

Senegalese restaurant in Rome, Idi entertains his friends by announcing in Italian, ‘I don’t like the Senegalese and therefore I’ve become Italian now. Understood?’ As the banter continues, one of Idi’s friends says in Wolof, ‘Give him some water so he can drink it in Italian’ (147). Encounters such as this one reveal that mastery of multiple languages, in addition to being useful, is also a source of enjoyment and camaraderie.

In her epilogue, Smith reflects on the life histories of her Senegalese interlocutors and the multiple ways in which they experience their mobility, their relationship to Senegal, and their struggle for inclusion. She makes the case for including migrants’ voices and perspectives more generally in academic and policy research, a task that she claims is all the more important in the current global political climate where migration plays a polarizing role. ‘[I]n many ways’, she writes, ‘the world is a much different place’ from when she began her interviews a decade ago.

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AFRICAN CATHOLIC DECOLONIZATION

African Catholic: Decolonization and the Transformation of the Church.

By Elizabeth A. Foster.

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In recent years a number of enterprising scholars have brought to light the wide variety of political futures that people in French Africa conceived at the end of empire. Elizabeth Foster’s new book shows that Catholics were avid and active participants in this creative work. Foster mines the archival record of Catholic political thought to illuminate how priests, activists, newspaper editors, missionaries, bishops, and other ‘denizens of the French-African Catholic world’ debated over their political loyalties and shaped the political and religious transformations of the era (7).

Where books in the field of church history ordinarily treat ecclesiastical matters as separate from the public domain, this book brings to light the convergences of sacred and secular history. Foster shows how the ongoing reconfiguration of the French Empire fed arguments among Catholics about missionary racism, about the legitimacy of empire, and about race and identity in metropolitan France. One interesting chapter focuses on Alioune Diop, founder and editor of the journal *Présence Africaine*, curator of the *négritude* movement, and avid Catholic. Foster shows how Diop’s interest in Catholic theology — particularly the doctrine of personalism, which emphasized the primacy of the free and creative individual — fed *négritude* thought more generally, furnishing its activists with a political and discursive platform. Here and elsewhere in the book Foster de-provincializes African Catholic thought, showing how ecclesiastical debates could shape the world more generally.

The capstone of the book comes in the conclusion, where Foster shows how African Catholics' priorities shaped discussions at Vatican II, the church council convened in 1962. There were only 61 African prelates present at the conference, out of 2,000 men present, but the African delegates exercised an influence over the proceedings that was out of proportion to their numbers. Vatican II followed closely on the heels of the dissolution of the French Empire in Africa. The African prelates who gathered in Rome had come to their office as a result of the Catholic church's efforts to Africanize the church's leadership. In Rome they drew from the lessons they had learned in Dakar, Bamako, Paris, and other centers of creative theological thinking. Vatican II's decisions regarding inter-religious relations, its support for the use of the vernacular in the liturgy, its backing of African independence: all of these novelties derived from the effective advocacy of African prelates, who drew from patterns of thought that had been forged in French Africa in earlier years.

It is exciting to read a work that places African religious brokers at the center of a global history. There are, however, reasons to wonder whether a wider research itinerary might have yielded more insights. Foster largely allows the structure of the church's archive to dictate the book she's written: that is, the chapters are organized around a series of significant texts that are both sources and subjects of historical research. Chapter Two, for instance, rests on her reading of the many articles that Alioune Diop contributed to *Présence Africaine*; Chapter Four examines a 1956 petition authored by African Catholic students; Chapter Five considers an edited book featuring the work of several African priests. It is like taking on a tour of a library. Foster's reading of these texts is insightful, but the bibliographic logic that guides and structures this book obscures rather more interesting questions about the architecture of the 'French-African Catholic world'. How did these and other texts circulate? In Foster's book it is hard to see the material world, to glimpse the places where ideas expressed on paper actually shaped public culture. Chapter Six, for instance, focuses on an incendiary editorial published by Monsignor Marcel Lefebvre in a 1959 issue of *La France Catholique*. In the editorial, Lefebvre — who was the apostolic delegate to French Africa — argued that Islam and communism together encouraged the enslavement of the weak. In its own time the editorial was regarded by Lefebvre's contemporaries as a matter of great consequence: one of his colleagues called it the 'L. Bomb', likening it to an atomic explosion (215). How did a newspaper article have such an incendiary itinerary? Foster focuses on the anxieties that Lefebvre's essay generated among leaders of the church, but she doesn't move outside the church's archive to see where this editorial — and other texts like it — spoke to African political life. Were texts like Lefebvre's published in local newspapers? Were they translated into the vernacular languages of Lefebvre's parishioners, and if so, by whom? Foster's exclusive focus on a relatively small number of texts published in French makes it hard to glimpse the wider itineraries where printed materials were recomposed, republished, and debated.

Here is a pioneering work of global church history, meaningfully widening scholarly understanding of the vexed and controversial process we call 'decolonization'. Like all good scholarship, it raises new and interesting questions.

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