EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A NON SECULAR PROMOTION OF FAMILY PLANNING METHODS IN SENEGAL

AN HONORS THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE 6TH DAY OF MAY, 2022

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF THE HONORS PROGRAM

OF NEWCOMB-TULANE COLLEGE

TULANE UNIVERSITY FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ARTS

WITH HONORS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

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This research explores the international gender equality movement through a non-secular theoretical lens by examining the potential effectiveness of engaging with religious leaders in Senegal to promote family planning information and access. The paper begins by acknowledging the current theoretical lens which exists throughout the discipline of International Relations, specifically questioning the lack of integration between a non-secular and non-male centric dialogue. By analyzing the history of both the international gender equality movement and traditional liberal feminist movement in conjunction with a newfound inclusion of interfaith dialogue amongst peace mediation strategies, this paper questions the potential of non-secular dialogue amongst women in the global south. Engaging with a series of interviews conducted throughout Senegal which seek to understand its culture and gender hierarchy, specifically focusing on family planning in relation to religion, this paper proposes the potential of a non-secular dialogue which would promote family planning access throughout Senegal and other religious communities in the global south.
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Introduction

Identity politics in our understanding of society today are becoming more noticeably prevalent than ever. People intrinsically associate their own lives and aspects of their lives to their political opinions. Aspects so niche such as how we dress or what we eat to identities so grand such as our gender and class continue to play a political role in our own communities and beyond. Religion, as one of the most ancient communal rituals and human developments, has and continues to be a crucial component of identity politics. Amongst communities across the globe, different belief systems have flourished as they provide a sense of belonging, trust, and hope which directly penetrate the thoughts and opinions of an individual. Religious communities have thrived in promoting community solidarity against various evils such as corrupt political officials, discriminantion of minority groups, etc. These positive impacts, however, often get ignored in politics, especially Western politics whose secular narrative patronizes religious people. While it is easy to see this narrative domestically, this trend carries over to the international community, as religious groups feel left out of the conversations of global progression. In doing this, international politics is leaving behind several groups of people, especially those in most need of a platform and a voice. Leaders of faith communities have a lot of access and power in their respective communities as they often maintain a trust and compassion with those who they serve, revering great influence over their communities' thoughts and beliefs. They know their communities better than any outside organization and even their own governments. Religious leaders have an opportunity to recognize the voice and platform of the unheard in their communities, however they themselves, due to the patronizing secular viewpoint, have not even been given an opportunity to speak in the international arena. Religious leaders need to be recognized as international actors in order for the international community to
continue to uplift and respect voices from across the world in efforts to continue their search for equitable access to well-being for all peoples.

The field of international relations has long been secular, maintaining that an academic approach separates itself entirely from religion and belief.¹ In efforts to have a non-biased, objective outlook, the field of IR (both theoretical and political) did not engage in religion or with religious leaders. The feminist movement in international politics came about in this secular age, as global promotions of gender equality also begun through a secular lens, attempting to fit into the existing frameworks of IR. International movements such as women's liberation were led by the West, meaning the repercussions of these movements (i.e. birth control/family planning) came about not only separate from, but in direct contrast to religious dialogues. Family planning is defined by the World Health Organization as something that “allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the spacing and timing of their births.”² Mainstreamed by contraceptive messages, family planning methods which rose to popularity after the Cold War faced controversy in the global north, and have faced even more repercussions in the global south due to a variety of reason such as the lack of health care support, side effects of the contraceptives, and a significant lack of access and cultural acceptance.³ Family planning entered the global south through a secular narrative, opposing the existing societal structures, and therefore it was not adaptable to a global agenda.

Some regions of the world have a historical connection to religion (most notably the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa) as their land bears the origin of several major religions. Further, since the end of the Cold War and the third wave of democracy, religion has begun to

¹ Vendulka Kubálková, “A ‘Turn to Religion’ in International Relations?” Perspectives 17, no. 2 (2009).
spread globally in contest with the spread of secularism (what can be noted as a resurgence of
religion)⁴. One region which faces a multitude of religious conflict due to the clash of religion in
geographically close regions (specifically Islam, Christianity, and traditional religions) is the
from Senegal to Chad and includes a total of 10 countries.⁵ The Sahel is characterized as an arid,
desert region which comprises one of the most youthful populations that is riddled with tension
and conflict.⁶ Amongst this region, Senegal is considered to be one of the closest links to the
West, due to the existence of transnational Senegalese communities who have spread their
religious practices to the west and vice versa, as many western missionaries have spent time in
Senegal.⁷ This transnational religious celebration expands to the Middle East as almost 95% of
Senegalese who are religious identify as Muslim.⁸ Because of its connection to the greater
powers in both the Eastern and Western regions, Senegal has found itself both participating in its
own national movements as well as being influenced by international movements.

In Senegal, religious leaders often hold significant positions of power and respect in their
communities, often seen as a source of trust and understanding: a direct path to the heart and the
mind. Their sense of authority is thus directly intertwined with politics as religious leaders are
coveted endorsements for candidates.⁹ Further, they hold much influence over political
movements and the acceptance of movements among a community's culture. This research will

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⁵ The Sahel region includes (from west to east): Senegal, Mauritania, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.
thus examine the effectiveness that engaging with religious leaders in Senegal will have on the
promotion of access to family planning methods. Assuming religious leaders have the respect
and trust built in their communities, this research predicts that a non secular\textsuperscript{10} approach to
promoting family planning methods will make them more accessible both physically and
culturally. Since a main drawback to family planning in Senegal is the lack of access and cultural
stigmatization (as it is often seen as an imperialist/western force), by engaging with religious
leaders, family planning can be promoted to a community through a trusted source who has
access to influence both the culture and politics of the community.

\textsuperscript{10} For this research, I chose the term non secular to describe organizations and theories that are inclusive of a faith
based or a religious approach. Non secular will not be used as a replacement adjective for “faith based” or
“religious,” as its meaning is more encompassing than these terms for it understands religion as an intrical part
of the system, but does not use religion as the sole guide to its system as the label “faith-based” does. I will however,
throughout the paper, respect organizations who label themselves as “faith-based” or “religious,” by using these
terms when describing them. Their decision to use those adjectives is powerful in its own right and should be
respected.
Chapter 1: Literature Review: International Relations, Women, and Religion

In the assessment of any International Relations question, it is common to attempt to examine it through the three main existing frameworks of IR: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. Thus, it is important to understand the inner workings and lenses of these frameworks. Realism is based on the idea that states are the primary actor in International Relations and that all states exist in an inherent, underlying anarchic condition where they are continuously in competition for power.\(^1\) Under this desire for power, states are also considered to be rational actors, whose decisions are made in a repetitive and predictable fashion with their own goals in mind. Realist theory examines a problem, therefore, under that assumption that state actors will act in their own interest in order to maintain security and promote their own status within IR. Realism has not, however, come without its critiques. Liberal IR theory has developed as a response to the limitations of Realism, e.g. it expanded its definition of actors to include international organizations. Liberal IR theory is also based on the relevant idea that all actors do not seek out power, but rather the wellbeing of the citizens of their state (often defined as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.)\(^2\) Liberalism noted issues with the lack of moral arguments in Realism, and therefore, mainstreamed this new lens to examine IR which proclaimed to be more progressive and inclusive, and promoted democracy. One final and key principle when understanding Liberalism is to note that although both realist and liberal theorists maintain a stance that the international community exists within an underlying anarchic state, Liberalism introduces the ideas of international norms which often favor morals, cooperation, and human rights and believes that states have the power and will to mitigate conflict.\(^3\) The third

\(^1\)Isabel Camisão and Sandrina Antunes, “Introducing Realism in International Relations Theory,” *E-International Relations*, (2018).
\(^3\) Ibid.
most common lens through which to study IR is Constructivism which grew in popularity after the Cold War. Constructivism allowed for the study of IR not to be as heavily reliant on the actions of states or international organizations, but rather examined the agency of individuals. Constructivist theories understand the world to be composed of a series of social constructions which dictate how our realities are made, implying a heavy emphasis on the significance of perspective. They also examine the events which take place with a belief that there exists an interdependency between individual agency and existing structures. In this sense, agency can be defined as one’s ability to act while existing structures are those which exist as they are in the international system, consisting of both material and intellectual properties. Thus, constructivists understand the agency which a state/international organization/individual maintains, but also acknowledge their limits and responsibilities which have been put into place by customary norms. 14

While each of these theoretical lenses have continued to progress and branch off of the faults of the proceeding ones, they all maintain two consistencies: they are based on the Westphalian secular state model and written through a male dominated lens. Therefore, these theories have failed to develop in ways which can account for the influence of religion and gender.15 Constructivism promoted the first attempt to be more inclusive of an individual's identity by paying attention to agency which allowed Feminist IR theory to develop from it. Feminist IR theory recognized the gendered gap which existed in IR literature as traditional theories were male-centric and dismissed women and other genders as being part of an “other” group (dictated as those who did not fit the overarching goals of IR and were thus given a different group, i.e. “women’s issues”) in the realm of IR. The goal of feminist literature in IR is

therefore to understand theoretical ideas of previously explored topics such as power, peace, war, democracy, leadership etc. through an explicitly gendered lens. Although women had vocalized political opinions in IR for centuries, feminist research gained more prominence after the Cold War and was led by women mainly from the Global North (especially Europe and North America) who pioneered women’s involvement in various sectors of IR.\textsuperscript{16}

**Women and International Relations**

After the Cold War, women had gained a role which they were able to play in International politics. Leading movements such as international human rights doctrines, education equality, and ending gender based violence, women took on aspects of IR which had previously been ignored by state leaders. Women began to excel in leadership in roles which promoted peace and human rights, gaining a global role in dealing with these issues.\textsuperscript{17} On October 31, 2000 a revolutionary doctrine in the sphere of International Relations was passed for women: the UNSCR 1325. This security council resolution reaffirmed the importance of women’s roles in conflict prevention and peace negotiation: making a commitment to continue to promote women’s leadership and influence in positions within the field of peacebuilding and conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{18} Ten years after this commitment, the UN devoted an entire branch of their organization to the acknowledgement and development of women across the globe: UN Women. UN Women has since attempted to foster a community of inclusivity and acceptance between women across the globe in order to promote equality through efforts of promoting girls education, ending gender based violence, and promoting the economic status of women.\textsuperscript{19} Still,

\textsuperscript{16} Marysia Zalewski, ““Feminist Approaches to International Relations Theory in the Post-Cold War Period,” *BBVA* (2017).
despite all of these efforts at inclusivity, there remains a gap between the feminists of the global north and the global south. Many local organizations in the global south are skeptical of the UN Women’s initiatives, as well as gender equality initiatives promoted by governments in Europe and North America. Much of this skepticism is rooted in the conflict between secular and religious traditions and relations that have recently unfolded in the West.

**Secularism and International Relations**

Before exploring the current impacts of secularism on the global women’s equality movement, it is important to recognize the theoretical history of secularism in international relations. Secularism, as it originated, could be defined by the process of removing land from religious authority. 20 This definition directly stems from the Protestant Reformation and has its roots in the Protestant church's attempt to separate itself from the political domination of the Catholic church in Europe. Since the Reformation, however, international ideas of secularism have adapted to hold a more complex and political influence. In the post WWII, Cold War era, secularism was associated with forms of government that were democratic, and labeled as “progressive.” Peter Berger defined secularism in 1967 as “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.” 21 Thus, in convergence with its Protestant origins, the ideas of secularism began to flourish in traditional protestant and democratic states and were promoted even more so during the third wave of democracy across the global south. However, as this wave and the promotions of democracy failed (especially in the Gulf region), a greater divide between the ideas of secularism

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and religion sparked, and these ideas became even more so intertwined with forms of
government.\textsuperscript{22}

Nevertheless, despite this divide, there still maintains, within the political field of
international relations, an underlying assumption of secularism. Although religious conflicts
have been discussed in international relations, the theories which seek to comprehend them, as
well as the solutions which are found in the actions of their resolutions remain secular. Theories
such as realism, liberalism, constructivism and mainstream feminist IR have all addressed the
inner workings of international politics while ignoring the influence which different religious
cultures maintain.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, these theories were able to be effective as international politics itself,
when in action, tends to ignore the influence and impact of religion. By ignoring it, however,
there is a gap in what the real world (especially communities outside of the west) are
experiencing and/or dealing with in their regional political dialogues and the dialogues of the
international community. Therefore, in the early 90s, academic Vendulka Kubálková proposed a
new theoretical lens in attempts to bridge this gap: international political theology (IPT). IPT
came about to grant theorists a method through which to examine the current international arena
which was becoming increasingly dependent on the ideas of faith and religion within culture.\textsuperscript{24}

Further, IPT would grant an acceptance of an even greater ideology proposed by Kubálková:
that as our world is becoming increasingly materialized and dependent on technology, people
(globally) are returning from a secular lifestyle to a religious one. Kubálková acknowledges the
shift towards religion which has been seen most obviously in the Global South, but also in the
West, as Christian-conservative rhetoric in the United States began to show a sharp increase post

\textsuperscript{22} E. Lust, “Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East,”. \textit{St Comp Int Dev} 46, (2011).
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 26.
9/11 as it coincided with the uptake of Islamophobia. Further, the challenges of the declarations of secularism which have been demonstrated in Europe reveal the growing tensions that exist between the past ideals of secularism and the resurgence of religious and faith practices.

In her proposal, Kubálková maintains that IPT can branch out from current constructivist ideologies, as scholars can study religion not only through states, but through individuals and local communities. Studying the actors themselves and the communities with respect to their internal culture, she proposes, will lead to grand shifts in how the international community understands the impact of religion on thought and ultimately political opinions. Recently, the international political community has made efforts to put her theory into action as they have begun to include a non-secular dialogue specifically by engaging with faith based communities through peace building and conflict resolution. Since 9/11, an interfaith and religious inclusive dialogue surrounding peacebuilding has grown in popularity in the international community. As described in Kubálková’s theory, 9/11 sparked a growing attention paid to religion in the global political sphere, and while these attacks led some to see religion as a greater threat, it proved to most that a resurgence in religion was relevant, and the attempt to spread secular ideologies throughout the world had failed. Religion had proven to be an intricate part of growing ideological revolutions and reclaimants of identity, and while this movement demonstrated liberation for some, it was also inherently involved with acts of violence. The global community therefore, took this opportunity to attempt to connect with religious leaders in peacebuilding efforts to address the disconnect which they had ignored. In 2007, the United Nations held a session on interfaith dialogue, signaling an attempt to build a relationship between their

25 Ibid, 22.
traditional secular policies and this resurgence. While the acknowledgment of religious conflict has been well discussed in the UN, the act of bringing religious leaders and communities to the table to discuss their ideas and potential outcomes of peace was a significant step in the path of being more inclusive and less demeaning towards the religious narrative. Since then, various international actors have continued to develop and support religious peacebuilding including through their own branches of religious foreign policy or the founding interfaith NGOs that work directly with international diplomacy such as Community of Sant'Egidio, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRF), and the Institute for the Global Engagement (IGE). The majority of these diplomatic initiatives all maintain a similar goal: building relationships with local religious leaders or communities in efforts to promote acts of peace and tolerance and manage conflict in the area.

Women and Secularism in International Relations

Although interfaith peacebuilding initiatives continue to develop, religious and nonsecular initiatives in other aspects of the international community have not seen as much development. The global gender equality movement has continued to remain secular, causing an inherent divide between religious and non religious groups. As mentioned earlier, feminist theory grew in popularity post the Cold War, and the action which coincided these theories (via the global gender equality movement) was mainly led by women from the global north, promoting ideas of liberation which reflected the secular ideology that was present in the global community at the time. However, as the paradigm has begun to shift, the gender equality movement is facing its own challenges. Since 9/11 the secular women’s movement has situated itself along the same western, democratic and Christian ideals, combatting what they deem to be the repressive

28 Ibid, 345.
conservative traditions of Islam and other tradiotnal faiths.\textsuperscript{30} This shift in the global gender equality movement poses a variety of questions about who the gender equality movement is serving and how identity and religion factor into it.

In “Under Western Eyes,” Chandra Mohanty critiques the ideas of western feminism during the peak era of the secular age by noting how western feminism was developed under the savior complex and the idea of the Other group.\textsuperscript{31} The main discourse which is prevalent in much of feminist IR that women, across the globe, are bonded together by the idea of a shared oppression equivalent to a sort of sameness between them. Mohanty critiques this by analyzing how this secular dialogue erases the significance of culture and the individual by labeling women as inherently victims of men or oppressed within their religion-social structure. The attempt to universalize the feminist movement that is already being led by western women disregards the localized efforts which are being made by women within their own cultures.\textsuperscript{32} By assuming women across the globe all crave a singular desire for liberation, western feminism is continuing the imperialist and colonialist dialogue under a new branding.

Although efforts have been made to make the feminist movement more inclusive since Mohanty’s piece following the general promotion of inclusion by the international gender quality movement led mainly by the UN Women, there still exists a gap between the neo-secular age of the current global gender equality movement and the resurgence of religion in the regions which it targets. Feminist literature continues to address the power imbalances which exist within religious structures, however they refuse to promote solutions within these religious structures, maintaining secularist ideologies and thus a disconnect between religious women and the gender

equality movement. Further, by equating secularity with modernity and gender equality, religious women are being dismissed from the dialogue and forced within an identity battle between their religion and culture and their gender. One of the main critiques within current Western society is the mistreatment of Muslim women under Europe’s doctrines of secular life. In *Politics of the Veil*, author Joan Scott adresses the relationship between France’s *laicité* and the 2004 headscarf ban in public schools which has led to a rise in identity crises for Muslim women in France who are facing an increasing amount of mistreatment from their Muslim, home communities and secular, public communities. Scott argues that secularism has allowed for a defense of this mistreatment, for by equating it with ideas of liberation and modernity, the public sphere has ignored the potential for it to equate religions with ideas of “backwards” logic and uncivilized nature, furthering Mohanty's original argument if the threat which western feminism and secularism posed on the religious women. France’s headscarf ban and continuous promoting of *laicité* reinforces an imperialist rhetoric which alienates religious women from the gender equality movement more so than it encourages or promotes their freedoms to exist in society as equals. Throughout Europe, the secular dialogue remains popular in both cultural and legal practice, and has continued to promote tension both between secular and religious individuals as well as within religious groups. Within a secular society, turmoil within a religious community is less likely to be brought to court due to the dismissal of religious expression in the public sphere. This knowledge adds another layer to which the global gender equality

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34 Ibid, 15.
movement's goals are not only unachieved or universally met, but in fact, their secular narrative could potentially harm religious women within secular communities.
Chapter 2: Brief History of Women in Senegal and Introduction to Family Planning

Feminism in the Global South

Thus, as communities in the global north begin to reckon with the conflicts between secularist ideologies and religious communities which are harming the global gender equality movement, feminism in the global south has taken a different approach. Feeling less connected to and disenchanted by the western feminist ideals, gender equality initiatives in the global south have been more successful when they are led by local organizations who work on smaller change goals within the culture of their communities. Some feminist movements in non secular states have developed their strength and power within their communities through their religion.\textsuperscript{37} By adhering to their culture and studying religious texts, women have been able to gain a level of respect within their communities to change the existing narratives. For example, many of the works of Fatema Mernissi sought to analyze the Quran and Hadith in order to find justification for the rights of women with these texts, rather than allowing for them to be manipulated into repressive ideologies.\textsuperscript{38} Although religion has been used as a tool in the public sphere to suppress the political equality of women, it has granted private liberation which has allowed women to unify behind common faiths and beliefs that have become crucial to the formation of their identity. This identity can become an inspiration for political equality, and therefore the significance of religion in the gender equality movement for women in religious communities cannot be denied.\textsuperscript{39} In communities where women have felt disenchanted by western economic systems, some seek to further separate themselves from western forms of identity, secularism being one of those ideologies. Although non secular feminists in the global south are not hesitant

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid, 114-115.
to note the patriarchal flaws within their own cultures, they find a kind of cultural liberation form the economic hardships through faith and religious practices.\textsuperscript{40}

As the world has become more materialistic, there has been a resurgence of religions across the globe. While from a western liberal perspective this resurgence has predominantly led to an increase in religious extremism and religious influenced violence, it is also important to note that it has created a greater space for religious groups and leaders on the political platform. Increased religious involvement in international affairs such as conflict management and peace processes whose efforts are continuing to develop. Still, the international gender equality movement has yet to be equally as inclusive of religious communities. Because the feminist movement of the west was built on secular ideologies under the belief that religious organizations were inherently patriarchal and oppressive to women, a gap in the theory of religious feminism exists. Although feminist theology has been labelled and researched and has begun to take off in study, in practice, the largest organizations which continue to fund global gender equality efforts remain secular, and thus leave religious women out of the dialogue. By doing this, the international gender equality movement is making it increasingly more difficult for women to bridge the gap between their gender identity and cultural identity. Therefore, in response to this existing literature, this study seeks to examine how effective it might be to promote an aspect of gender equality in the global south using a non secular method. This research will examine the efficacy of taking a non secular approach by engaging with religious leaders to promote access to methods of family planning within Senegal.

\textbf{Women in Senegal}

\textsuperscript{40} Dr. Kwok Pui-Lan, “Feminist Theology from the Global South and the Church's Mission,” \textit{United Methodist Insight}, (2017).
The feminist movement in Senegal has been greatly influenced by their colonial history. Although feminism existed in various fashions throughout the regions history, this paper will begin with the analyzation of gender equality movement in Senegal starting at the same time that women’s liberation movements were being seen across the West. This time period is when modern feminism began and was first documented, and also it is near the time that Senegal gained its independence and was beginning to construct its new government. Thus, in many African countries, the objectives of women's liberation have been inherently intertwined with the objectives of national liberation. In an uptake of international led-feminist movements, the Fédération des Associations Féminines du Sénégal (FAFS) was created in the 1970s. The movement sought to unite women from rural and urban communities who encompassed diverse backgrounds, religions and interests. In actuality, however, the movement attracted primarily first-generation Senegalese school teachers who were educated during the French colonial period. These women therefore, expressed a desire to improve the living status of women within the existing societal structures, taking a more conservative approach. Although a couple other feminist organizations erupted in Senegal in the 1970s, some led by younger university students and other led by research-based initiatives, none had as much influence as the Yewwu-Yewwi. Emerging in the mid-1980s amongst a more radical leftist discourse, the Yewwu-Yewwi had a goal not only to identify the injustices within the patriarchal system in Senegal, but to rewrite the discourse and statuses of women making them the first Senegalese organization to make public demands on behalf of women’s progression.41

Unlike the other feminist organizations, Yewwu-Yewwi was not brought into Senegal by an outside international organization, and was therefore in deep connection with the national

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liberation sentiments that existed at the time. Its success is deeply alligned with the national
liberation timeline, for several feminist groups early on were not able to chart their achievements
of their gender equality efforts, as their issues were drowned out by the national issues that were
deemed to be more crucial. Since Yewwu-Yewwi was not founded until 1984, (24 years after the
first Senegalese election) it was able to develop a strategy that allied itself alongside the national
liberation movement, while also headlining their overarching feminist goals. Yewwu-Yewwi was
thus able to integrate their own agenda alongside the reworkings of the political agenda that was
happening post liberation. In order to center these goals, the Yewwu-Yewwi had to focus heavily
on only a few issues. Thus, the organization decided to prioritize their demand to rewrite the
existing family law in a way that was less harmful to women. Being led and supported (both
socially and financially) from educated Muslim Senegalese women rather than international
organizations, the Yewwu-Yewwi were able to curate a respect from Senegalese government
officials, and found great success in their revision of the Senegalase family code. The
Yewwu-Yewwi are given credit for their changes specifically to the following Articles of the
Family Law Code:

- Article 13 which recognizes the permanent home of the women being her primary place
  of residence;
- Article 142 gives the woman who was married as a child bride the ability to annul her
  marriage after giving birth;
- Article 154 in which the husband can no longer prevent the wife from taking up a
  profession that she desires;
- Article 371 grants the married woman full civil capacity.\(^{42}\)

Although the organization was later critiqued for its lack of inclusion/popularity and its ability
to reach all women, its work set the stage for many future feminist movements to come in
Senegal.\(^{43}\)

\(^{42}\) Ibid 25.
\(^{43}\) Ibid 23-27.
The Yewwu-Yewwi achieved most of their changes within the first 10 years of their activism in Senegal (from 1980-1990).\textsuperscript{44} Following these changes, the Yewwu-Yewwi received some stigmatization in the next ten year span (1990-2000) as they were seen in their own communities as being irreligious (despite being led by Muslim identifying women) and too heavily influenced by European and American feminists. Further, during these next ten years, Pan-Africanism was dominating the social movement sphere. Many Senegalese feminists thus turned their attention away from a focus on gender and towards an emphasis of their black identity.\textsuperscript{45} Today, feminism in Senegal, like most of the world, is led not by individual, local groups but rather by globalized movements that adjust to a local audience. Feminism in Senegal is continuing to become more intersectional and inclusive, and with this comes a slower pace of change. Although this wave is more inclusive, due to the globalization of feminism, it has been heavily influenced by the West and has thus created a generational gap in acceptance within Senegal. The Western influence is accepted as the norm amongst the younger generation, however, the legal limits against women still exist.\textsuperscript{46}

These legal limits have since set up the boundaries (both economically and culturally) for women in Senegal today. This paper will outline the current legal restrictions which are placed upon and affect the status of women in Senegal. Although Article 1 of Senegal’s 2007 constitution states guarantees equality between men and women, various culture codes continue to enact discriminatory practices.\textsuperscript{47} After Senegal gained its independence in 1960, the Senegalese Commission on the Codification of the Law of Contracts and Liability began writing


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid

the Family Law, however it took 11 years until it was enacted in 1972.\textsuperscript{48} and has been amended several time since, continues to this day (despite the work that was done by Yewwu-Yewwi) to list discriminatory policies. It should be noted that before the Family Code was written, there existed a customarily understanding of the family unit and rights. Some main policies of differentiation between women and men include:

- Article 111 which lists the minimum age for women to be 16 and for men to be 18;
- Article 152 which lists the father as the sole head of the household with authority over the family and the children.\textsuperscript{49}

Further, the Family Law’s understanding of the system of divorce conflates the customary and national legal systems, making it more difficult for women to apply and obtain a divorce. Although Senegal does allow divorce to be settled in court amongst the national legal system, most divorces occur outside of court through the understanding of customary law.\textsuperscript{50}

Family law holds high significance in Senegalese culture as it creates a bridge between aspects of culture and customary law as well as legality. Article 153 of Family Law makes it required for a woman to live in a home chosen by her husband, confining her to a space which she has no legally required input in.\textsuperscript{51} This requirement bridges into another important form of status for women in Senegal: land and property ownership. Similar to family law, land ownership law in Senegal is based on a combination of two different models: one based on national legislation and another based on customary law which is heavily influenced by Muslim customs in the region.\textsuperscript{52} Although Senegal passed in 1964 the National Domain Law which classified

\textsuperscript{49}Senegal’s family code
97% of all land to be public and state-owned, the lack of resources and democratic security at the local level, this national law is overruled by the customary practices. 53 Land ownership, therefore, continues to be understood through customary Muslim law which assumes that land is collectively maintained by a family or village unit and is owned by the head of that unit: the patriarch in 95% of households. 54 Women have access to the land and its resources as a participant, but are thus excluded from land ownership and participation in business and economic aspects of the land (including trading and selling). Women therefore, when excluded from the family unit by various reasons such as divorce or widowed, can lose access to land ownership. Security of land crosses beyond gender, however, making the situation even more complex as land insecurity is prevalent throughout Senegal due to foreign investors and political instabilities. Land Ownership, therefore, is considered a prized gain of autonomy and agency, and women who are currently lacking access to even the smallest portion of that ownership due to their customary social settings are being continuously pitted as dependents in their society. Both Land Ownership and Family Law play a significant role in the understanding of societal hierarchies as they both maintain a deep connection which links Senegal’s roots as a liberated African nation as well as a Muslim-majority nation. Religion therefore proves to be a key feature in influencing the customary law of Senegalese society.

**Family Planning in Senegal**

Family planning has been defined by the United Nations Population Fund as “the information, means and methods that allow individuals to decide if and when to have children.” Family planning can be enacted through various methods such as contraceptives including birth control pills, IUDs, condoms as well as other methods such as calendar planning. For this

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53 Ibid
54 Ibid
research, we will emphasize our understanding of family planning as a two step process meaning that access can be understood as access to family planning information and then access to resources to enact that family planning. Both of these factors will be heavily influenced by cultural boundaries and limits of family planning.55

Family planning has been in practice since the 16th century where it originated amongst the people of Djenné in West Africa (south of Mali). In its origins, family planning was used to give women space after giving birth (commonly called birth spacing) so as to allow women time to best physically and psychologically prepare for the next child.56 Since then, family planning has evolved across the globe in varying fashions. The contraceptive movement was popularized in the West by Margaret Sanger in the early 20th century. Born in New York, Sanger’s activism promoted the importance of reproductive awareness and liberty for a promotion in women’s status as she founded what would later become Planned Parenthood. Sanger also sponsored the first world population conference in 1927 which tackled the issue of overpopulation in less developed and poorer countries. This mission of Sanger’s has proven to be incredibly problematic, for throughout her mission she maintained ulterior motives in support of eugenics.57

Family planning, thus, diverged in perception in the West and the rest of the world. In the West, family planning became equivalent with contraception as the women’s liberation movement promoted birth control access throughout the United States and the UK. Although birth control faced stigmatization from existing Western patriarchal structures, it was widely accepted by women in the West. To this day, birth control has continued to become normalized in the West.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, between 2015 and 2017, 64.9% of

the 72.2 million women surveyed aged 15–49 in the United States are using some form of contraception. In 2019, UN data collection found that approximately 71% of women ranging in age from 15-49 in the UK were using a form of contraception. Contraception, ranging from the contraceptive pill and IUD as well as a male condom, have become normalized particularly amongst younger women in the United States and the UK, as well as several other European countries including Belarus, Norway, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Germany whose statistics relay that over 50% of women aged 15-49 are using some form of contraceptive.

In contrast to the statistics from the West, the statistics the UN found regarding the use of contraceptives specifically throughout Africa were lower. Out of the entire continent, only 5 countries reported over 50% of women using some form of contraceptive. Four of these countries (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, and Namibia) are all in the South African region and Eswatini had the highest reported use at 53.4%. In Western Africa, the region averaged 22% of women who were using contraception, the highest being Liberia with 28.6%. Senegal’s statistics fell slightly below average as 20.8% of women are estimated to be using contraception. Within this percentage, the type of contraception use in Senegal can be divided up as follows: 0.3% female sterilization, 3.1% pill, 7.4% injectable, 6.1% implant, 1.6% IUD, 1.0% male condom, 0.5% rhythm (or charting of fertility), 0.2% withdrawal, and 0.7% other. The difference in these statistics can be explained by multiple reasons including culture, poverty, medical research, colonialism, etc., which all have some sort of influence. Still, the culture today in Senegal is what continues to influence the use, knowledge, and acceptance of family planning practices and

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60. Ibid
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
contraception in the area. The political influences are deeply intertwined with the creation of a culture which also relies heavily on religion. The combination of these factors has proven to create some of the biggest barriers when it comes to providing access and information about family planning methods in Senegal.

The current perception of family planning in Senegal remains diverse. Based on values and identities such as class, geography (rural vs. urban), religion, gender, etc, various understandings and limits of family planning exist creating a diverse cultural mindset. In her 2013 research, Heidi Kahle conducted interviews in Dakar in an attempt to gain an impression of public perception surrounding family planning. It is important to note that the overall access to family planning methods is significantly higher in Dakar than in rural Senegal, and the attitude of the persons interviewed will be influenced by this availability and access. Kahle ultimately found that each person she interviewed (ranging from gynecologists and professors to mothers and Imams) believed that family planning had some sort of benefit, most notably relating to the well-being of women and children who can be victims of poverty and lack of sufficient resources. The interviewees however noted a divide in the reasoning behind the importance of family planning between urban and rural lives. They found it crucial to have access to family planning in urban Dakar as they noted that many mothers tend to work more in order to help ease the higher cost of living. In rural areas, however, the interviewees noted that family planning is important in order to counter the cultural pressure placed upon women to have a lot of children. Interviewees also agreed upon the importance of delegating access and knowledge of family planning to both men and women, as men become skeptical when left out of the conversation, making them more likely to restrict access to women who are thus put into more dangerous

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circumstances. Finally, from her interviews, Kahle found that the terminology used when discussing family planning in Senegal is pivotal in its perception and acceptance. The narrative of contraception and birth prevention which is used most commonly throughout the West, enters the Senegalese culture with skepticism as they can understand it to be a threat of colonialism. This threat dates back to the argument of eugenics and population control institutionalized by Sanger. The interviewees therefore noted that discussions of family planning are most effective when focused around ideas of “organizing” and “structuring” the family unit with intent, rather than “controlling” or “limiting” the number of children one has. Ultimately Kahle found that throughout Dakar, the perceptions of family planning were positive, however, she notes that these perceptions are directly influenced by the access and education which differs between Dakar and rural Senegal.

In both areas, however, religion continues to play a key role in influencing the culture of Senegal. As discussed earlier, the central cultural legal systems are based around Islamic law in Senegal, and therefore religion directly influences the role of women in society and reproductive rights knowledge. In her interviews, Kahle found that several people emphasized that Islam does not forbid family planning (so long as family planning prioritizes the argument that above all, its goal is to protect the well-being of women and children). Both of the Imams who were interviewed supported family planning as a way to support women within their communities. In contrast, however, one of the mothers interviewed mentioned that Imams and other religious leaders can be hypocritical when it comes to family planning as she stated that

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64 Ibid, 18.
66 Ibid, 19.
“Religious leaders say yes to family planning, but in reality, it’s not that. They do not want it... There’s a contradiction in Senegal, religious leaders say yes but they do not apply it to their families.”

Despite being open about supporting family planning, many activists are skeptical of the Imams in power as they have seen them fail to put their words into actions. Still, Imams continue to have a lot of power and influence in their communities and thus their opinions and promises should not go unnoticed. Through all of her interviews, Kahle found that religious leaders have the most access to their communities (even more than both politicians and medical professionals) and thus she concluded that their influence will be necessary for any cultural promotion of family planning in the region.

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Chapter 3: Using Religious Leaders to make Political and Cultural Changes

Non-Secular Peace Promotion

Religious leaders maintain a critical role in their communities, especially communities who fail to find trust in other positions of power such as government officials, familial structures, etc. Often providing a sense of security, consistency and reason to those who have lived turbulent lives, religious communities and those who lead them directly impact every aspect not only of the individual's life, but of the culture which the group creates. Despite religious leaders being proven to be a direct connection between the culture and the politics of the region, they have too long been exempt from political conversations due to the historic secular nature of international politics. Recently, however, there has been an increase in the inclusion of religious leaders in political discussions, especially in conversations involving peace mediation and conflict resolutions. Since 1975, conflicts including religion as a factor have been on the rise, and between 1975 and 2010, approximately 30% of armed conflicts were charted as being influenced by religion. In response to this, the US passed the UNSCR 2250 in 2015 in efforts to promote the engagement of religious actors in peace mediation. In 2017, the US Institute of Peace conducted a report to examine the effectiveness/influence of the resolution. The report found that religious leaders and youth provide access to some of the most vulnerable and inaccessible communities, and even if youth and traditional religious leaders disagree, they are both important perspectives to bring to the table of peace mediation. By engaging with religious leaders, states

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and political powers provide leverage and legitimacy to the authority of religious leaders, making it more likely for them to build connections and trust when sharing policy ideas.

One channel in which religious individuals are working towards peace and gaining a voice in the political sphere is through non-secular, religious NGOs (RNGOs). RNGOs have become increasingly popular in local communities, especially those that display greater levels of distrust within their governments (particularly unstable or corrupt governments). Because religious organizations themselves are able to offer stability as highly organized and structured units in communities where governments cannot, non-secular NGOs present a more culturally adaptive alternative to secular international NGOs. Building off of the community's trust, religious NGOs “challenge the notion that the emerging global order is purely secular.”\(^{71}\) Further, RNGOs are able to thrive not only from a participant perspective, but also from a financial and resource perspective. Because they are affiliated with outside networks, RNGOs are granted more resources than other secular NGOs. Able to draw on a more global group of individuals for financial support, RNGOs are given a less dependent platform with which to build their agendas on, being able to seek donations from a variety of individuals rather than one international/foreign donation. When dealing with peace initiatives, RNGOs present another new dichotomy as well. Religious institutions themselves are directly related to a sort of moral entity that prides itself on the efforts of protecting the sacredness of human life.\(^{72}\) Because of this, they are able to look beyond barriers of political ideologies or governmental corruptness in peace efforts. Religious NGOs can capitalize on aspects of nonviolence and spirituality as a bonding factor of humanity, providing them with an initial bridge to conversation that is not possible in a

\(^{71}\) Berger, “Religious Nongovernmental Organizations”: 17.

\(^{72}\) Berger, “Religious Nongovernmental Organizations”: 19.
secular method for peace. 73 Three places where NGOs were/are continuing to be found influential are in the peace processes of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and amongst current peace efforts in Israel/Palestine and Nigeria.

The conflict in Northern Ireland (commonly referred to as the Troubles) has been classified as an ethno-national or ethno-religious conflict. Lasting for almost 30 years, the conflict between self described protestants and catholics ended with the Good Friday agreement in 1998. Although no official religious groups or leaders were present during the signing and writing for the agreement, their role was monumental in coming to a conclusion. The Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) played a key role in communicating peace efforts with the political loyalists. 74 By drawing on their already established religious community and legitimacy as evangelicals, ECONI was able to appeal to a wide Protestant community in order to influence their thoughts about peace, reconciliation and compromise. 75 Built off of a grassroots mission to engage with religious leaders in conversation with an overarching goal to promote peace in their dialogue, ECONI eventually built relationships with political officials. The organization was thus able to maintain their relationship to the Church, however by being separated from the church’s title (and creating their own organization) ECONI had flexibility when expressing and conversing their own political opinions, making them a bridge between the church, the people and the politicians. 76 The work done by ECONI as well as other NGO groups such as the Clonard-Fitzroy Fellowship, the Corrymeela Community, and the Community Dialogue Northern Ireland to help bridge gaps between political entities and churches during the

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76 Ibid, 15,16.
Troubles, giving power to the voices of those church and politics communities that they otherwise would not have had. By raising voices from the grassroots level, the RNOGs of Northern Ireland promoted peace that had been long sought after by the people.

The RNOG model of Northern Ireland has continued to be used, especially in peace mediation work amongst the Israel/Palestine conflict. Several religious grassroots organizations are continuing to prioritize building dialogue based on commonalities between groups, and religion has proven to be a greater connection than it is a divide between communities. Interfaith based NGOs in Jerusalem such as Friends of Roots and Interfaith Encounter Association, have noted that by focusing their dialogue between individuals around religion, people are able to find a sort of connection that builds trust and sparks conversation. On a more political level, mediation between extremists leaders is also being led by non-secular mediation processes. In Israel/Palestine, these organizations are still blooming, as religious leaders are taking it upon themselves to learn about other communities so as to dissolve local tensions. For example, Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth who works for Mosaica uses his own religion and practices in his mediation processes as Mosaica’s mission is to engage with religious extremism in the Israel/Palestine region through an insider mediation process so as to come to resolutions and peaceful agreements. Religious extremist groups are often left out of political dialogues as they are considered “spoilers,” however their influence over their communities is not only strong but dangerous, as they pose imminent threats to the safety of their communities. Therefore, in order to engage with them in a productive manner, organizations like Mosaica use religion as a bridge for dialogue between these group leaders. Mosaica provides these “spoilers” with a chance to be


78 Bailey Montgomery,”Examining the Efforts of Non Secular Grassroots Organizations and How Religion Can be Used as a Bridge to Peace in the Israel-Palestine Conflict,” Mandel-Palagye Summer Research Program, Tulane University, June 2021.
heard in situations where they are often ignored, helping to prevent localized, hostile conflict. For example, Mosaica launched a campaign to engage with religious leaders in preventing the spread of misinformation during the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic. This mission was able to provide religious leaders with the knowledge and the platform to stop the spread of misinformation regarding the science behind Covid-19 research, ultimately promoting the acceptance of recommendations from the WHO such as wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.

Non-secular peace mediation is continuing to grow across the globe, including in the Western African Sahel region. In Nigeria, Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions are all practiced freely and commonly. Because of this, religion has deeply influenced cultural laws and understandings throughout Nigeria. Therefore, conflict which arises as ethno-national, interstate, economic or territorial is intrinsically linked to or involving religion. In response to the current political conflict in Northern Nigeria, several non-secular peace organizations began to develop, making efforts to create resolutions between conflicting religious groups. Because peace processes are long and time consuming (and not often totally successful) it is difficult to measure their success rates, however, in Nigeria we can analyze small victories such as promoting dialogue and awareness between different religious groups. Organizations such as the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), The Interfaith Mediation Centre of Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum (IMC- MCDF), and the International Peace League (IPL) have continued to help do this. These organizations are all based in existing religious communities, and have proven successful in gaining traction as they are built upon a system which has already

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79 Ibid.
established trust within the community and has resources from their international religious partners. In Nigeria, the government's inconsistency has led to a lack of trust and legitimacy as well as a lack of funds, making their peace process unsustainable. However, interfaith and non-secular groups are able to demonstrate qualities which people hope to see in their government: socially tolerant, democratic and peace-centered.  

Thus, their peace mediation extends the example of tolerance and acceptance from one religious group to the other, building upon an already existing structure that is highly trusted, and thus more accepted in the communities.

The Existing Culture of Religion and Family Planning in Senegal

Peace mediation, in its most basic form, refers to conflict-management and an end to violence in a community, however violence can go beyond just physical. Violence in forms of discrimination also exists, and mediation is needed to make legal changes to discriminatory policies. When addressing the subject of family planning in Africa, it proves complex and intersectional as its resistance is backed by historic impacts of colonialism which has led to an ongoing racist patriarchal structure that exists. Family planning, therefore, on one hand, is rejected as a threat of the white colonialist narrative to limit the population of black people in the world. On the other hand, religious extremist narratives are continuing to be used to prevent women from gaining knowledge and access to family planning resources. This intersectional issue makes family planning a difficult subject to broach in the region, however, it has continued to be done, even by religious leaders.

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82 Ibid 142
83 Ibid 145,146
When assessing the three most common religious practices in throughout West Africa (Christianity, Islam and traditional African religions) all three religions have variations on the acceptance of family planning. Different denominations (and even different individual church leaders) preach/practice a variety of acceptances of family planning ranging from being in full denial, to partial acceptances (such as making sure the man is and aware and involved in the decision making process or limiting the type of family planning that is accepted) or total acceptance. Still, however, the churches are not the ones leading the promotion of family planning, despite being leaders of communities and trendsetters of cultural norms. The majority of the influential work in prompting access to family planning is continuing to be done by local grassroots feminists organizations. The Ouagadougou Partnership has been key in today’s work of promoting family planning access throughout Western Africa. This partnership was launched in 2011 between Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The unit head which is based in Dakar, Senegal centers its work around engaging in relationships and coordinating with donors to achieve the mission of the organization which is to “increase the number of modern contraceptive methods users to at least one million between 2011 and 2015 and 2.2 million between 2016 and 2020,” and to promote family planning as a catalyst for sustainable development in the region.85 This Partnership recently released their ten year report in which they acknowledged where their goals were met (for example, Mali established an Office of Reproductive Health and Niger decreed free Family Planning access in 2016), and where they fell short and continue to grow, especially mentioning the promotion of youth leaders.86

The report also mentions a desired effort to connect with religious leaders and traditional cultural leaders in order to promote family planning in more rural communities. The report, however, rarely mentions specific examples of this, only mentioning the Alliance des Religieux de l'Afrique de l'Ouest pour la Promotion de la Santé et le Développement in Mali who they note “has provided assistance to internally displaced persons, established consultation frameworks for dialogue between religious movements, and facilitated peaceful coexistence.” There thus exists a disconnect between the established desires of the Ouagadougou Partnership’s efforts to connect with religious leaders and the outcome of their actions. This discrepancy can be arguably accredited to several reasons, however it is worth noting that the Partnership maintains an alliance and deep partnership with several Western government organizations such as the French Development Agency (AFD), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). Despite the organization being led by locals, their work continues to be intertwined with outside politics, which, as mentioned earlier, can be threatening to religious leaders in the West African region in relation to the topic of family planning who feel threatened by historic implications.

This barrier must be transcended in order to effectively connect religious leaders and family planning knowledge in West Africa, and in order to do this, international family planning activists must not only change the diction which they use to describe family planning, but they must begin to show a direct support for religious communities. In 2017, a guide for family planning advocacy through religious leaders was published by the Christian Connections for

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87 Ibid, 24.
International Health Organization. The guide described a series of reasons directed towards faith leaders where they explained the significance and importance of promoting family planning methods in their communities. The guide goes through a set of discussion questions which would be used to lead religious leaders through the process of learning about family planning beyond its original history (the history which they feel threatened by) and outside of the western context. In a sort of training format, religious leaders would use the guide to create their own idealistic view of family planning. As found in the Kahle interviews as well as the Ouagadougou Partnership’s report, religious leaders continue to voice the importance of women’s healthcare, however the discrepancy between what they believe healthcare to be and what they believe family planning to be exists. A crucial step, therefore, when engaging with religious leaders is to separate oneself from western development/population control groups and ideas and to then ask religious leaders what their ideal circumstance regarding women's health and family planning would be so as to find the best possible way to promote its access.

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Chapter 4: Case Study in Senegal

West Africa as a region is charted as having some of the highest rates of birth complications and some of the lowest rates of contraception. According to the research done by Ouagadougou Partnership, approximately 225 child-bearers in West Africa die per day while giving birth.\textsuperscript{90} Further, according to the research collected by the United Nations, only 22\% of women aged 15-49 are using some form of family planning/birth spacing.\textsuperscript{91} This has since made the West African region a target for a lot of outside efforts to promote birth control as a way to promote women's health. The difficulty, however enlies within the conflict and pushback which outside organizations face when they try to promote family planning. As stated earlier, this can be attributed to various reasons including the diction which outside organizations use, the colonialist threat which they bring as they typically come from western regions, and the disruption to the current culture of the society. Although many organizations have made efforts to control these grievances (such as using the term family planning instead of population/birth control), there still continues to exist some doubt in both acceptance and promotion of family planning methods that would be accepted by the culture of a community. Continuously, the significance of the role of the religious and traditional leaders has been noted as being important to developing the culture of West African communities. Although they can influence the community in a negative light, religious leaders have also made efforts to promote peace, such as those in Nigeria who formed NGOs. Religious leaders have been seen and noted to be involved in peace processes, and are now beginning to be added to the conversations about family planning.

\textsuperscript{90}“Partenariat De Ouagadougou,” Ouagadougou Partnership, accessed 2022.
\textsuperscript{91}United Nations, “Contraceptive Use by Method 2019 Data Booklet,” UN Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019.
Senegal proves to be an interesting component for the West African region. In some ways it presents an average in region: having a mix of urban and rural life, a wealth status that is the median of its region, speaking French in combination with its traditional Wolof language, encompassing a mix of religions (majority Sunni Islam which has a long tradition in West Africa\textsuperscript{92}). Senegal also presents deep connections with the Western world, as it brought about one of the largest populations of migrants in Europe and the United States. Several Senegalese citizens tend to know someone (family, friend or community member) who lives and works in the West and sends money back to their home communities.\textsuperscript{93} The transnational Senegalese community has extended to Senegalese religious leaders who have traveled to the West, growing their communities and making their ideas and personas transnational.\textsuperscript{94} Senegal, in this sense has proved itself to be a bridge in culture between West Africa and the global Christian and Islam communities. There has thus developed a greater tolerance for outside ideas in Senegal, being why several organizations such as Ouagadougou Partnership base themselves in Dakar. Senegal continues to lead the Francophone West African region in several categories of liberalism such as the World Press Freedom Index and Freedom House's Global Freedom score.\textsuperscript{95} Although the objectiveness of these ranking systems is debated, Senegal’s spot still proves its ability to connect with the West despite being a majority Muslim country. Its intersectional culture and history puts its status in a prime international position, all the while maintaining a strong value towards its own local traditions.


\textsuperscript{93}Abdoulaye Kane, “Charity and Self-Help: Migrants’ Social Networks and Health Care in the Homeland,” \textit{Anthropology Today} 26, no. 4 (2010): 8–12.


Research: Interviews Conducted

The overlapping qualities which Senegal presents allows for opportune ground for presenting the study and assessment of the effectiveness of engaging with religious leaders in the region to promote access to Family Planning methods. Further, knowing that the atmosphere of birth control acceptance in Senegal seems neutral, with more positive reactions coming from the urban areas than the rural areas (according to the study done by Khale), it proves to be a safe environment for questioning/interviewing religious leaders. Therefore, in 2018 the World Faiths Development Dialogue (a non-profit organization based in Washington DC which works to include religious dialogue in conversations of global development) teamed up with the Cadre des Religieux pour la Santé et le Développement (CRSD) (an interfaith organization based in Senegal) in efforts to conduct a survey with religious leaders throughout various communities in Senegal to acknowledge their perceptions on family planning (specifically the act of birth-spacing\textsuperscript{96}) promotions.\textsuperscript{97} The survey conducted interviews with Imams and a Catholic Priests, as well as civilian women and men in Kédougou, Mbacké, and Ranérou. The survey asked the religious leaders questions regarding the following topics:

- Their religions position on reproductive health/birth spacing practices.
- Their religious perspective on maternal health [post giving birth].
- Their opinions on the connection between family planning and community welfare.
- Their opinions on the relationship between the state/ health department and the religious leaders.

\textsuperscript{96}Birth spacing was decided to be used as it is considered to be the most universally understood term in reference to family planning. The term family was very new at the time of the survey and is still being clarified in its definition in the region. As stated earlier “birth control” and “abortion” pose too large of a threat to religious leaders. Birth spacing therefore is used as a more accepted word choice whose meaning is equivalent to multiple methods of family planning such as natural spacing, the contraceptive pill, and male condoms.

The specific questions varied, as the interviewees tended to follow up in response to the religious leader's answers. Throughout the interviews, however, the religious leaders gave their general opinions on family planning, their faith practices, and their relationship with the state. The general air of their responses is demonstrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Religious Leader</th>
<th>Are you in favor of birth spacing promotion?</th>
<th>Does your religion support birth spacing?</th>
<th>Does birth spacing relate to community welfare?</th>
<th>Does the state support religious leaders?</th>
<th>Would you consider promoting education about birth spacing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kédougou</td>
<td>Imam 1</td>
<td>Believes it is a personal decision to be made between couples and health care workers.</td>
<td>It is not influential/relevant to the decision making process.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes, however health workers should work privately with individuals first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imam 2</td>
<td>Yes, so long as the couple makes the decision together.</td>
<td>Yes, so long as the couple makes the decision together.</td>
<td>Yes,birth spacing can provide financial relief.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>No, it would be difficult to talk about in public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Priest 1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Natural planning only</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Enough is already happening: young girls are being provided with church-approved sex ed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Imam</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mbacké</td>
<td>Imam 3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Religious leaders should speak to elder women only who are then responsible for communicating with their daughters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imam 4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Birth spacing is only permitted if needed to promote the health of the woman.</td>
<td>Yes, birth spacing can be used to promote the financial well-being of a household.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranérou</td>
<td>Imam 5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Islam promotes the health of an individual—does not have proper knowledge to speak on birth spacing.</td>
<td>No, the state ignores religious leaders. Yes, but I would need to educate myself more on the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imam 6</td>
<td>Birth spacing should be a conversation conducted between a woman and her husband.</td>
<td>It falls within sharia to promote a woman’s health and thus her right to</td>
<td>No, it is the responsibility of medical professionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The men and women in the interview were also asked questions about the religious leaders' role in their communities and their own relationship with religions. A summary of questions which were asked to them includes:

- What is your opinion on the practices of birth spacing?
- Do you know someone/have you suffered reproductive health issues?
- Have you had conversations with your partner about birth spacing?
- What does your religion say about birth spacing?
- Has your religious leader discussed the topic of birth spacing with you?

Similar to the religious leaders, the specific questions and answers varied between the focus groups of men and women who were interviewed. The general air of their responses is demonstrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Group Gender; Religion</th>
<th>Do you know someone/ Have you experienced reproductive health difficulties?</th>
<th>What is your relationship with/ opinion on the concept of birth spacing?</th>
<th>Is a woman required to converse with her husband before deciding to practice birth spacing?</th>
<th>What is your religious leader's opinion on birth spacing?</th>
<th>Is your religious leader influential in your opinions on birth spacing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kédougou</td>
<td>Women; Muslim</td>
<td>Yes, one woman volunteered her difficulties</td>
<td>Having pregnancies too close together can</td>
<td>Answers were split: most said yes except in cases of</td>
<td>The Imam does not speak in public of these</td>
<td>Yes, the Imam’s advice is needed to note if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Gender; Religion</td>
<td>Statement 1</td>
<td>Statement 2</td>
<td>Statement 3</td>
<td>Statement 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men; Muslim</td>
<td>Yes, one man discussed his wife’s failed pregnancy.</td>
<td>Above all, the health of the woman is a priority.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>One mentioned that the Imams have held meetings with the men and are trying to raise awareness. Another noted his Imam was against it.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mbacké; mixed religion</td>
<td>Two women said yes: in both answers they spoke of women who struggled to use family planning due to their husbands views.</td>
<td>Family planning is a good thing: brings peace and health to women.</td>
<td>Yes. You should also talk to your mother or mother-in-law.</td>
<td>Birth spacing is permitted if a woman’s health is threatened.</td>
<td>n/a-- one woman mentioned that religious leaders should discuss the matter.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Men; mixed religion</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a.</td>
<td>Islam permits birth spacing if the woman’s health is fragile.</td>
<td>The Imam speaks in private about the matter before a couple is married.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ranérou</td>
<td>Women; mixed religion</td>
<td>One woman spoke of the difficulties she had while pregnant.</td>
<td>Family planning is acceptable when their husband agrees; several women mention that they are using it but hide it from their communities.</td>
<td>Yes. Some women mention that they know of individuals who use family planning even though their husbands are against it.</td>
<td>Family planning is allowed in consultation with one’s husband in order to promote the woman’s health.</td>
<td>If religious leaders worked to increase awareness the community would follow in support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men; mixed religion</td>
<td>One man discussed his wife's difficult pregnancy.</td>
<td>Family planning is used only when the woman’s health is at stake.</td>
<td>Women should consult their husbands first, and he should support her decision. If he doesn’t, she can use family planning on her own.</td>
<td>Religion promotes family planning if a woman’s health is fragile.</td>
<td>Opinions were split: some urged religious leaders to promote family planning so the community would support it, others disagreed.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Assessment

The responses from the religious leaders as well as the focus groups reveal information about the relationship between religion, gender, and family planning in Senegal that can be used to address the next steps which should be taken in order to continue to promote access to family planning. Throughout the interviews, there were a series of consistencies found between and across each group. 1. The acknowledgement that family planning is accepted by religion in cases where the woman's health is threatened, 2. The idea that a woman should first and foremost consult her husband if she wishes to begin family planning and 3. Religious leaders have a tendency to stay out of the conversation, usually prompting the matter as private. Each of these constituencies provides us with an ability to analyze the success and flaws of current non-secular efforts to promote access to family planning, and in turn present potential changes to be made in the approach.

In regards to the first consistency, it is now proven that the term “birth spacing” and sometimes the term “family planning” relates itself to the ideas of healthcare for women. On a positive note, this relates the success of the recent efforts to these newfound terms so as to distance the ideas of family planning from their historic threats of population control. The interviews reveal that women, men and religious leaders are all able to associate birth spacing with healthcare (as several mentioned the importance of women discussing their options with health care professionals) allowing family planning to not be seen merely as a political threat of colonization from the West. In contrast, the cons of this dialogue seen in the interview is that religious leaders, as well as some men and women mentioned that family planning must only be used in cases where the woman’s health is threatened or not good.98 In this case, family planning can be noted as sometimes being seen as a last resort: an exception to be allowed after the

98 Ibid.
woman’s health has already deteriorated/been put at risk. This culture of family planning demonstrates its use as reactive rather than proactive which is less effective in the prevention of maternal and fetal illness and deaths. Further, as most of the women and men in the group mentioned either having or knowing someone who has pregnancy difficulties, revealing the commonality of this issue. This flaw in the encouraging or family planning access must be noted when continuing discussions with religious leaders: the dialogue must continue to frame family planning not only as a women’s health issue but as a preventative measure.

Still, the dialogue must not threaten societal culture too much. Most interviewees (women, men and religious leaders) at some point noted the importance of a woman engaging in conversation with her husband before beginning to use family planning methods. This conversation is expected to build trust and partnership in a marriage and to give mutual respect between the needs of both man and woman. By prompting the engagement of conversation between men and women publicly, religious leaders could preserve the notion that the discussion should include men and be private, while also making sure that all couples are aware of the options and access to family planning options. Some interviewees even mentioned that a woman and her husband should talk with their Imam in order to gain guidance about family planning matters. Although there are positives to keeping talks of family planning private (as it can help build trust), as mentioned earlier, a religious leader's impact goes beyond a private life of individuals as we have seen how they influence customs which in Senegal greatly dictates customary law. In a society where customary law holds so much power, religious leaders do have a duty to speak of issues dealing with the well-being of women publically. Still, there will continue to be Imams and religious leaders who personally disagree about the matters of family
planning, and will struggle to agree to discuss them privately, never to mention the option of public speaking or workshops.

It is with this refusal that it is important to assess what is holding the religious leaders back from promoting family planning access. From the interviews we can gauge the consistency that religious leaders have attempted to stay out of the conversation of family planning. Their reasons for doing so, however, varied. While some admitted to believing it was the job of the health professionals, others stated it as a private matter between families, and others admitted to not knowing much about it and were therefore intimidated to discuss the matter.\textsuperscript{99} Still, both the men and the women throughout the interviews acknowledged the significant role which their religious leaders have played in their lives as well as they noted that in regards to family planning, they would likely consult and trust the opinions of their religious and community leaders. We are therefore left to question what discrepancy is causing the religious leaders to speak only privately about the matters of family planning. Although some may simply continue to disagree with it altogether, it is important to note the lack of information which the religious leaders have on the topic. Feeling unequipped to discuss the topic of family planning, they therefore referred to medical professionals and the state. However, this cyclical issue reverts back to the Kahle interviews in which she noted the perspective of several healthcare workers who felt that they did not have the authority or influence to change the culture of acceptance of family planning in the same way that religious leaders do.\textsuperscript{100} Access to information thus dwindles as the culture inadvertently pushes it down and leaders refuse to speak on it while medical professionals and activists are not being listened to at the same level.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Heidi Kahle, "Public Perceptions on Family Planning and Birth Spacing in the Cultural and Religious Context of Senegal: A Case Study in Dakar, Senegal," Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection, 2013.
Propositions of Future Efforts

Although the interviews reveal less than enthusiastic opinions from religious leaders to discuss family planning topics, it does reveal two positive notes: 1. Civilians (both men and women) have noted that they would listen to religious leaders if they provided public opinions and information about family planning and 2. Religious leaders are not directly against family planning, but they rather feel that it is not their place to speak on the matter due to their own lack of understanding and information. The access and information about family planning, however, does exist and it is thus a promising option to bridge the gap between the two. As has been done in effort of peace building and mediation, it can be proposed that religious leaders begin to work directly with outside organizations and states to promote family planning access. Organizations such as the Ouagadougou Partnership have demonstrated their desire to work alongside religious leaders as well, however they have been unable to fully do so. This is potentially due to the influence of the secular missions of western organizations. As one of the religious leaders mentioned in the interview, religious leaders sometimes feel as though they are unheard or disregarded by the state (similar to the way they feel during peace mediation processes). However, if given a platform in a non-secular environment, religious leaders could gain access to information in a similar manner to the guide presented by the Christian Connections for International Health.\footnote{Christian Connections for International Health, “Family Planning Advocacy through Religious Leaders: A Guide for Faith Communities,” January 2017.} The approach to family planning in non-secular communities must therefore be different from traditional Western approaches, and by presenting religious leaders with knowledge and platforms, the influence of family planning methods can continue to be charted.
Conclusion

Despite the long history of secularism which the field of international relations has had, we have seen it start to shift. From non secular international theory to interfaith peace mediation, the acknowledgment of the significance which religious communities and their leaders have is permeating in awareness. In regards to the promotion of family planning access in the Global South two main things should be noted: 1. The history of the colonialist narrative about population control continues to be a threat making the language of family planning crucial and 2. Women and men continue to desire a variety of options and information despite not always having access to it. When dealing with the first point, we can note why it is vital that the promotion of family planning comes from a trusted source within the region who is able to adapt to the existing cultures. With regards to the second point, we can continue to promote access rather than action: family planning comes in a variety of forms which should be demonstrated as equal options rather than hierarchically and it is crucial to include men in the conversation as well. Senegal as a country is familiar with intersectional transnational identities, making its interfaith dialogue potentially more open than other states in the region. With that, it still faces hardships and corruption that lead to distrust in the state, being that religious leaders have much power in dictating the culture of the community. Therefore, in order to promote family planning in Senegal it is necessary to go through and gain support of religious leaders. Providing access to influence of culture and acceptance, religious leaders are seen as symbols of trust and knowledge and direct paths to their communities. In order to gain their support and trust, however, outside actors must maintain a non-secular approach similar to how they have done in peace mediation. The pretentious air of secularism has connected itself to colonialist impacts and is therefore necessary to be left behind in conversation. Ultimately, each religious leader will maintain his
own opinion, however, in order to build a dialogue and promote family planning access it is necessary to engage with them.
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