans but chose to emphasize their loyalty to France and publicly proclaim their patriotism, in hopes of finally converting French officials to their views on civilizing Africans.

The final two chapters address the relationships between religion, politics, and policy in the interwar period, though both reach back into the prewar period to fully develop their subjects. Chapter 5 examines the conception, construction, and consecration of Dakar's Cathedral of the Souvenir Africain between 1910 and 1936. Catholic missionaries billed the

project as a patriotic monument to the French who had died colonizing Africa and, after the First World War, to the French and African troops who had died fighting for France. The cathedral formed a central part of missionaries' sustained and unsuccessful effort to convince the colonial administration of the value of their Catholic civilizing mission. The lavish consecration in 1936 appeared to show that the mission and the administration were close allies but obscured their fundamentally different priorities, reflecting instead a metropolitan interwar ideal of a *plus grande France*. Providing a contrast to the image of harmony developed around the cathedral's consecration, Chapter 6 returns to rural Senegal to assess the administration's religious policies in the wake of the First World War. It commences with a history of the legal status of African Christian converts in Senegal, a key theme in the long-standing civilizing debate between missionaries and administrators, before examining how the issue became particularly fraught in the interwar Casamance. Concerned about African political gains in the Four Communes and returning African soldiers' new expectations of colonial rule, the interwar administration tried to revalorize indigenous "custom" and "tradition" in the face of change, including religious conversion. This led to controversy and even violence in the Casamance, the last region of Senegal where Catholic missionaries felt they could still persuade a large number of animists to adopt Christianity.

The final chapter illustrates that the administrative/missionary divide over civilizing Africans persisted throughout the period under study. Though missionary and administrative power and influence evolved between 1880 and 1940, their attitudes toward civilizing remained fairly consistent. Missionaries continued to pursue an assimilative model and tried to convince the administration of the wisdom of their approach, but officials rejected African assimilation emphatically and, in general, did not prioritize civilizing of any kind. Throughout the period, the divide between missionaries and administrators, like differences between officials and other independent power brokers, provided opportunities that Africans exploited to subvert the regime or turn it to their advantage. If Father Strub and Mayor Sicamois had returned to Rufisque on the eve of the Second World War, they would have found their local influence and importance diminished because of African political gains and the decoupling of the church and the colonial state in the communes just after the turn of the century. Yet they may have recognized that as in their day, colonial rule in Senegal was still the messy product of a cacophony of French and African interests jockeying for position and influence, though the identities of some of the key players had changed.