

Bringing Old States Back In

Senegal's Precolonial Polities

Even though Africa's precolonial states ceased to exist as political units long ago – their kings co-opted and their bureaucracies dismantled by the colonial state – the country's precolonial history remains prominent in the national imagination. The names of precolonial kingdoms still circulate widely: Senegalese speak of traveling to *Fouta* (short for Fouta Toro) rather than Kanel or Podor Department, they shop at *Baol Décor*, and in the footprints of the country's ethnically Wolof kingdoms, mayors are as frequently referred to as *bour*, the precolonial title for king, as they are “the mayor.” These references reflect not only regional pride but the palpable nature of precolonial legacies in contemporary Senegal, legacies that I argue actively inform and constrain behavior under democratic decentralization today.

This chapter introduces the first of three historical building blocks for the argument. Specifically, I present two empirical propositions below. First, I locate the source of historical divergence at the heart of my argument by detailing the histories of Senegal's precolonial polities as well as the political forms that were present in what we might call “stateless” – though certainly not anarchical – areas, to document the historical antecedent to my independent variable of institutional congruence. I then introduce my criteria for identifying what qualifies as a “state” as well as my strategy for measuring their geographic footprints. The second proposition relates to the question of why precolonial legacies persist to the present. I begin by introducing three prominent reasons that we may in fact predict the *opposite* of my argument. Precolonial legacies may have been erased by (a) French colonial rule, particularly French aspirations of direct rule; (b) religious conversion and the emergence of influential Sufi Islamic brotherhoods; and (c) migration induced by the introduction of cash crops. I argue that none of these overturned the key mechanism of persistence linking the precolonial past to contemporary local politics: the nature of village-based social hierarchies. The second and third building blocks,

Senegal's decentralization reforms and the top-down process of boundary demarcation that unintentionally netted precolonial identities within new jurisdictional boundaries, are presented in the following chapter.

SENEGAL'S PRECOLONIAL POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

This book's core empirical argument is that local governance following Senegal's decentralization reforms is intimately shaped by the region's dynamic state system in the precolonial era. Africa's savannah belt was home to a series of complex polities that rose and fell between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. These states possessed well-defined territorial administrations and projected powerful national identities.¹ They collected revenue, adapted to capitalist markets, managed far-flung intermediaries, enforced property rights, and established clear rules for succession while maintaining checks on any given leader's power, all reflecting defined, state-like attributes.² The distinction between the patchwork of states that dominated the region prior to French conquest and the political organization of "uncentralized" areas is the first historical foundation of my argument.

Precolonial Kingdoms

When Portuguese ships first began exploring the West African coast in the late fifteenth century, Senegambia was home to more than a dozen small states that had formed in the ruins of the Malian Empire in the 1300s. In Senegal, the immediate inheritor of the Malian Empire was the Djoloff Empire, ruled by a powerful ethnically Wolof aristocracy based in the center of present-day Senegal. Like most states that formed in the West African Sahel, the Djoloff Empire consolidated power by acting as a gateway to the trans-Saharan trade. Beginning in the sixteenth century, the rise of the Atlantic slave trade reoriented local economies toward European traders along the coast. This proved costly to the Djoloff's interior base, as the lure of new coastal- and river-based trade with Europeans prompted considerable unrest within the empire's constituent provinces. Soon, ambitious political leaders sought independence and the lucrative ability to control their own profits from the growing Atlantic trade.³ By 1566, the empire had largely collapsed as the Djoloff's vassals stopped paying tribute – an effective declaration of independence.⁴ Though the Djoloff Kingdom persisted with much more limited territorial control, it never regained its prior levels of regional hegemony.

Like all states in Senegambia at the time, the Djoloff and its various inheritors were run by an ethnically defined aristocracy. Some of the Wolof kingdoms, such as Cayor and Baol, were able to capitalize on their seaports to

¹ Warner (1999). ² Colson (1969, 37). ³ Monteil (1966, 122). ⁴ Searing (2002, 14).

enrich themselves, becoming regional economic powerhouses. Others, such as Walo in the northwest, faced continual internal and external pressures as raids from Maure populations to the north amplified internal weaknesses created by endemic conflict between the three ruling Wolof lineages. Although the kingdom received some support following the establishment of the French trading post at Saint-Louis, Walo was beset by civil war and largely ceased to exert meaningful political authority over its territory by the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ Also gaining independence from the Djoloff in the late sixteenth century was the southern vassal of Saloum, which became the region's second kingdom run by an ethnically Serer aristocracy along with its neighbor Sine, which had formed in the mid-fourteenth century.⁶

To the northeast, stretched out along the northern arc of the Senegal River, lay Fouta Toro, an ethnically Peulh Islamic theocracy. Fouta Toro was a regional "breadbasket," and an early site of French commercial interest, exporting salt, gum arabic, slaves, and gold sourced from the southeast from the late fifteenth century onward.⁷ Unlike its neighbors that had formed on the vestiges of the Malian Empire (~1200–1400s), states like Fouta Toro or Walo illustrate the presence of bottom-up pressures to centralize in the area, both having been founded in fertile floodplains that lay in close proximity to the Saharan trade. Fouta Toro was also an early adopter of Islam.⁸ In 1690, a second Peulh Kingdom, Boundou, rapidly consolidated power to the south, as the economic link between the Gambian and Senegal River basins, subduing the zone's heterogeneous population in the process.⁹ In the decades before colonization, the Upper Casamance saw the emergence of Fouladou, when Molo Egue Bande, also a Peulh, overthrew the declining Mandingue aristocracy of the federated state of Kaabu in 1867, though Fouladou was never to consolidate to the same degree as its counterparts to the north.¹⁰

A number of minor polities populated the landscape as well. Between Fouta Toro and Boundou were the small, Soninke trading states of Gajaaga and, weaker and less organized, Guidimakha, located at the confluence of the Senegal and Faleme Rivers.¹¹ The Gambian River Basin saw a number of small, ethnically Mandingue states – such as Rip, Pakala, Niani, or Ouli – peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during the height of the slave trade before entering a period of decline, beset by internal rivalries, pressure from neighbors, Islamic jihads, and the Atlantic trade's abolition.¹²

⁵ Barry (1985, 64) and Suret-Canale and Barry (1976, 464). ⁶ Sarr (1986–1987).

⁷ Clark and Phillips (1994, 142–143). ⁸ Curtin (1975, 7–8).

⁹ Clark and Phillips (1994, 142–143); Gomez (1992); and Clark (1996).

¹⁰ Girard (1964); Ngaïdé (2012); and Innes (1976). The true extent of Fouladou's territorial control at the end of the century remains contested (see Fanchette 1999).

¹¹ Gomez (1992, 19). ¹² Quinn (1972) and Van Hoven (1995).

Senegal's political geography in the century leading to colonization was thus a dynamic and shifting one, as political entrepreneurs sought to capitalize on changing economic and social realities. But despite their variation, these polities shared three commonalities. First, though all states were controlled by an ethnically homogenous political aristocracy, significant ethnic minorities were present everywhere. Minorities often held specific rights, such as the distinct tax collected by Cayor's fourth minister from Peulh herders.¹³ The Wolof-dominated state of Baol was home to a number of Serer provinces in its western stretches, while Saloum was "pluriethnic" with important Wolof and Peulh minorities.¹⁴ Even the population of Fouta Toro, strongly associated with the Peulh, is estimated to have been 10 percent Wolof, Soninke, and Maure by the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁵ This diversity reflects a broader regularity in pre-colonial Africa. As observed by the historian Elizabeth Colson (1969, 31),

political and ethnic boundaries rarely coincided in precolonial Africa. Human ambitions were too pressing to allow people to remain static over long periods. States expanded when they were sufficiently powerful to do so. Communities competed with one another to attract settlers and thereby gain supporters . . . Men moved to find better land or more favorable opportunities in their craft . . .

Second, in all cases, social and political life was structured around social caste. With the exception of the acephalous Diola in the southern Casamance, Senegal's major ethnic groups are all caste-based with three social groups: an aristocracy, freemen, and slaves.¹⁶ Under the caste system, an individual's profession, marriage choice, and place of residence were circumscribed by the caste they inherited from their parents.¹⁷ Slaves could be owned by the aristocracy and casted individuals alike. While many slaves worked domestically, the Wolof and Serer kingdoms were notable for their powerful warrior slave castes (*ceddo*), who protected the royal court, collected taxes, and served as a standing army in many parts of the country.¹⁸

Finally, the political structures of these states were all based on elective monarchies, with kings selected from among a set of eligible families. Both Fouta Toro and Saloum had federated systems, comprised of provinces that retained substantial autonomy; in the former, province-based electors served to protect their own localized interests as a check on any lineage or province from

¹³ Ba (1976, 173). ¹⁴ Becker et al. (1999, 49). ¹⁵ Robinson (1975, 5).

¹⁶ This varies slightly by ethnic group. The Serer had a less rigid caste system than other states north of The Gambia (Searing 2002, 8). All non-casted ethnic groups fall in acephalous areas (Koter 2016, 70).

¹⁷ Castes are assigned by profession to artisans and griots (praise singers). Blacksmiths, weavers, carvers, and other artisans were considered to work with unclean materials (in the case of griots, words were the perceived danger). Unlike slaves, many casted groups retained important positions in the community; griots attached to aristocratic families, for example, kept the oral history of the lineage (Clark and Phillips 1994, 85–87).

¹⁸ Diouf (1990) and Getz (2004).

consolidating power.¹⁹ The Bourba (king) Djoloff consulted with a council of seven titleholders on questions of great importance for the kingdom, including the declaration of war.²⁰ Political authority, in other words, was far from absolute as the need to negotiate among a broader set of stakeholders “meant that power was in effect collegial,” reflecting the institutional checks on political leaders that defined all of the region’s polities.²¹ Each was administered through hierarchical organizations that extended from the king down to the village. In Sine, for example, the king was represented directly in each village by a *sakh-sakh*, who served as judge and tax collector.²²

Acephalous Polities

Of course, political order was not absent outside of what I define as a state. I label as acephalous any society that did not have a unified political hierarchy beyond the village level.²³ Originally categorized as the inverse of statehood in influential early work by anthropologists, acephalous societies do not lack political structure, but rather take horizontal (as opposed to vertical) forms of organization, such as segmentary lineages or confederacies.²⁴ As a term, acephalous embraces an admittedly broad category of societies that risks equivocation. The key distinction I wish to make, however, is that historically centralized areas were home to political institutions that were maintained by an elite stratum of society and which were enforced across villages through a political hierarchy. In contrast, though acephalous societies were often equally complex, their complexity was not oriented around a set of overarching political institutions that integrated diverse populations across space.

The Diola in the Casamance (present-day Ziguinchor Region) remain the most invoked example of an acephalous ethnic group in Senegal, though many smaller acephalous groups existed. Among the Diola, village chiefs were elected by all household heads, who sought the bravest and most respected man in the village for the role.²⁵ A chief’s power was not absolute, however, and no unifying hierarchy existed between villages. As Méguelle (2012, 80) cites the French explorer Hecquard (1850), “the chiefs have very little influence and cannot take any important deliberation without assembling the village elders.” Even though villages at times recognized mutual religious leaders, political organization remained fractured. By way of illustration, Pakao (in current-day Sedhiou Region) was home to a small group of villages that were unified around a powerful marabout or Muslim religious guide. Despite their shared

¹⁹ Robinson (1975, 19, 27). ²⁰ Monteil (1966, 604).

²¹ Klein (1968b, 21) and Beattie (1959). ²² Klein (1968b, 16).

²³ We might otherwise refer to these as decentralized societies, but I opt for acephalous to avoid confusion with decentralization as a contemporary political reform.

²⁴ Classically, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940); see also Kaberry (1957).

²⁵ See the accounts of Pélissier (1966); Boone (2003b); and Beck (2008).

religious adherence, the principle of independence across villages was “central to the social ethic.” Villages rarely intermarried and high levels of suspicion existed between them.²⁶ The explorer Hecquard also visited Pakao, observing in 1855 that “each village forms a sort of republic, governed by an imam, directing religion, and by a chief in charge of dispensing justice.”²⁷ Balans (1975) describes Niominka, a territory straddling Sine and the present-day Gambia along the Atlantic oceans, similarly.

At times, villages maintained informal protection arrangements. The Mandingue-dominated Bambuk, for example, a territory along the Senegalese–Malian border, was comprised of villages grouped under loose, protective confederations.²⁸ The Bassari, Konigui, and Bedik peoples of southeastern Senegal, all acephalous, conversely developed strategies for self-protection that included settling in isolated, hilltop villages.²⁹ Other regions, such as much of present-day Kaffrine Region and western Tambacounda Region, were sparsely inhabited forests by a small number of largely isolated villages or, in the Ferlo desert, pastoralist populations organized largely by clan.

Historically acephalous zones of Senegal were thus equally if not more variable in political form than their centralized counterparts. They also were important economic actors in their own right; despite lacking a centralized political apparatus, the Casamance River delta was home to an active economy in the centuries preceding colonization, trading wax and slaves with Portuguese and French traders.³⁰ Importantly, with the exception of the Diola, many of the region’s major ethnic groups inhabited both centralized and acephalous political systems. The Toucouleur Peulh inhabited the kingdom of Fouta Toro, while the closely related pastoralist Peulh inhabited the Ferlo desert. Similarly, Mandingue populations resided in the microstates within the Gambian River basin, but they also expanded into acephalous stretches of present-day Tambacounda Region. This point, that all of the country’s significant ethnic groups can likewise be located both within and outside of Senegal’s precolonial states, is an important one, indicating that political centralization is not reducible to ethnic group traits.

MEASURING PRECOLONIAL STATES

The above discussion indicates a spectrum of political forms with varying degrees of centralization. When should we consider a polity sufficiently centralized to engender the legacy theorized in this project? I employ four criteria to assess precolonial statehood, following North et al.’s (2009, 5–9) definition of a natural state, these are (a) a limited organizational form, notably an elite tied together through personal relations and a political hierarchy built around

²⁶ Schaffer and Cooper (1980, 45). ²⁷ Quoted in Schaffer and Cooper (1980, 44).

²⁸ Clark and Phillips (1994, 74). ²⁹ Kywels and Ferry (2006). ³⁰ Mark (1985).

patron–client relationships. Political rule in the Djoloff, in central Senegal, for instance, was assured by a well-defined set of elites who together formed an advisory council to the King.³¹ (b) A system for taxing trade. Many of West Africa’s states profited off of the slave trade, taxing caravans as well as European traders.³² Drawing on Hawthorne’s discussion of features specific to African precolonial states, I add (c) regularized tribute systems from clients.³³ In West Africa, yearly tributes took specific forms in each state, such as a locally administered payment for the right to farmland claimed by the royal court in Boundou.³⁴ In Saloum, the Buur (king) received the following: each village farmed a field for the royal household, with one animal per herd and one-tenth of the millet crop going to the Buur as well.³⁵ Lastly, (d) some form of local representation to regulate social and economic life has to be present. This included direct appointments from the royal court or, more commonly, a system whereby a local chief or religious figure was delegated to enforce the king’s orders and laws. Because precolonial states rose and fell over time, I measure the existence of these attributes in fifty-year intervals between 1500 and 1880 to create an inventory of the polities that we can describe as “states” in the precolonial period.

By this definition, on the eve of the final French push to conquer Senegal in the early 1880s, slightly under half of Senegal’s territory was under the control of a centralized political organization. Yet generating a list of polities that meet my definition of statehood leaves a critical question unanswered: how can we estimate their spatial extent? Although certain regions of the country are associated with certain kingdoms, Baol with Diourbel Region is a case in point, this is not always the case and remains an empirical contention to be confirmed.

Certainly, early traders along the coast or explorers, such as Henry Barth or Parfait-Louis Monteil, made maps of some of Senegal’s precolonial states in the 1800s, but the accuracy of their representations should give us pause for thought. Most explorers only passed through small segments of a given state and early maps follow what Branch (2014) describes as the boundary-focused character of the European state, leading to neatly bounded polygons that are questionable measures of felt state presence. These concerns are compounded by the fact that many precolonial states in the interior, such as Boundou, largely escaped the attention of early traders and explorers or were poorly understood as territorial political units.

Accordingly, I develop an alternative estimation strategy to capture the territorial footprints of Senegal’s precolonial polities. The principal insight of this method is that of Herbst (2000), who argued that precolonial power was projected concentrically outward from nodes of power. Drawing on secondary and archival material for all of Senegal’s polities that meet my criteria of

³¹ Monteil (1966, 603–604).

³² For example, see Gomez (1992, 64) on Boundou.

³³ Hawthorne (2013, 77).

³⁴ Clark (1996, 8).

³⁵ Klein (1968b, 20).

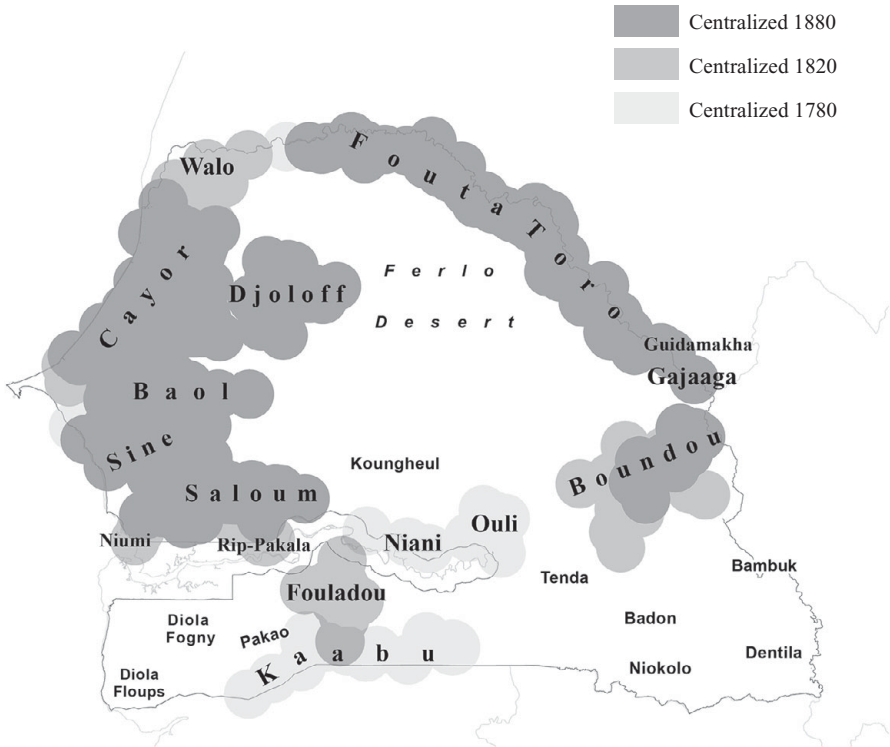


FIGURE 2.1 Precolonial polities and historically acephalous regions

statehood, I code the key political, social, and economic centers of each state. Georeferencing these locations to a spatial dataset of Senegalese localities today, I am able to estimate the spatial extent of the country's precolonial polities by generating buffers around these core nodes of power.

This approach generates the map of Senegal's precolonial states between 1500 and 1880 as seen in Figure 2.1. The map, which displays both my estimates of the general locations of precolonial states and the approximate location of historically acephalous, or stateless, regions that had commonly used names, shows spatial estimates with 20-kilometer buffers. I use 20 kilometers as a baseline because it is a reasonable daily travel distance for an individual on foot. That travelers were unlikely to cover much more territory than this is supported by Lasnet et al.'s (1900, 285) observation in the late 1880s that camels employed to transport cargo in the regions of the Djoloff, Cayor, and Baol could travel no more than 25–30 kilometers a day.³⁶

³⁶ As noted in Chapter 5, my results are robust to expanding these buffers upward to 30 kilometers.

This distance also best approximates the more reliable boundaries found on early colonial maps. My coding process is detailed in more depth in Chapter 5.

WHY DO PRECOLONIAL IDENTITIES PERSIST?

Students of African history have long debated whether colonialism was a fundamental moment of social transformation or whether preexisting social and political dynamics mediated or persisted through the colonial encounter.³⁷ My argument – that legacies of the precolonial era persist at the grassroots – falls clearly within this second perspective. But if precolonial Senegambian states generated the seeds for historical divergence as I argue, then I must explain why these legacies were not eliminated by the rupture of the colonial encounter.

The remainder of this chapter addresses this issue. I begin by reviewing the three most prominent reasons that we would expect the *erasure* of precolonial legacies: the nature of French conquest, which introduced policies of association and direct rule that dismantled precolonial political hierarchies, the spread of new forms of religious practice, notably Sufi Islam, and migration following the introduction of the cash crop economy. I then turn to examine why social institutions emerging out of defunct precolonial states have persisted by specifying the mechanism of reproduction: the persistence of rural social hierarchies. Throughout the West African Sahel, local elite status is largely tied to genealogical descent from the families that first settled or ruled a territory. As a consequence, village status hierarchies reproduce local historical narratives because these narratives explicitly bolster elites' claims to local authority. Although similar place-based status claims exist in acephalous areas, these are only sometimes mutually reinforcing across villages, generating village-specific narratives that are incapable of generating congruence with the local state.

Social Shocks Predicting Erasure

The colonial encounter was a period of substantial social and political change: old power structures were dismantled and new ones constructed. New economic imperatives emerged at the same time that legal systems changed and technological inventions transformed landscapes. In many ways, therefore, my claim that precolonial legacies persist over a century after these polities were dismantled is a puzzle. After all, Senegal has seen substantial changes in the interim, including most obviously the onset of French colonial rule which dramatically altered the country's social, political, and administrative structure.

³⁷ See for example, Young (1994) or Mamdani (1996) compared to Ballantyne (2010) or Reid (2011).

In reality, French influence was felt in the subregion as early as the 1600s, most notably through the economic demand for slaves, gum arabic, and peanuts generated by French traders based in a series of trading posts along the Atlantic coast and, later, the Senegal River. A tentative effort to conquer the interior by General Faidherbe in the mid-1850s proved costly and resulted in a quick retreat.³⁸ The French did not seriously pursue territorial expansion again until the late 1800s, but once they did, the process of conquest went quickly. Beginning with the reestablishment of the protectorate of Cayor in 1883, most of Senegal north of the British Gambian territories was under nominal French control by 1890.³⁹ Up until this point, existing states had retained control over their territory and actively negotiated with the French.⁴⁰ As late as 1880, for instance, the French were forced to make a series of concessions to Abdoul Bokar, the king of Fouta Toro, in order to complete a telegraph line linking Saint-Louis, France's long-standing coastal commercial base to Kayes in present-day Mali. The king's refusal to allow the French to complete a section between French forts at Salde and Bakel resulted in five years of diplomatic negotiations and, ultimately, French retreat in 1881.⁴¹ This should not obscure the militarization of French conquest, however. France forcibly subdued polities across West Africa. The most famous example in Senegal was with Lat Dior, the last *Damel* (king) of Cayor, who took up arms against the French in response to France's seizure of his territory for the construction of a railroad linking the French coastal trading centers of Saint-Louis to Dakar. Dior's forces were ultimately defeated and Dior himself was forcibly replaced by the French.⁴²

In the ensuing years, the French made their final conquests in the area. In 1888 they replaced the Almamy of Boundou, a sign that they no longer depended on alliances with autonomous rulers, and in 1890 French troops entered and quickly occupied the Djoloff and Fouta Toro, bringing the last two semiautonomous areas under direct control.⁴³ Following the pacification of the Casamance in 1900, France had effectively claimed control of the territory we now know as Senegal. The economic motives that led France to secure the coastline in earlier decades saw no parallel in the late 1800s as it was well-known by the second half of the nineteenth century that the West African Sahel held little economic value.⁴⁴ Instead, it was largely the French Navy that roused domestic interest and drove inland expansion in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In particular, a number of emerging African political leaders produced useful fodder for French metropolitan newspapers, which documented the French Navy's pursuit of leaders like El Hadji Omar Tall or Samori Touré.

³⁸ Fage (1969, 163–167); Robinson (1975, 168); and Searing (2002, 35).

³⁹ Getz (2004, 137, 147). ⁴⁰ Ajayi (1998, 3, 271). ⁴¹ Robinson (1975, 126–138).

⁴² The railroad was motivated by both economic and political objectives: the French wanted to open the Wolof countryside for peanut production at the same time that they wanted to consolidate their control over Cayor, the strongest state in the region (Pheffer 1985, 33).

⁴³ Robinson (1975, 149–151). ⁴⁴ Roberts (1963, 304) and Crowder (1968, 55).

Rather than a clear plan for conquest, therefore, French expansion in the Sahel produced a series of “deepening entanglements” that led the French onward.⁴⁵ French conquest, in other words, was far from overdetermined.

The widespread changes that followed have become the focus of a recent body of scholarship estimating the long-run effects of colonial occupation. This work views colonialism as a critical juncture that generated profound differences in contemporary development outcomes both across and within countries. The colonial era introduced new institutions, new forms of human capital, and new avenues for economic accumulation, all potential fundamental causes for present-day disparities.⁴⁶ I test these potential alternative explanations empirically in Chapter 7, but I focus here on three substantial shocks to local social life that came with French colonization and which were most likely to have erased precolonial legacies.

Colonization: “Association” and Direct Rule

French rule in Senegal exemplified extreme poles of the country’s colonial aspirations. Influenced by enlightenment philosophy, France’s stated aspiration was for their colonial subjects to assimilate into French culture and become French citizens. This assumption of an evolutionary progress toward French civilizational ideals resulted in the substantial legal recognition granted to residents of Senegal’s four coastal urban centers (Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée Island, and Rufisque) – known as the *quatre communes* or “four communes” – in 1848. France had maintained these coastal trading posts since the seventeenth century, and each was home to French traders and a sizable *métis* population. In this way, the four communes saw the purest practice of the French colonial ideology of assimilation as residents were granted specific citizenship rights, including representation in France’s *Chambre des Députés*, the right to local municipal councils, and access to the French education system.⁴⁷ The contrast with rural areas was sharp. Here the colonial administration sought more pragmatic, short-term strategies.⁴⁸ The first two decades of colonization were thus defined by a bifurcated administrative structure with the interior placed under a system of protectorate that more closely resembled the classic dichotomized view of British indirect rule while the direct rule commonly associated with the French was limited to the four communes.⁴⁹

As the colonial state gained strength, it became evident that the ideals of assimilation were too burdensome for the thin colonial state to apply beyond the four communes. As a consequence, French thinking evolved toward a *politique d’association* as an intermediate approach. Association did not

⁴⁵ See Ajayi (1998). ⁴⁶ See for example, De Juan and Pierskalla (2017).

⁴⁷ Diouf (1998, 676) and Crowder (1964, 202).

⁴⁸ Rural Senegalese were subject to the *indigénat* penal system and forced labor requirements, for example, far from the legal rights held by their urban compatriots (Hesseling 1985, 134).

⁴⁹ Idowu (1968, 248).

abandon the core tenets of assimilation – African subjects were still expected to be socialized into French culture through a centralized administration – but the timeline was extended and the scale of state intervention reduced.⁵⁰ Colonial schools were scarce, for example, but they nonetheless taught a French curriculum. By 1920, the colony had been unified politically under a colonial council, wherein residents of the four communes were represented by elected representatives while rural subjects were represented via their *chef de canton*, or canton chiefs, appointed by the French as district-level intermediaries.⁵¹ This disjuncture only ended in 1956 when France passed the *Loi Cadre*, which made all colonial subjects French citizens in an effort to construct a “modern Africa.” At no point, however, was the ultimate authority of colonial officers questioned. Even as territorial assemblies were constructed following the Second World War, African representatives could not amend colonial budgets and had minimal policy influence.⁵²

The influence of France’s pragmatic policy orientation is perhaps seen most clearly in the role of traditional authorities. Early efforts to locate and appoint aristocrats favorable to French rule quickly registered a number of failures, leading the colonial state to shift away from ruling via indigenous hierarchies.⁵³ With the exception of the Bour Sine, who ruled until he passed away in 1969, the French had eliminated all precolonial monarchs by the early 1900s. The experience of Boundou’s Almamate, which was officially dismantled in 1905, was common: the state saw its territory split into two with French-appointed canton chiefs from the kingdom’s ruling lineage put in charge of each.⁵⁴ By the interwar period, the French were neglecting customary rights in favor of more politically expedient selection criteria for even canton chiefs.⁵⁵ While the French worked with and tolerated traditional authorities throughout the colonial period, this was a matter of expediency rather than a normative commitment and there was a firm guardrail of expected loyalty to French interests.

As a result, the ultimate symbol of the French colonial administration in rural areas became the French *commandant du cercle* and his indigenous

⁵⁰ Crowder (1964, 203) and Idowu (1968).

⁵¹ Legally, there were no recognized intermediaries in rural areas until the First World War. It was only after this that canton and village chieftaincies were institutionalized (Hesseling 1985, 146–147).

⁵² Chafer (2001, 170).

⁵³ Searing (2002, 107). In Baol, for example, the failure of French colonial officers to understand the rules of succession – assuming that a king’s son was his natural heir – ignored the true nature of hereditary claims. The French accordingly put in place a former king’s son by his concubine, a maternal line that would at most have earned the son a provincial chieftomship (Searing 2002, 114.).

⁵⁴ Gomez (1992, 173). Note that while the French used easily identifiable aristocracies when present, they often violated traditional rules of succession.

⁵⁵ Hesseling (1985, 147).

counterpart, the canton chief. The French came to see the canton chiefs as a form of professional bureaucrat, trained if possible, in the *Ecoles des Chefs* in Saint-Louis. Ultimately, to the extent that the role of a canton chief was to collect taxes and organize *corvée* labor, it should be of little surprise that canton chiefs grew increasingly unpopular as “the traditional state had been incorporated into the French bureaucratic state.”⁵⁶ Writing in 1946, the French administrator Delavignette also observed a growing animosity to canton chiefs: “the spirit of indigenous power has left the big chiefs [*chef de canton*] and sought refuge in the lower chiefs [village chiefs], who are less touched by our actions.”⁵⁷ The result of France’s consistently ambiguous attitudes toward traditional authority meant that public confidence in colonial chiefs declined over time as they became divorced from any precolonial understanding of legitimacy.⁵⁸

To summarize, French colonial policies of *assimilation* and its applied policies of *association* were predicated on an evolutionary progress away from indigenous tradition and cultural practice. The French colonial state dismantled precolonial political hierarchies and established a new administrative apparatus that emphasized a uniform stratum of higher-level chiefs, undermining in the process notions of traditional legitimacy even when aristocratic lineages were employed. From the level of urban elites to rural authorities, therefore, French colonization prioritized a Cartesian administrative hierarchy that should bias *against* the persistence of robust precolonial political hierarchies, which we might think of as an important conduit for the legacies that I document in this book.

Religious Conversion and the Spread of Islam

A second historical factor that we might expect to undermine the persistence of precolonial legacies is the expansion of new forms of religious practice, most notably via the rise of the Sufi Brotherhoods that dominate Senegalese Islamic practice. Islam has been practiced in West Africa since the eleventh century and was adopted relatively early in some precolonial states like Fouta Toro. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the Senegalese peasantry did not begin practicing Islam until the onset of colonial rule.⁵⁹ As precolonial systems of authority buckled under French advance, a number of charismatic religious leaders sought to fill the leadership void that was emerging across the rural countryside; “everyone was seeking protection, land, and new opportunity, and this is precisely what the Sufi clerics offered,” Boone (2003b, 52) writes of the era.⁶⁰ While doing great violence to precolonial political and social institutions, the gradual consolidation of French hegemony produced relative peace in the

⁵⁶ Klein (1968b, 204). ⁵⁷ Delavignette (1947, 146). ⁵⁸ Hesselting (1985, 148–149).

⁵⁹ See discussion in Klein (1972). ⁶⁰ Markovitz (1970) and Searing (2002).

region, increased trade, and opened new lines of communication that enabled Islam to spread rapidly.⁶¹ New forms of religious practice also provided new forms of social mobility for peasants as slaves found they could shed their status or young men saw new avenues of social advancement.⁶²

The most studied long-run effect of this is the “Senegalese Exception,” a reference to the unique alliance between the country’s Islamic brotherhood and the colonial and postcolonial state.⁶³ The most prominent of these are the Mourides, whose spiritual leader and founder, Amadou Bemba, was initially seen as a threat to French interests in eastern Baol, where Bemba was settled. Despite the fact that the French twice exiled Bemba in an effort to counter his influence, over time the Mourides and French settled into a “pragmatic” alliance. French concerns about Islam as a counterbalance to their authority were largely assuaged by the start of the First World War as the colonial state came to understand that Bemba’s ability to organize his followers in large-scale farming schemes was a means to boost groundnut production in the region, culminating in a policy of effective “noninterference.”⁶⁴ As the Mourides encouraged and actively assisted followers to settle new villages and devote themselves not only to their religion but also cash crop production, both parties came to learn that they could use the other to advance their own goals.⁶⁵ Mouride influence quickly spread outward from the Mouride Brotherhood’s de facto capital of Touba as Bemba’s followers expanded into new zones. Today, many of these early sites of settlement are among the Brotherhood’s most sacred.⁶⁶

Of course, the Mourides were not the only religious movement during this period. Other Sufi sects were also spreading, notably the Tidjanes and Layennes. Here as well, French thinking pivoted dramatically in the early years of colonial rule. The French initially viewed the Tidjane sect as fanatical because prominent nineteenth-century jihadists, like Omar Tall, were adherents. Yet the Tidjane’s charismatic leader, Malick Sy, adopted an explicitly pro-French attitude; in 1912, for example, Sy called upon all Tidjanes to support French authority.⁶⁷ Catholic missions also played a role in religious conversion during this period, though it was a more geographically concentrated one.⁶⁸ The only areas where missions were truly active in Senegal was on the *Petit Côte* south of Dakar, home to the precolonial kingdom of Sine, and in the Casamance, where the Catholic church had made early inroads, strategically

⁶¹ Clark (1999, 155).

⁶² See for example, the arguments of Mark (1978) and Bayart (1993, 119).

⁶³ Cruise O’Brien (1971) and Villalón (1995).

⁶⁴ See Harrison (1988, 166–169) and Boone (2003b, 52). ⁶⁵ Clark (1999, 158, 150).

⁶⁶ Searing (2002, 242). ⁶⁷ Harrison (1988) and Searing (2002, 131).

⁶⁸ French West Africa had relatively few missionaries compared to British colonies, in large part because France declared a separation of Church and state in 1905 which restricted access (Crowder 1968, 283).

focusing on these two areas because their populations, the majority of whom were animist, were seen as more likely converts than the Muslim populations that dominated the coastline north of Dakar.⁶⁹

The mass religious conversion of the 20th century generated new social identities that have not only spiritual but also political and economic consequences for citizens. This might suggest that religious identities are more salient forms of social identification at the local level than the precolonial identities I focus on here. To the extent that Sufi religious leaders are endowed with “saint”-like properties, they have become powerful organizing symbols in Senegalese social and political life that could provide powerful counterweights to precolonial structures.⁷⁰ Senegalese peasants devoutly follow religious leaders – indeed their hierarchical structures have long formed the backbone of the state’s most reliable clientelist networks – raising the question of why claims to descent from a precolonial past would hold currency in the face of these alternative structures.

Migration

The third factor that may predict an erasure of precolonial legacies is the substantial migration induced by colonial efforts to boost cash crop production. At many moments, this intersected with the spread of the Mouride Brotherhood as discussed above. The colonial state allocated vast tracts of land to Sufi religious leaders, encouraging eastward settlement from densely populated precolonial states like Cayor, Baol, and Saloum in a process that created a tight relationship between Islamic conversion and an expanding peanut economy.⁷¹ This led to significant demographic shifts. The availability of open land and the leadership of new religious leaders generated a notably sharp population increase in present-day Kaffrine Region during the colonial era.⁷² Migrants also came from outside of Senegal, most prominently via the importation of seasonal migrant workers, or *navetanes*, who came to work in the country’s peanut basin from Mali and Burkina Faso as well as eastern Senegal. Over time, many *navetanes* settled permanently in Senegal, most notably in the region of the precolonial state of Saloum (contemporary Kaolack and Kaffrine Regions).⁷³ Earlier parallels can be found in Mandjak and Mandingue populations from what is now Guinea-Bissau who settled in the Casamance. These flows were not negligible; David (1980) estimates that the Mandjaks were producing two-thirds of the peanut crop in the Casamance in the first decades of independence.

⁶⁹ Indeed, missionaries were often hostile to the French colonial reliance on Muslim elite, believing that their own efforts alone could form a Catholic base capable of preventing the further spread of Islam (Foster 2013, 15, 46).

⁷⁰ Cruise O’Brien (1975). ⁷¹ Pélissier (1966). ⁷² Faye (2016). ⁷³ See David (1980).

Other causes of migration existed as well. In addition to the rapid rural to urban migration that Senegal has seen over the past half century, state policies in the early postcolonial era continued to encourage resettlement in underpopulated areas, notably during the *Terres Neuves* projects in the 1970s, which encouraged Serer peasants from Fatick and Diourbel Regions to resettle in Kaffrine and Tambacounda.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, these dynamics took specific forms, such as the colonial and postcolonial states' efforts to settle pastoral populations. The construction of permanent water points and increased regulations on things like vaccinating livestock, encouraged Peulh pastoralists to create new, permanent villages around traditional migratory routes.⁷⁵ Regional political dynamics also influenced population movement. Kedougou and Tambacounda Regions (as well as Dakar) have seen a number of in-migrants from Guinea, as families fled the postcolonial regime of Sekou Toure in the 1960s.

Because in-migration has not affected all regions equally, we might expect these flows to mitigate precolonial legacies where descendants of precolonial polities cohabitate with in-migrants. For my theory and measurement to be correct, the legacy of the precolonial states must be *spatially* dependent over time. Yet if populations that were exposed to a precolonial state migrate, this may suggest that they will carry with them attributes that facilitate governance today. Inversely, if areas that were home to precolonial states see substantial in-migration, this could dilute the strength of precolonial legacies. As I argue in the next section, the mechanism of persistence is not a portable, cultural attribute, however, but rather is rooted in village-based social hierarchies that both rest on and reinforce the value of territorial claims. Where communities that had fallen under a precolonial state saw substantial in-migration, my theory's mechanisms – social identities and social networks – should only be destabilized if in-migrants set up extensive parallel social hierarchies, but not if they are integrated into preexisting village social structures which effectively subsume them to cross-village social institutions.

Figure 2.2 offers a visual display of the geographic spread of the three factors reviewed above and their intersection with the territories of precolonial states. Early colonial centers concentrated along major trade routes, including the Senegalese river in the north, the railroads, and peanut-producing zones. In-migration flowed along the railway lines, particularly into Saloum, but also into the Casamance and southeastern Senegal. Finally, although the entire country saw mass conversion to Islam during this period, Figure 2.2 indicates the territory associated with the Mouride pioneers, which settled large tracts of sparsely inhabited forest that lay on the eastern edges of the country's large Wolof kingdoms.

⁷⁴ Garenne and Lombard (1991). ⁷⁵ Touré (1990).

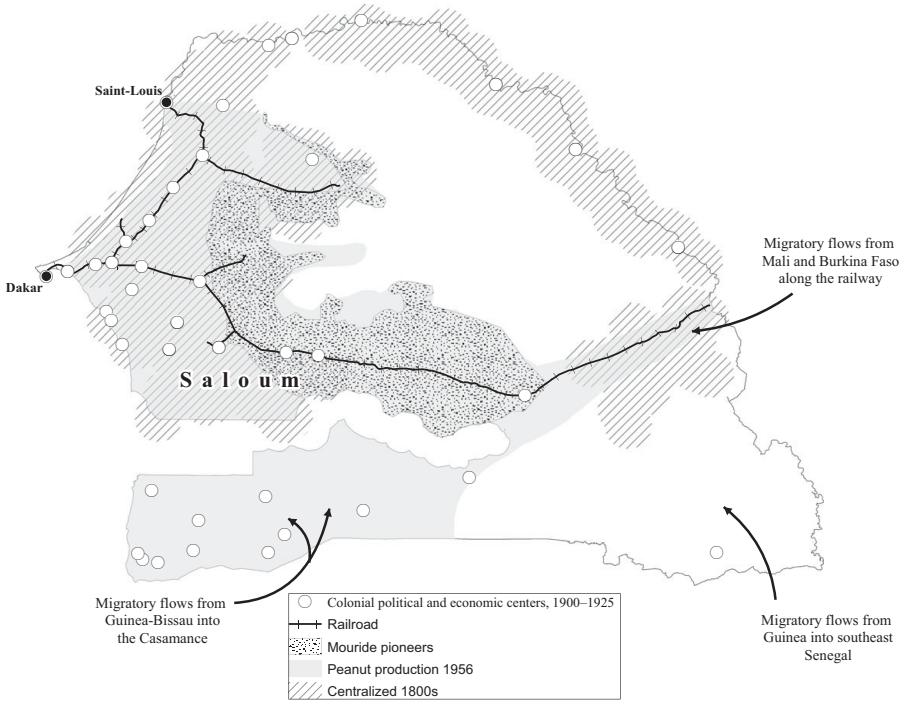


FIGURE 2.2 Colonial-era dynamics predicting erasure of precolonial legacies

The Mechanism of Persistence: Village Social Hierarchies

Given the social upheavals of colonialism, conversion to Islam, and migration documented above, why do I think that precolonial legacies have been able to persist to the present? Precolonial forms of political order may have rested on institutionalized norms of intra-elite compartment, but these norms could have easily been dismantled with the arrival of the French colonial state. In the final section of this chapter, I elaborate on my contention that cross-village social institutions inherited from the precolonial past have persisted over time. Specifically, I argue that the precolonial past remains a unifying focus of local political narratives in areas that were home to precolonial polities because these narratives justify rural social hierarchies. As the “fundamental social unit of the region,” villages in the West African Sahel are home to enduring internal sociopolitical hierarchies that define elite status.⁷⁶ I cast a broad net to define local elites as anyone holding local social status within a village, or, put otherwise, anyone who exerts some authority in village-based hierarchies.

⁷⁶ Searing (2002, 6).

Typically, this includes village chiefs, notables, religious leaders, elected officials, and their families. These individuals inherit social authority that extends into political, social, and sometimes, though certainly not always, economic life.⁷⁷

Throughout much of the West African Sahel, lineages obtain social status through historical patterns of settlement. This grants substantial sociopolitical rights to individuals who descend from a village's founding families. Even 100 years later, these families remain tied together as the "first founders."⁷⁸ Lineage and genealogy have long served as key markers in rural social hierarchies, with lineage heads "reproduc[ing] a social, not individual identity, with obligations and rights attached" that structures local social life.⁷⁹ Village chiefs, for example, are almost always chosen from among the descendants of the village's founders with the title transmitting from father to son or to the oldest male in the family. This is an old pattern; even in the precolonial era, village chiefs were often chosen from the oldest branch of the founding lineage.⁸⁰ In many villages, the local imam comes from the lineage of the second family to arrive in a village.⁸¹ Prominent families in some of the country's oldest settlements trace their social status back for generations, illustrating how markers of social status are highly persistent over time.⁸² Indeed, lineage structures served as the animating locus of local political allegiance in many precolonial states, with the clan or family serving as a mechanism by which to maintain and adjudicate local authority.⁸³

To the present, narratives of shared settlement or, in its strongest form, narratives of shared descent from a precolonial state, provide a portable identity that local actors can invoke to justify their own claims to social status as well as that of their relatives and friends. Across rural Senegal, therefore, social status is animated by identities based in histories of settlement that enable hierarchical claim-making to authority as questions of "first-comers" versus "later-comers," ethnicity or caste come to define social hierarchies and rights to local resources. Among these, the ability to trace descent from a precolonial kingdom via one's lineage comes to constitute an undeniable claim of community membership. As local lineages make shared and mutually reinforcing

⁷⁷ My definition thus includes holders of customary authority as well as individuals who obtain social status via their association with state or economic spheres of opportunity though as my empirical material shows these often overlap. In this way, a distinct feature in many rural Sahelian communities is the absence of a consistent class division. While some village chiefs or councilors are wealthier than their neighbors, most are only marginally so at best.

⁷⁸ See Galvan (2004) for a discussion of this among the Serer. ⁷⁹ Juul (1999, 211–212).

⁸⁰ See Diouf (1990, 67) on Cayor. ⁸¹ For example, Juul (1999).

⁸² Boone (2003b, 47). Indeed, many villages are spatially organized into lineage-based quarters or neighborhoods that reflect patterns of settlement (Tamarit 1991, 231).

⁸³ See Kane (1987) on Fouta Toro, for example. Bathily (1989) notes that in states like Gajaaga the clan itself was the mechanism of state power, more important than who actually held the title of *tunka*, or king.

TABLE 2.1 *Descriptive data on persistence of village social hierarchies*

Respondent type	N	% related to village founder	% chiefs inherited from family	% with family members in authority positions	% related to current chief
Chiefs	380	81.8	86.8	75.8	
Elected Officials	123	67.5		75.6	57.7

claims to a precolonial past, actors reproduce the power of narratives of the precolonial past over time.⁸⁴

Elites in historically acephalous areas likewise root their claims to local status in local histories of settlement, of course. To illustrate, one mayor in Kaffrine rooted his decision to enter local politics in his family's history of "traditionally tak[ing] part in things." His uncle had founded his village and his father had been a canton chief and then the *chef d'arrondissement* following independence.⁸⁵ Elsewhere, such as the Casamance, local narratives are more likely to detail historical rivalries between villages than they are to recount historical alliances. The difference is not that histories of settlement only influence elite status in historically centralized areas, but that these claims remain fragmented across villages in historically acephalous areas as historical narratives of settlement remain village-based. Acephalous histories have similarly long afterlives, therefore, but their form is quite distinct.

I substantiate this claim by presenting descriptive data from more than 500 interviews I conducted with rural elites over the course of six years. Table 2.1 displays the percentages of these respondents who reported family ties to other elites in their local government. These numbers parallel claims found in the secondary literature and my own qualitative data. More than 80 percent of village chiefs are related to their village's founder and directly inherited their position from a family member. Seventy-five percent of all interviewees reported that another family member currently or recently had held another position of authority, such as serving as a religious guide, village chief, or local government councilor. Table 2.1 not only provides evidence for robust elite control of local positions of authority but also reflects a broader trend documented by scholars of West Africa: rural social relations are structured by sticky, lineage-based attributes.

A second test of this can be had by looking at villages, whose names contain a patronym. Many villages in the West African Sahel are named after their founder, for example, the village Sinthiang Bourang Ly implies that someone named Bourang Ly founded the village, with Sinthiang acting as a placeholder

⁸⁴ Similar to Walther (2012).

⁸⁵ Interview, February 8, 2016.

(here “home of”). Across the country, certain patronyms have known adaptations, the last name Tall is adopted to Pallene, Diaw into Ndiawene, or Diop into Ndiobene. Taking the 2011 *Repertoire des Villages*, which lists all official villages and their current chiefs, I code whether or not villages that contain such a name marker had a chief with the associated last name in 2011.⁸⁶ Of the approximately 3,000 villages with a patronym or a known derivative of a patronymic in their name, 69 percent are headed by a village chief of that same name today. In historically centralized areas, this rises to 71 percent compared to 63 percent in historically cephalous zones.⁸⁷

On the ground, individuals recount the stories of how their family settled an area or their genealogical descent from an area’s first founders with great pride. Similar to most work on the persistence of cultural norms over time, I recognize the role that intergenerational transmission of values and behavior plays in the reproduction of social institutions and local historical narratives.⁸⁸ This is more plausible than some might initially assume. To begin with, Africa’s precolonial states projected national identities to which their subjects ascribed.⁸⁹ Serer populations in the precolonial state of Baol assimilated into the state’s majority Muslim, Wolof identification, for example.⁹⁰ Wright (1999, 419) notes similarly of the Niumi, which lay along the Gambian River basin: “like it or not, villagers were part of Niumi. Most knew who the royal families were, and some knew a good bit of Niumi’s history, which they had heard from bards reciting the glories of Niumi’s royal lineages.”

A second factor that has ensured the persistence of narratives about the precolonial past is found in the role of griots, or traditional praise singers. As a distinct social caste, griots hold reciprocal socioeconomic ties to prominent families within casted ethnic groups of West Africa. Griots function as “oral historians,” memorizing and reciting a family or community’s history, ensuring the intergenerational transmission of local mythologies and histories of settlement.⁹¹ These histories are, of course, constructed. As Leyti (1981, 8) wryly notes, among griots “noble traditions of the family know neither flaws, nor weaknesses, nor even setbacks.” Nonetheless, griots play a critical role in keeping popular history alive, with each generation memorizing and adding to a family’s lore. Because griots recite these tales at weddings, funerals, and

⁸⁶ I eliminate villages that have an ethnic marker that is distinct from the ethnic group associated with the village name because this frequently indicates that in-migrants settled next to an existing, non-co-ethnic village. For instance, it is common to find two villages such as Keur Malick Diaw Wolof and Keur Malick Diaw Peulh in the same area. This generally implies that Keur Malick Diaw Wolof is the original village (Diaw being a Wolof last name) and that Fulani in-migrants either passed through Keur Malick Diaw when first arriving in a community or settled on land allocated to them by Keur Malick Diaw Wolof. To code Keur Malick Diaw Peulh as a village founded by the Diaw family would then be inaccurate.

⁸⁷ This difference is statistically significant at the $p < 0.000$ level.

⁸⁸ Tabellini (2008) and Acharya et al. (2016). ⁸⁹ Warner (1999, 238).

⁹⁰ Searing (2002, 9). ⁹¹ Galvan (2004, 41).

other major ceremonies, these stories are performed publicly. The value of descent from a precolonial state not only comes through private, intragenerational socialization, therefore, but is amplified in explicitly public spaces in ways that create interlocking narratives across lineages and generations.

Why Village Social Hierarchies Survived Colonial-Era Shocks

My claim that rural elite status in historically centralized areas has largely persisted over time will strike some as particularly puzzling given that the French colonial state actively dismantled precolonial political hierarchies. Two reasons explain why areas home to precolonial states saw their village social hierarchies girded against the challenges of colonial rule, new forms of religious authority, and, when relevant, in-migration.

First, where legible political structures existed, they facilitated France's desire for "a cheap, efficient administration" in the years immediately following conquest by offering the French the chance to make opportunistic alliances with existing monarchies.⁹² Even though France quickly abandoned their reliance on indigenous leaders as noted above, this buffered village social hierarchies in historically centralized areas against the tumult of the era.⁹³

This is seen perhaps most clearly by looking at the marked social upheaval in historically acephalous areas during this period. Population movements driven by the wars and social upheaval of the nineteenth century created competing political claims that undermined the ability of village chiefs and lineage heads to solidify power and assert the advantages that come with having established "first comer" status. Writing on Mali's Bougouni Region, laying to the immediate east of the Senegalese border, Peterson (2004, 124) notes that the French faced a chronic authority problem in the region, with one officer reporting in 1926 that over one-third of villages in the region had no designated chief due to fights between local lineages. The autochthonous Mandingue population in Kounghoul was beset by deep divisions as a result of the Soninke–Marabout wars of the mid-1800s, for example, a situation only amplified with the in-migration of Wolofs during the early colonial era.⁹⁴

The result was that acephalous zones presented a unique administrative challenge to colonial administrators.⁹⁵ In some cases, villages revolted over the mere idea of appointing an official village chief. In the Casamance, which mounted the longest resistance to French rule, the French signed treaties with village chiefs without recognizing that many chiefs were religious rather than

⁹² Searing (2002, 66); Klein (1968b, 290); and Roberts (1963, 304–306).

⁹³ Searing (1993, 107).

⁹⁴ Klein (1968b, 211). Kedougou Region is characterized similarly. Following substantial population movement in the years leading up to French conquest, the onset of colonial rule saw Bedik, Bassari, and Diahanké minorities who had long inhabited the area joined by Mandingue and Peulh in-migrants, generating new claims to land and authority (Aubert 1923).

⁹⁵ Cohen (1971, 76) and Bayart (1993, 120).

political or administrative figures and commanded little real authority within the village.⁹⁶ In contrast, the relative stability of historically centralized areas helped preserve village-level social hierarchies even as broader precolonial state structures were dismantled. Because village chiefs remained largely removed from French political interference – provided they met French demands for labor and taxation – village-level political structures were relatively more legible to the nascent colonial state in historically centralized areas, facilitating continuity in local social hierarchies.

Second, village-based social hierarchies in a region's home to precolonial states proved more adaptable to the challenges posed by in-migration and religious conversion because they could effectively graft these changes onto existing social hierarchies. Although religious conversion took place across the countryside as Sufi religious leaders filled emerging gaps in social authority, historically centralized areas saw elites effectively “reconstruct the old social order on a new religious base.”⁹⁷ In Diourbel, the Mourides became so influential, for example, that they functionally incorporated the social and political elite of the precolonial state of Baol.⁹⁸ With the exception of casted villages, village imams throughout the country are always of freeborn status, illustrating how conversion did not eliminate – but rather often reinforced – traditional social hierarchies.⁹⁹ Though Islamic conversion did allow those of a lower social status, notably slaves, to find new patrons in religious leaders, Searing (2002, 224) speculates that many slaveborn populations migrated *away* from the rigid hierarchies that defined historically centralized areas as a way to both shed their status and obtain access to land.

West Africa was historically home to flexible practices for integrating migrants, such as *cousinage*, “adoption,” or clientelism, whereby the logic of “wealth in people” as opposed to wealth in land created a pressing need for elites to welcome and integrate valuable labor into the polity.¹⁰⁰ The massive churning of migration that took place in the colonial and early postcolonial period challenged this logic more in acephalous areas, which saw particular pressures from in-migrants as the lack of established social hierarchies undermined the land claims of autochthons.¹⁰¹ The tendency of the French to appoint outsiders as canton chiefs in these areas, often employing former soldiers or interpreters, effectively assigned local indigenous political authority to someone

⁹⁶ Pélissier (1966, 678) and Klein (1968b, 175). The Diola “village did not exist as a collectivity,” Méguelle (2012, 117, 119) writes. “Social life as mostly limited to clans and family concessions,” and while the French designation of “villages” met an administrative objective, it never mapped onto any real political community. The administrative difficulty the French faces was described in a 1902 Political Report, the people of the Casamance “are refractory to all progress and in a social state neighboring on anarchy,” with villages refusing to pay taxes or recognizing village authority (Senegal et Dependances 1902).

⁹⁷ Cruise O'Brien (1971, 15). ⁹⁸ Searing (2002). ⁹⁹ See Venema (1978, 124) on the Wolof.

¹⁰⁰ Geschiere (2009); Hilgers (2011); and Bayart et al. (2001). ¹⁰¹ Klein (1972, 439).

with a thin understanding of local history and, critically, with minimal social pressures through which individuals could press their claims.¹⁰²

Adopting in-migrants into local social structures was more viable in areas that were home to precolonial polities. Pélissier, who wrote at length on the social organization of the Senegalese peasantry in the mid-twentieth century, observed that in-migration in the Saloum had not in fact undermined or challenged the land rights or social status of autochthonous elites. Rather, he describes the Saloum as “cosmopolitan,” writing that not a single village was ethnically homogenous in Kaolack’s Langham Canton mid-century.¹⁰³ The integration of in-migrants into the Saloum’s existing social structures by village chiefs who lent land and hired laborers suggests that the migration patterns induced by the introduction of the colonial cash crop economy were met in these zones with older repertoires of behavior. Qualitative interview data suggest that this pattern has broader traction. To take one representative example, in Kebemer Department, which falls in the heartland of the precolonial state of Cayor, one former mayor recounted how the community’s minority Peulh population had come to settle permanently in the area: the Peulh had passed through the area for generations, but it was under the first colonial canton chief that they were given empty land to settle on. Today, the mayor noted, the Peulh village was quite large and an important part of the community after over a century of cohabitation.¹⁰⁴

As shown in subsequent chapters, sociopolitical dynamics around religious belief and migration continue to reverberate in contemporary local governance across the country, but they do so with a particular sharpness in historically acephalous areas. In areas that were home to precolonial states, I find that they have neither prevented the persistence of powerful shared narratives about the precolonial past nor do they offer robust leverage on contemporary local government performance. Precolonial political hierarchies were dismantled, but the nature of who could claim local social status and village-based hierarchies remained largely unchanged in these areas even if things were more fluid elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ In other words, factors that might predict erasure were effectively grafted onto existing social hierarchies, meaning that social institutions that had developed to regulate intra-elite conflict in the precolonial period have by and large persisted in historically centralized areas. Local elites’ claims to local

¹⁰² Boone (2003b, 107). The French themselves realized the dangers of appointing canton chiefs who had no ties to the region they were about to rule, though Klein (1968b, 209) argues that French use of imported chiefs was more successful “in stateless areas and in areas where the community was new.”

¹⁰³ This, Pélissier (1966, 452–456) argues, was the result of in-migrants who need to quickly learn the Wolof language in order to work, the unifying effects of Islam, and the fact that everyone – autochthon and allochthon – was deeply implicated in the peanut economy.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Louga Region, February 12, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Crowder (1968, 7). As Gellar (2005, 31) describes, “noble families continued to support retainers and show largess to social inferiors, though on a more limited scale.”

authority remain rooted in the same villages and lineages that existed before the onset of French rule. Consequently, elites seek to preserve their status by reinforcing historical narratives of shared descent from a precolonial kingdom that justify their social position and which remain locally hegemonic, leading them to reinforce their social ties with other elites who make comparable claims across villages.

The Costs of Elite Persistence

One of the most persistent critiques of decentralization emerges from exactly the social dynamics I describe above: efforts to empower local communities provide a venue for social and economic elites to pursue their own political and material interests.¹⁰⁶ By appropriating resources or monopolizing decision-making, the pervasiveness of such elite capture undermines the benefits of reform for average citizens because those already at the top of the social hierarchy dominate new avenues for economic, political, and social advancement.¹⁰⁷

My research confirms this core insight: local elites disproportionately occupy local elected office and continue to dominate in local positions of authority, reflecting what Dasgupta and Beard (2007) dub “elite control.” Because social status is by and large durable over time both within families and over an individual’s lifespan, elite status has persisted despite recent waves of socio-economic transformation. Thus while the introduction of Western education and new forms of associational life have generated new avenues for building authority across the country, most of these positions continue to be filled by “good” families, as individuals parlay social status ascribed to them at birth into other forms of prestige later in life. A common manifestation of this is found in Patterson’s (2003) account of the village of Ndoulo, where the president of the women’s cooperative is also the wife of the village chief.

The consequences for local political life are pervasive. Elite status shapes not only who is accorded influence (“if you are from a respected family, then each time you speak you are listened to,” one village chief summed up) but also one’s propensity to enter local political life.¹⁰⁸ For example, one highly educated mayor in Diourbel had formed a development-focused youth association before becoming involved in politics. It didn’t hurt, he added, that he was the descendant of a historically royal family.¹⁰⁹ Even following reforms intended to open the political playing field, such as gender parity laws introduced in 2014, high-status families still dominate.¹¹⁰ As one councilor in Louga Region explained, she had been placed on the electoral lists because she was the daughter-in-law of the village chief, though she had been chosen from among all the women of

¹⁰⁶ Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006). ¹⁰⁷ Ribot (1999) and Mattingly (2016).

¹⁰⁸ Interview, village chief, Kaffrine Region, April 23, 2013. ¹⁰⁹ Interview, February 15, 2016.

¹¹⁰ In principle, village chiefs should not serve as councilors though in some cases they do run and are elected. Approximately 15 percent of my interviewees serve both roles, for example. Many more chiefs had served as councilors in the past before taking over the duties of the chieftaincy.

the family because she alone had gone to school.¹¹¹ Local elected officials often report having run for office because of their family's social status rather than any particular political platform or skill. A rural development agent with years of experience working with local councils observed that many elites he had met did not even seem interested in local policies, but ran because they thought they ought to – and indeed that they deserved to – as holders of elite social positions.¹¹²

The most obvious cost of this elision is that those born into low-status families often face undue obstacles when pursuing civic and political opportunities. Within villages, social exclusion tends to revolve around questions of caste or autochthony, with notables or autochthons still controlling access to most agricultural land.¹¹³ As a consequence, individuals from low-caste families are significantly less likely to obtain high-status positions in the community. This rarely results in complete exclusion, but rather the maintenance of an uneven playing field. Caste villages or quarters are often allocated a small number of places on electoral lists, for example, meaning that they are “represented” in a tokenized way, even if they face considerable resistance in participating equally in local political and social life. Migrants similarly tend to see reduced social and political rights in their communities. The long-run significance of colonial and postcolonial patterns of migration is acutely reflected in the rise of autochthony claims in contemporary West African political discourse. To the extent that “first-comers” are those who rendered a locality habitable, subsequent waves of migration add layers of “late-comers” or even “latest-comers” with differential degrees of rights to a community or land.¹¹⁴ Even co-ethnics might compete over who has more authority in a community if they represent unrelated waves of settlement.

This is perhaps best seen in the example of village creation. The value of obtaining the status of an official village is both material and symbolic: the status offers residents of hamlets or informal settlements “their part” of

¹¹¹ Interview, February 8, 2017.

¹¹² Interview, Chef de CADL, Goudiry Department, March 27, 2013.

¹¹³ Tamari (1991) and Koter (2016, 63–64). The fact that this does seem to matter more in some communities has implications for expectations about the role of *cousinage*, or joking cousin relations, in preventing the escalation of ethnic conflict (e.g. Dunning and Harrison 2010). The rules of *cousinage* are consistent across the country, leaving open the question of why it is cited as a moderator of ethnic or caste tension in some regions of the country while apparently failing to do so in others despite the presence of the same ethnic groups and caste categories which form the basis for joking relationships.

¹¹⁴ For example, Ece (2009) documents how villages founded by populations evicted in the 1970s from Niokolo-Koba National Park, located in Senegal's southeast, continue to be considered “foreigners” within their local government, despite the fact that their original villages have been located within the local government's boundaries. Such disputes had increased following the 1996 decentralization reforms.

projects and aid, which is otherwise biased toward official villages.¹¹⁵ In historically acephalous areas, many bemoaned the tendency of intra-village feuds and in-migration to lead to a rapid proliferation of villages. “Oh just anyone can create a village here,” said one exasperated local development agent in Tambacounda Region.¹¹⁶ A frustrated subprefect in the area agreed, commenting that he had witnessed many family disagreements lead one party to decamp and form a new village a short distance away during his current posting. He went on to draw an explicit contrast with his previous post in Matam Region, home to the precolonial state of Fouta Toro, where such behavior would have been unthinkable.¹¹⁷ The tendency toward exit is not uncommon in the Sahel, but it is in sharp contrast to the dominance of loyalty as a strategy in areas where social institutions around consensus and saving face dominate.¹¹⁸ Notably less village creation has taken place in areas that were home to centralized states, where in-migrants tend to be integrated into specific quarters of existing villages or to settle in hamlets on the periphery.¹¹⁹ Indeed, approximately 83 percent of villages in areas that were home to precolonial states are listed in the colony’s 1958 village census versus only 65 percent in historically stateless areas. The question remains contentious throughout the country, however, and interviewees in historically centralized areas indicate that appeals for official recognition and their subsequent denial by local elites had created tense political situations in the past. This serves as a visible policy area where the politics of institutional congruence have a profoundly undemocratic impact.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has introduced the first of three empirical building blocks of my argument, the historical antecedent: the political geography of precolonial Senegal was home to stark differences in the organizational form of political systems, with some communities ruled by precolonial kingdoms while others remained acephalous, or stateless. Because social status in rural West Africa is largely tied to historical settlement patterns, the nature of an area’s precolonial political organization shapes the degree to which local elites make interdependent claims to local authority today. Though there are many reasons that may predict the erasure of these identities, most notably French policies of

¹¹⁵ This dynamic is described by Juul (1999) in her study of Barkedji, Senegal. The ease of obtaining official village status varies, though in principle any hamlet could appeal a denial by the part of the local council to the central state.

¹¹⁶ Interview, CADL agent, Goudiry Department, March 27, 2013.

¹¹⁷ Interview, March 22, 2013. ¹¹⁸ Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2003).

¹¹⁹ Two exceptions are the present-day areas of the Saloum (Kaolack Region) and the Djoloff (Linguere Department) which have seen substantial in-migration. These are discussed as specific cases in Chapter 4.

association and direct rule, the spread of Islam, and patterns of migration during the colonial and postcolonial periods, I argue that none of these fundamentally undermined the village-based social hierarchies that reproduce local social status over time. In areas that fell under a precolonial state, elites are more likely to be able to claim descent from lineages dating to the precolonial kingdom to justify their social status in ways that are mutually reinforcing. The consequence is that such shared narratives of descent from the precolonial past are glorified and repeated, as elites collectively reinforce the value of social identities rooted in the distant past. This, in turn, obligates elites to reciprocally recognize the status of others who can likewise trace their genealogy to a shared past, reinforcing the perceived legitimacy of social ties among elites. At the same time, historical narratives justifying local social hierarchies are inherently exclusionary with serious consequences for those who can access and hold various positions in a community.