4-2019

Le Ventre de la Femme Sénégalaise: Control and Reclamation of the Senegalese Female Body, From French Colonialism to Modern Healthcare

Leah Roemer

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Part of the African History Commons, African Studies Commons, Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, Race and Ethnicity Commons, Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons, and the Women's History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/1402

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Le Ventre de la femme sénégalaise
Control and Reclamation of the Senegalese Female Body

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures from
William & Mary

by
Leah Roemer

Accepted for Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Magali Compan, Director
Elyas Bakhtiari
Giulia Pacini
Kathleen Jenkins
Jonathan Glasser

Williamsburg, VA
April 30, 2019
Le Ventre de la Femme Sénégalaise
Control and Reclamation of the Senegalese Female Body,
From French Colonialism to Modern Healthcare

Leah Roemer
Introduction

Since 2010, three figures have towered over the coastal city of Dakar, Senegal. Perched on an extinct volcano in the neighborhood of Ouakam above the city, the man, woman, and child look out towards the sea, the child pointing determinedly into the distance. *Le Monument de la Renaissance Africaine* is meant to represent the future of Senegalese and African power. The tallest statue in Africa, it stands higher than both the Statue of Liberty in New York City and Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro. Nineteen African heads of state, as well as the Reverend Jesse Jackson and the hip-hop musician Akon, attended the lavish unveiling on April 3, 2010. At the time, then-President Abdoulaye Wade, who had conceived the project, wrote that, “This African who emerges from the volcano, facing the West...symbolizes that Africa which freed itself from several centuries of imprisonment in the abyssal depths of ignorance, intolerance, and racism, to retrieve its place on this land, which belongs to all races, in light, air and freedom” (Al Jazeera and Agencies 2010). The President of the African Union, Bingu wa Mutharika, stated, “This monument does not belong to Senegal. It belongs to the African people wherever we are” (CNN Wire Staff 2010).

However, beneath the applause and symbolism of the new monument lay controversy, misrepresentation, and sexism. The day of the unveiling, rather than celebrate the glory of their African heritage, thousands of protesters marched in the Dakar streets to criticize the new statue. They had many complaints; for one, the $28 million price tag. For a country of 15 million in which an estimated 46.7% of people live in poverty and 17% are food insecure (World Food Programme 2019), the price was exorbitant and simply unjust.
Furthermore, a monument billed as a celebration of African strength had been designed not by a Senegalese architect, but by Romanian sculptor Virgil Magherusan (O’Toole 2012). The “Soviet-style” (BBC 2010) statue featured little trace of African or Senegalese art styles and instead seemed more reminiscent of the “West” from which it
allegedly sought to distance itself. In a final blow to the monument’s supposed African promise, observers noticed that a delegation of North Korean officials attended the ceremony. They were there to honor a statue built by 50 North Korean laborers from a Pyongyang company called Mansudae Overseas Projects. For the protesters, this provided “yet another source of discontent in a country where formal employment is scarce” (Al Jazeera and Agencies 2010). In return for the company’s work, Wade allocated Senegalese land to North Korea. A North Korean official commented that he hoped the friendly relations between the two countries would grow even stronger in the future (CNN Wire Staff 2010).

In a country that is almost 95% Muslim, with a predominantly Catholic minority, Wade managed to draw the ire of both religious groups with his new statue. Many leading imams criticized the wastefulness of the monument as well as its idolatrous nature, “presenting the human form as an object of worship” (Al Jazeera and Agencies 2010). They were further disturbed by the woman’s naked legs and apparent lack of modesty. Influential imam Massamba Diop went so far as to issue a fatwa “urging Senegal’s imams this Friday to read the holy Quran in the mosques simply to ask Allah to preserve us from the punishment this monument of shame risks bringing on Senegal” (Al Jazeera and Agencies 2010). Christians criticized Wade and protested in Dakar after he compared the statue to statues of Jesus in churches, which led Wade to issue yet another apology. Leaders of both religious groups remained displeased with the project.

Above all the complaints over the financial expenditures, global outsourcing, and sacrilege of the work, however, some of the loudest critical voices came from women. Senegalese, Romanian, and North Korean minds together had produced a piece of art that sexualized women and reinforced their perceived purpose as addendums, as mere
vehicles for childbirth and copulation. While the man in the statue is almost comically muscular, holding the pointing child singlehandedly on his shoulder as he stoically gazes towards the sea, the woman waits behind him, an afterthought. Instead of the sea, she stares at the man, who has eyes only for the future of Africa. The sheet wrapped around her slips over one breast and rides up on her thighs so that her entire legs are exposed. Her hand falls passively towards the ground. The child she produced no longer has a thought for her either. She stands as a symbol of sexuality, fertility, and proof of the man’s masculine achievements: he has conquered her body as he will the world.

Senegalese women quickly sounded the alarm. Historian Penda Mbow commented, “This woman, she is completely subjugated to man. It’s the man making the decisions. It’s the man as protector, and that doesn’t fit with the African reality” (Look 2010). Mbow wasn’t the only one who was disgusted with the woman’s portrayal as a “sex object”; a Senegalese columnist wondered if any women had been consulted in the design of this piece of “revolting sexism,” and “from a woman selling vegetables on the side of the road to an educated office manager and single mother of four, there was a similar refrain when asked about the monument: ‘I don’t see myself in that woman’” (Look 2010). Indeed, “in a country where women dress in floor-grazing boubous, carrying heavy loads on their heads and babies strapped to their backs” (Look 2010), the representation was out of touch and offensive to many. Magatte Sy of the Dakar women’s rights organization Siggil Jigeen took issue with the woman’s placement and size, drawing a parallel with the Family Code of Senegal, which declares the man to be the head and decisionmaker of the family. Sy commented, “It’s the man who runs

---

1 Emphasis added.
everything. Everything revolves around him. That’s not the future for the African woman. I don’t want to see the woman behind of or in front of the man, I would like to see her next to him on the same level” (Look 2010). Nevertheless, Wade’s ill-received monument still stands on the hilltop, the woman resolutely behind the man, yet controlled by his arm reaching back. She is an accessory until he needs her; then, her body can provide.

What do we make of this controversial monument? On the one hand, a Wade spokeswoman said that the statue is “an affirmation to be proud of Africa—to be proud to be black” (CNN Wire Staff 2010). Yet evidence shows much of the Senegalese population disapproved of its design and felt shame rather than pride in how it represented their country. The hidden globalized deals behind its creation lent an air of irony to the claim that it was a product of African strength and power. And finally, African women did not see themselves in the scantily clad figure who hovered behind her family members as they asserted their African identity and promise. Female activist and attorney Aminata Kebe stated emphatically, “Does this monument represent the African Renaissance for women? Does this statue represent the future? No, absolutely not” (Look 2010).

Le Monument de la Renaissance Africaine represents an important vignette in the long history of Senegalese women, and their bodies, being controlled, regulated, and subjugated. Though the days of slavery and French colonialism in Senegal are long gone, this statue shows that women in Senegal are still portrayed in demeaning ways, with their role as sexual and fertile beings valued over their intellectual abilities. Further, it shows that this subjugation still comes from both international influences—the
foreigners who played a role in designing and promoting the statue—and a patriarchal structure within Senegal. However, in the face of this reductive and degrading portrayal, women resist and continuously search for ways to subvert the pressure.

This thesis explores the control of Senegalese women and their bodies, and their methods of resistance over time. I argue that this control results from two different sources: an entrenched patriarchal society within Senegal dating from its earliest history as a region, plus international bodies including governments, health organizations, the “Western” media, and independent actors (of which the sculptor Virgil Magherusan is just one example). Even though this international control of Senegalese women allegedly ended with the fall of colonialism, these international bodies still exert great power over Senegalese women’s health, wellness, and representation. This demonstrates a sort of “neo-colonization” of Senegalese women’s bodies. This control is amplified by the entrenched historical values and beliefs Senegalese society holds regarding women, which reinforce myriad female health and social problems. However, Senegalese women have responded by challenging these stereotypes and norms and reinventing their roles in society to increase their personal autonomy. This thesis highlights the ways Senegalese women fight against both domestic and international exploitation to regain control over their bodies.

• • •

History of Senegal

Before the arrival of Europeans, the area that is now Senegal was part of the ancient Ghana and Jolof (now Wolof) kingdoms (Clark, Camara, and Hargreaves
Power and land changed hands between many different ethnic groups over time, forming the foundations of many ethnic groups that still exist in Senegal today, such as the Fulani, the Tukulor (spelled in French as Toucouleur), and the Wolof. Historians trace one of the earliest entries of Islam into the area to c. 1040 C.E., when Zenaga Berbers from what is today Mauritania and northern Senegal established a ribāt, a fortified Muslim religious retreat. The Almoravids, who later conquered Morocco and crossed into Spain, took this fort as a base and converted the Tukulor ethnic group. Islam spread throughout the region through merchant trading and various social confederations, becoming the dominant religion over the next several centuries. However, many people still practiced local animistic religions, often in harmony with Islam.

The Sahara Desert, the tropical rainforest, and the oceanfront converge in Senegal, resulting in a rich diversity of ecosystems, wildlife, and mineral resources. This natural abundance and key location made Senegal attractive to early colonizers and slave traders, leading them to nickname it the “Gateway to Africa.” Though slavery was practiced to some extent within African kingdoms, “most slaves were prisoners taken during battles between warring tribes or those who had become financial debtors who worked to gain their freedom” (Wikle and Lightfoot 2014). The Europeans, on the other hand, envisioned massive overseas transportation of enslaved peoples to support their economic ventures in foreign colonies. The Portuguese reached the Cape Verde peninsula, the westernmost point of Africa and the site of the city of Dakar today,
Around 1444. They established one of several trading factories at nearby Gorée Island soon after. The island became a “center of the rivalry between European nations for control of the slave trade” due to its convenient geographical placement and its “excellent strategic position offering a safe haven for anchoring ships” (UNESCO 2018). The Portuguese retained control of the area until the seventeenth century, when the Dutch established a presence on the island. In 1677 the French took the land and traded enslaved people, gold, and gum Arabic. The British had two periods of occupation before the French officially regained control of Gorée Island in 1816. This presence of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and the British over the centuries produced many colonial mansions in different styles, and local historians estimate that at least 28 of these mansions were used as “slave houses” in which Africans were bought, housed, and sold (Barnett 2012). Today only La Maison des Esclaves—the House of Slaves—remains in the same state it was centuries ago, as a museum and testament to the island’s haunting history.

In 1848, France’s Second Republic outlawed slavery on all French soil, but the French colonists retained a powerful position over the Senegalese peoples. The French exploited several conflicts between ethnic groups to maintain their dominance, and they put the Senegalese to work in peanut cultivation and export, from which great economic benefits flowed to France (Clark, Camara, and Hargreaves 2018). Over the second half of the 19th century France consolidated its land in West Africa and gained more territories. In 1902, Dakar became the capital of French West Africa.

---

3 This section also draws heavily from the various sub-articles in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* about Senegal.
In the 20th century Senegalese officials battled with the French government over French citizenship, which was selectively awarded to residents of some areas, including Saint-Louis, Gorée, and Dakar, though they were an urban minority in the colony. In exchange for helping recruit West African soldiers in World War I, of which some 200,000 served, France affirmed full French citizenship for residents of those cities. Socialist deputies Lamine Guèye and Léopold Sédar Senghor, elected in 1946, originally sought to extend French citizenship rights to the whole Senegalese population, but as nationalist fervor swept across Africa and Asia, Senghor became more inclined towards full independence for Senegal. In 1960 the country finally achieved independence and Senghor became the first president. He is a beloved figure in Senegalese history; not only did he guide the country smoothly through its first twenty years of independence, he also achieved worldwide recognition for his poems, which helped establish the Négritude movement, the “literary and artistic expression of the black African experience” (Clark, Camara, and Hargreaves 2010). These poems include “Femme Noire,” a celebration yet sexualization of female black womanhood which I will examine later in this work. In 1984 Senghor became the first African inducted into the French Academy in recognition of his life achievements, and he holds a heroic legacy in Senegal today.

Since Senghor’s tenure, Senegal has had three presidents: Abdou Diouf, Abdoulaye Wade, and Macky Sall (currently serving). There are several political parties, including the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party. The president appoints a prime minister, who appoints other ministers for various sectors. Senegal has a unicameral legislature, the National Assembly, where representatives serve five-year terms. The country has had relatively peaceful transitions of political power and is known for being
one of the most stable and democratic countries in Africa, with relatively low corruption, speech suppression, and ethnic or religious violence. The presidents have historically maintained strong alliances with the leaders of several Muslim brotherhoods, who exert a large influence over the country and its people.

Recently, the participation and representation of women in Senegalese politics has increased drastically. The 2012 law of parité, or parity, “aims to secure full equality” at all levels of politics by requiring political parties to submit an “alternating list of men and women candidates” (UN Women 2012) with a gender ratio as close to fifty per cent as possible. This law “instituted an aggressive gender quota that increased the percentage of women in the national legislature from 22% to 43% over a single election in 2012” (Hern 2018). This shift coincided with a spike in female political participation, including voting, attending community meetings, contacting elected officials, and other measures. Though female politicians report that it remains difficult for them to enter decision-making groups and that men still hold many key leadership positions (Sané 2014), after years of grassroots activism and political lobbying Senegal now has one of the highest rates of female political representation in the world.

Leadership has also maintained a civil yet sometimes fraught relationship with France. At some moments France has provided “economic, technical, and military support” (Hern 2018), while at others it has explicitly harmed the Senegalese economy, for example with its 1994 decision to devalue the African franc by 50 percent. Even though France ostensibly provides some aid to Senegal, this relationship allows France to continue to exercise control over the fates of the Senegalese citizenry, and to reap benefits from various partnerships. I will further explore the current relationship dynamic, and my research on Senegalese attitudes about it, later in the thesis.
In its post-colonial history, Senegal maintains a vibrant music and arts culture. Dakar is a popular music center with many clubs, bands, and performers in all sorts of genres, including hip-hop, rap, salsa, reggae, and jazz. One of the most popular Senegalese genres is *mbalax*, a style of “propulsive, percussive, melodic pop music” (Sherwood 2009) that has won its performers recognition all over the globe. Dakar also has numerous galleries, art collectives, museums, and other venues for the fine arts. Many artists use their work to critique global politics and social issues, as well as celebrate and maintain historical Senegalese traditions. Fashion is extremely important; women wear wax printed boubous and dresses in endless colorful designs, while young men dress in a more “Westernized” fashion with athletic clothing and t-shirts. Older men tend to wear traditional matching sets of pants and long shirts, especially on Fridays, when Muslims celebrate the holy day. Clothing and textiles are passed down through families and play an important role in social ties. I will further discuss this phenomenon later in the context of female empowerment.

Though the country of Senegal remains a poor nation globally with widespread unemployment, health problems, and significant barriers for women, it has made great strides in developing its governmental, legal, economic, political, and social systems. Senegalese women have worked tirelessly to expand their opportunities and redefine what it means to be a modern woman in Senegal.

Demographics of Senegal

Senegal is home to roughly 16.4 million people inhabiting 75,935 square miles (World Population Review 2018). Senegal has a high rural population, with a rate of 53.3% of residents living in rural communities; by comparison, the United States has a
19.3% rural population rate (United States Census Bureau 2016) and France has a 19.8% rural population rate (World Bank 2018). In sub-Saharan Africa, the adjacent countries of Mali and Mauritania have 59% and 39% rural population rates, respectively (World Bank 2018). In general, the more a country industrializes, the lower the percentage of rural residents. For OECD countries as a whole, the rural rate is 19%, while in sub-Saharan Africa, it is 61% (World Bank 2018). Therefore, Senegal is more urbanized than sub-Saharan Africa as a whole but falls short of the rate in high-income countries.

Senegal’s population is fairly even in terms of gender; the World Bank reports that females make up 50.9% of Senegal’s population, compared to 49.6% of the total world population. This means Senegal has a higher percentage of women by 1.3%. However, interestingly, the country’s sex ratio at birth is 1.036 males per female birth (World Bank 2018), meaning that the percentage of men drops as the population ages. One reason for this imbalance is the large migration of Senegalese men abroad over the past several decades, a trend which has changed marriage landscapes and family dynamics within the country. I explore this trend later in the thesis and discuss how it has affected female autonomy within marriages.

Senegal has a very young population. The median age is 18.7 years, compared to 37.9 in the United States and 41.4 in France. According to the World Population Review (2018), “the vast majority of countries with median ages under 20 are in Africa,” which reflects “poverty, disease, and ongoing conflict situations.” A full 43% of Senegal’s

---

4 OECD stands for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The body has thirty-six member countries which work together to stimulate world trade and economic development. Nearly all the member countries have high-income economies, high marks on the Human Development Index (HDI), and status as a “developed country.” This grouping is commonly used when comparing quantitative statistics about populations, economies, and global problems of various countries.
population is under the age of 14, the same rate as sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, compared with 18% in OECD countries.

The United Nations classifies a list of “least developed countries,” which are “low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development” (UN Economic Analysis and Policy Division 2018). These countries are also “highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets” (UN Economic Analysis and Policy Division 2018). Senegal was first put on the list in 2000 and remains one of the 47 countries included. Its economy revolves around fishing, tourism, mineral resources like gold, petroleum, and natural gas, and cash crops like peanuts, sugarcane, and cotton. The economy has been growing rapidly at over 6% a year for the past several years, while poverty has fallen over time (World Bank 2018). One of the largest remaining barriers to economic success for poor Senegalese is the prohibitively high cost of healthcare; while the government started a “Universal Health Insurance” program in 2013 with a goal of 75% coverage by the end of 2017, the actual rate falls far short of that. Several of my interview participants put the number as low as 20%, though I have not been able to find a clear statistic on the coverage rate. Senegal also has a low literacy rate which exhibits a gendered divide in access to education. As of 2013 the adult literacy rate was 42.8%, with 52.8% of males being literate and only 33.6% of adult females being literate. There are myriad reasons for this disparity, chief among them unequal access to education based on gender.

There is a large diversity of ethnic groups in Senegal, and as many as 40 local languages. The Wolof ethnic group makes up 43% of the population, but many more

---

5 The majority of my interview subjects worked in health-related fields and had knowledge of the insurance programs. However, they simply made estimates.
people speak the Wolof language, which is “rapidly becoming the *lingua franca*” (Thompson 2016). The Fula and Tukulor ethnic groups, from the northern region of Senegal, make up 24% of the population, followed by the Serer at 14.7%. Several other ethnic groups such as the Jola, Mandinka, Soninke, and others make up 5% or less of the population each (World Population Review 2018). The ethnic groups coexist fairly peacefully. French is the official language of Senegal dating from the colonial period, but only a minority of Senegalese residents speak it, typically those who were educated in colonial-style French schools. French is much more commonly used among educated and higher-class Senegalese residents who live in urban areas.

As for the geographical and topographical makeup of the country, Senegal has a variety of climates and ecosystems, being at the intersection of the desert, the rainforest, and the ocean. It is bounded to the north and east by the Sénégal River, which separates it from Mali and Mauritania. The Cape Verde (*Cap Vert*) peninsula, which contains Dakar, is the westernmost point of Africa. The country of The Gambia is contained within Senegal and surrounds the Gambia River, which spills into the Atlantic Ocean. Senegal is a relatively flat country with a dry season from November to May and a rainy season from June to October. The country has a tropical latitude and temperatures can exceed 105 degrees at some parts of the year while dropping to 55 degrees during others, sometimes within the same day. The landscape around Dakar and its suburbs is very dry and dusty with desert-like plant and animal life and many baobab and palm trees, while other parts of the country are greener. The eastern part of the country is home to large savannah animals such as giraffes, cheetahs, elephants, and lions. Mosquitos and other

---

6 Wolof is used between speakers of many different Senegalese languages, including Serer, Fula, and Diola.
insects abound, and insect-borne diseases such as malaria remain a large health problem in Senegal.

Senegalese society sees religion as fundamental to a healthy life. As previously discussed, nearly 95% of the population identifies as Muslim, while nearly 5% identify as Catholic. There are three primary Islamic brotherhoods: the Qadiri (Qadiriyyah), the Tijani (Tijāniyyah), and the Mourides (Murid, Murīdiyyah). The spiritual leaders of these groups, known as marabouts, exercise a large influence over religious, social, and political life. The remaining Senegalese population identifies with other religions such as Protestantism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Baha’ism. While Islam arrived in Senegal around the 11th century, Catholicism came to the area in the late 15th century. Protestants are mostly recent immigrants from Europe. Some people in rural areas practice animism; though less than 1% identify as animists, many who identify as Muslim or Catholic incorporate animistic traditions and rituals into their forms of worship.

While people of different religious doctrines and ethnic groups are respectful of one another—Senegal is known for its widespread tolerance among diverse ethnic and religious groups (Ojeda 2012)—Senegalese society does not generally accept atheism or agnosticism. In my informal conversations with Senegalese men and women, they repeatedly stated that people there expected everyone to identify with a religion or religious institution, and that they saw atheists and agnostics as opportunities for new converts. A student researcher from Georgetown University observed the same phenomenon, writing that, “Everyone must be a believer, be it Christian, Muslim, or any other denomination. One must have beliefs and practice a religion; atheism is not socially accepted” (Ojeda 2012). Several Senegalese people I met counseled American travelers who identified as atheists to just lie when asked if they were religious. People
turn to religious texts and institutions to shape their views on gender, sexuality, and society, and religion provides a structure to one’s schedule, whether that is praying five times daily or attending weekly mass.

The information above serves as a background on the country’s history, culture, and environment, so that I can later discuss women’s roles and opportunities in Senegalese society within the context I have laid out. I will also contest some representations of Senegal by the “Western” media, which has at times distorted or manipulated how “Western” populations view the country. With that in mind, I now move into the literature and theoretical basis of this project.

• • •

**Literature & Theoretical Background**

This thesis seeks to examine the oppression of Senegalese women in the context of existing theory on gender, black feminism, and postcolonial studies. Within these fields, I ground my work in two main traditions, the first being research on intersectionality and the second being racial capitalism and neocolonialism. This section reviews the existing research on both sets of theories.

---

7 I have chosen to put “Western” and “West” in quotation marks throughout this work to show that the “Western world” is an amorphous and socially constructed concept. Several scholars in the postcolonial studies field have challenged the view that the “West” is a concrete, objective place, arguing instead that it is a tool used to differentiate powerful, wealthy, predominantly white nations from “the other” (Said 1978; Hall 1996). In “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” Hall (1996) argues that “the West” is not an innocent concept; rather, it has been built and reinforced over centuries in order to cement the power of its member peoples. The “West/other” discourse racializes and demonizes “non-Western” countries, who struggle to rebut demeaning stereotypes about them and find it even more difficult to improve their global economic and political standing. I use the “West” in this work as a shorthand for the group of powerful high-income countries that includes the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and most European nations, as that is generally how people understand the term, and it is easier than listing out the countries every time. However, I do so while acknowledging the problems with this concept and critiquing its role in maintaining colonial power structures.
Intersectionality

Many scholars have noted the intersectionality of oppression: the idea that multiple identities factor into the way one is treated in society. For example, a woman may suffer harm and discrimination based on stereotypes about the female gender, and a black person may suffer harm and discrimination based on stereotypes about people of African descent. However, for a black woman, her two marginalized identities will intersect, and the discrimination she encounters may be more than just a “combination” of the two. Intersectionality can also play a role in the power exerted by groups in society. A white person in America or Europe may benefit from the respect and privileges traditionally afforded to people of European descent, but a white male person will likely benefit even more because of the added respect and power afforded to men. This privilege exceeds the sum of the separate powers of the “white” identity and the “male” identity.

Scholars conducting research on intersectionality and oppression of African women have directed their analysis towards African-American women in the United States. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in her key 1989 paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” She contrasts the “multidimensionality of Black women’s experience with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences,” (Crenshaw 1989:139) ultimately proposing a new framework of analysis that considers how multiple marginalized identities, such as gender and race, interact with each other to create oppression. Crenshaw’s work discusses Black women in America specifically and the dearth of scholarship on Black women’s issues at the time of her writing.
Patricia Hill Collins expanded Crenshaw’s analysis in her seminal 1990 text, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. She updated her work and produced a second edition in 2000, which I rely on for this project. Collins describes a *matrix of domination* which allows oppression to endure through actions within four different domains. The *structural* domain organizes power and oppression through institutions; the *disciplinary* domain punishes those who resist oppression; the *hegemonic* domain legitimizes oppression through larger societal attitudes and representations of marginalized groups; and the *interpersonal* domain impacts the consciousness, self-image, and opportunities of individuals through micro-level interactions. Using intersectionality, Collins argues that Black women are more susceptible to oppression under these domains because of their dual racial and gendered identities. She further describes certain “controlling images,” such as the “breeder” and the “mammy,” which are tropes about African and African-American women found in the media. These theories, though very fruitful for considering social disparities and divisions of power, were also created and applied in an American context.

Dorothy Roberts (1997), in her book *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, discusses the Black body as a site for control, oppression, and violence enacted by whites. She elaborates Collins’s “controlling images,” discussing racially biased portrayals of Black women as “welfare queens” with “crack babies.” For Roberts, the Black female body is an even more desirable site for control than the Black male body—the former is an invaluable resource because of its reproductive capacities. She traces this phenomenon from slavery, when slave owners had an economic interest in the fertility of their female slaves, to the present, with laws and policies that still regulate Black women’s reproduction. Her work, though applied in an American
context, reflects international economic power dynamics; “Western” nations still propose many laws and policies that regulate the reproduction and fertility of African women. However, the book is ultimately grounded in research on American race relations, not African ones.

Roberts’s work is used aptly by other legal scholars who trace the roots of modern-day practices to slavery. For example, Priscilla Ocen, in “Punishing Pregnancy: Race, Incarceration, and the Shackling of Pregnant Prisoners,” a 2012 California Law Review paper, argues that the practice of shackling pregnant prisoners derives from the control and violence wrought upon Black women’s bodies during slavery. In America, where a widely disproportionate number of prisoners are Black, entrenched racial tensions and systemic inequalities perpetuate the inhumane treatment of prisoners of color. Ocen analyzes practices during slavery, such as white masters raping female slaves to impregnate them and increase slave holdings, as well as the whipping of female slaves who disobeyed orders, in order to understand the modern-day shackling of pregnant prisoners, most of whom are Black. This method of tracing practices from slavery and colonization to the present is very fruitful for analyzing modern-day oppression, but it has not been fully applied to the women in African nations, the descendants of many women subjugated under the same belief system, using the same practices.

Several scholars have advocated using intersectionality in an international context; however, their efforts have not taken off, and the theory has mostly rested in the United States. Johanna Bond (2003), in her paper “International Intersectionality: A Theoretical and Pragmatic Exploration of Women’s International Human Rights Violations,” argues that women are oppressed internationally based on an interplay of
their identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class, just as they are in the United States. She contends that international bodies like the United Nations should consider the intersectionality of women’s identities when researching their plights and deciding how to approach international human rights violations. Though her work is mostly theoretical, she largely relies on examples from the Middle East and Asia, not Africa. Llezlie Green (2002), in her article “Gender Hate Propaganda and Sexual Violence in the Rwandan Genocide: An Argument for Intersectionality in International Law,” argues that women often experience sexual violence because of their racial or ethnic group in addition to their gender, and thus intersectionality is essential to understanding this violence. She uses the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, in which the Hutu ethnic group committed widespread sexual violence against women of the Tutsi ethnic group, as her prime example. However, as can be seen, both of these papers are over fifteen years old and there is scant literature after that period applying intersectionality in an international context.

Recently, there was a resurgence of the idea of international intersectionality. In 2017 the journal *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity* titled one of their issues “Considering Intersectionality in Africa” and published several articles on the topic. The vast majority of these articles focused on South Africa, including Amanda Gouw’s (2017) piece “Feminist intersectionality and the matrix of domination in South Africa.” Gouw considers how Collins’s matrix of domination applies to female student protestors in South Africa. Other articles in the same issue examine the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. However, despite this encouraging recent push, international intersectionality has untapped potential as a theory and could be very useful in understanding the experiences of marginalized groups in countries
outside of the United States. Additionally, no one has yet established country of origin—that is, whether the marginalized group lives in a developing, formerly colonized nation or a powerful colonizer nation—as an identity that affects a group’s intersectional experience of oppression.

*Racial Capitalism & Neocolonialism*

In the area of “racial capitalism” scholarship, researchers have widely used an international focus, arguing that capitalism goes hand in hand with, or even depends upon, racial oppression. Nancy Leong (2012), in her article “Racial Capitalism” for the Harvard Law Review, was the first to identify this relationship as a systemic issue. Her analysis focused on how affirmative action and university race policy tie into capitalist goals. She argues that while universities profess to value diversity and offer opportunities to students from marginalized backgrounds, in truth they only do so for their own economic gain and lofty image. After Leong used the concept in a domestic analysis, scholars applied it to international economic ties. In today’s postcolonial, globalized economy, where a single product might travel through a dozen countries before being placed on a shelf, wealthy and predominantly white countries reap most of the benefits while poorer countries, including many African countries, provide most of the thankless labor. This power differential is a product of racial and socioeconomic hierarchies created during global slavery and colonialism. Many scholars have rightly noted that this economic exploitation is closely connected with reproduction, as capitalist growth often necessitates growth of human capital.

This connection is aptly explored in a book by French scholar Françoise Vergès (2017), *Le ventre des femmes : Capitalisme, racialisation, féminisme* [The Women's
Womb: Capitalism, Racialization, Feminism]. Vergès, focusing on the island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean, explores how former colonial powers like France still reap economic gain by regulating women’s sexual and reproductive practices in former colonies. When it was convenient for the colonizers to have more bodies working for them, they encouraged high birth rates and even enabled endemic rape to produce a larger slave or colonial population. Conversely, after the colonized countries gained independence but often needed economic support from former colonizers in the transition, those former colonizers attempted to limit birthrates in the new nations. For example, the French legalized abortion on Réunion when it wasn’t legal in France, and forcibly sterilized thousands of women on the island in the 1970s. Vergès further applies a racial framework, arguing that the postcolonial power dynamic depends upon the whiteness of the oppressors and the racialization of the oppressed. When greater social value is placed on the lives of whites compared to people of color, exploitation of the latter group is justified in the public eye (Blumer 1958). It thus behooves whites to “racialize” people of color—to draw attention to their race and demonize it in the media and pop culture—to increase public support for practices that mistreat people of color. However, Vergès’s work is constrained by the focus on practices in Réunion and other island colonies. Though extremely applicable, her theories have yet to be expanded to mainland former French colonies in Africa and the specific colonial, postcolonial, and modern forces that restrict women there.

In Rethinking Racial Capitalism: Questions of Reproduction and Survival, Gargi Bhattacharya (2018) explores capitalism’s historical roots in slavery and how the economic system has “created or enhanced” racism. While Vergès focuses on reproductive exploitation and analyzes how capitalism and racism are used as tools to
achieve it, Bhattacharya flips the analysis slightly and considers capitalism and racism as intertwined, self-reinforcing causal factors. The role of reproductive labor is discussed as an important factor in the continuing existence of racial capitalism, among other factors such as border creation and immigration, but reproductive labor is not the main subject of the book. She bases her analysis upon research in the United States. While the works of Vergès and Bhattacharya provide an essential theoretical framework, neither has been as yet applied to an African country.

Racial capitalism evolved from and remains closely tied to neocolonialism. While racial capitalism focuses on the economic incentives for wealthy nations to maintain racial oppression domestically and globally, neocolonialism holds more generally that the colonizer/colonized relationship persists internationally today; former colonizing countries are still the most powerful and richest and former colonized countries remain the poorest and least developed. Neocolonialism is a tenet of the broad category of postcolonial theory, which is the general study of the legacy of colonialism and imperialism, holding that human consequences of this oppression persist. A recent article by sociologist Julian Go (2018) offers an excellent review of postcolonial theory and its connections to race. In “Postcolonial Possibilities for the Sociology of Race,” he describes how postcolonial theory serves as a lens to see international power relations and economic divides as products of historical colonization. Mostly developed in humanities fields over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, postcolonial “theory” has not been fully realized as a theory or produced a set of clear hypotheses. Additionally, the theory grew out of work in South Asia and Southeast Asia, while there is less scholarship in this field applied to African nations. This leaves a significant gap in the field. Go also argues that theorists can work to integrate the sociology of race with
postcolonial theory and apply a stricter form of scientific analysis to its claims. However, no one has yet done so.

Theories of racial capitalism, neocolonialism, and postcolonial theory more generally, have not yet been specifically applied to the treatment of Senegalese women. Using Vergès (2017) as a guidepost, I plan to fill this research gap by analyzing the status of Senegalese women in the context of these oppressive international dynamics.

Research in Senegal

When it comes to Senegal, researchers have mostly conducted case studies or investigated specific national issues in lieu of connecting their findings to wide-scale theories. Conversely, scholars who propose wide-scale theories, such as intersectionality, the matrix of domination, or racial capitalism, have not used Senegal as an example or considered it as a test site for analysis. Many researchers in Senegal do focus on women’s rights and structural inequalities. In Women and ICT in Africa and the Middle East: Changing Selves, Changing Societies (ed. by Buskens and Webb 2014), a variety of authors contribute chapters on the rise of information communication technology and how it has impacted women in different countries within the specified regions. Chapter 5, “Can new practice change old habits? ICT and female politicians’ decision-making in Senegal” by Ibou Sané (2014), discusses Senegalese women in politics and how they incorporate ICT into their lives. The study includes many interviews with Senegalese women describing barriers to their career success, with some even sharing how their husbands sought revenge or punished them for gaining too much power both politically and in the home. While illuminating when it
comes to gender roles and women’s resistance in Senegal, the article is limited due to its focus on politics and ICT for women.

In *Muslim Families in Global Senegal: Money Takes Care of Shame*, Beth Buggenhagen (2012) conducts a detailed and rich ethnography of Senegalese Muslims in Dakar. Analyzing economic transactions and power among Senegalese Muslim families, she connects traditional practices of cloth exchange to women’s empowerment within the family structure. She also captures generational divides in views on romantic love, sexuality, gendered relations, and reproduction, using vignettes about marriage and relationships within the group she studied. However, it is primarily a book about economic relationships, and remains focused within one large extended family in Dakar.

Similarly, two other economic books address some women’s issues but don’t connect them to large theoretical patterns of oppression. *Your Pocket Is What Cures You: The Politics of Health in Senegal*, by Ellen Foley (2010), uses ethnography to capture the divide between the vision of reformative healthcare policies and the reality of poverty and illness in Senegal. Men and women are often trapped by their healthcare debt and only the wealthy can access the care they need, leading many poor Senegalese to use Islamic and traditional healing practices instead. Though this book discusses the plight of women, it is centered in an examination of the struggles of the Senegalese people as a whole. Maghan Keita (2006) addresses a similar divide in “Western” and “traditional” health practices in his book *A Political Economy of Health Care in Senegal*, arguing that there have been centuries of rivalry between traditional, Islamic, and European health systems. According to Keita, there is a difference between “official” health policy and how the typical Senegalese person experiences healthcare; indeed, many Senegalese people seek out alternative medicine and healing options in the face of
bureaucratic or social barriers. Real-life practices as compared to official policy feature different combinations of elements of traditional, Islamic, and European health systems in Senegal. While useful for general scholarship on Senegalese healthcare, Keita’s work and Foley’s work do not examine women’s healthcare specifically or situate women’s health needs within a global or theoretical context.

Other studies do focus on specific problems or healthcare needs of Senegalese women; however, they are often limited to one topic and don’t always engage theoretical literature about the patriarchy or economic incentives for female oppression. Awa Thiam (2014) offers a detailed and powerful study of female oppression enacted through body mutilation in her book *La sexualité féminine africaine en mutation : L'exemple du Sénégal* [African Female Sexuality in Mutation: The Example of Senegal]. In examining Senegalese practices like female genital modification and ritual cutting and tattooing, she argues that Senegalese society enacts patriarchy through control of the female body. She then examines female practices of bodily autonomy and control, including contraception use and abortion, to assess the Senegalese female body as a contested field and determine the nature of power dynamics in female sexuality. Her work is rich in analysis and data, drawing from interviews with hundreds of Senegalese women and a detailed examination of Senegalese practices. She ultimately argues that female African sexuality is changing and mutating because of female rebellion against many restrictive bodily practices. She also situates female genital modification in a postcolonial context, arguing that African nations doubled down on female excision in the wake of efforts by European countries to end the practice. She asserts that African nations saw it as key to cultural preservation and their new autonomous rule, and rebuffed “Western” nations in their efforts for social, cultural, and political reasons.
However, Thiam doesn’t incorporate much theoretical background for her arguments, rooting her claims in the inductive data she collected. She also leaves untouched the economic incentives for reproductive control; in other words, she does not use a racial capitalism lens in her analysis.

In *Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, Emily S. Burrill, Richard L. Roberts, and Elizabeth Thornberry (2010) provide several key insights into the intersection of law and female oppression in Senegal. They open with an overview of the structural and social problems in combatting domestic violence, and then discuss how women fall victim to entrenched practices of wife-beating, marital rape, and forced child marriage despite legal reforms currently on the books. All these practices relate to patriarchal beliefs about female submission, and the authors analyze the role of colonialism in contributing to these laws and practices as well.

Two chapters focus specifically on Senegal. In Chapter 9, “‘I killed her because she disobeyed me in wearing this new hairstyle...’: Gender-Based Violence, Laws, and Impunity in Senegal,” Codou Bop (2010) illuminates the divide between Senegal’s embrace of reforms that protect women and the persisting abusive treatment of women, which is often condoned by judges, attorneys, and law enforcement. Bop uses case studies to illustrate the law failing to protect women or hold men accountable. In Chapter 11, “Constructing Law, Contesting Violence: The Senegalese Family Code and Narratives of Domestic Abuse,” Scott London (2010) uses a similar strategy, punctuating his argument about the failings of the Senegalese Family Code with horrific stories of rape and violence against Senegalese women. He grounds his piece in the historical evolution of the Family Code, which drew from both French colonial law and Islamic law, and was thus, according to London, destined to contain contradictions and
concessions to different political groups. As such, the Code enshrined specific provisions that put women firmly in a secondary role, in accordance with the beliefs of the traditional Muslim brotherhoods, while also leaving some important protections out. For example, marital rape is not illegal or even defined under the Code. While these chapters are key texts for any discussion on Senegalese women, they are limited to the specific topic of domestic violence and don’t provide an underlying framework for why this violence might take place, or the larger patterns to which it is connected.

**Literature Gap and Conclusions**

Despite clear overlap, studies of intersectionality, racial capitalism, postcolonialism/neocolonialism, and women’s barriers in Senegal have not yet been unified. Intersectionality—the theory that people experience varying levels of oppression based on multiple marginalized identities interacting with each other—connects very clearly to neocolonialism, the notion that predominantly white and wealthy former colonizing nations still exert power over predominantly non-white and low-income former colonized nations. However, intersectionality has mostly been used to describe oppression of various individuals and groups in the United States. The theories of Crenshaw and Collins have great potential to be applied to the experience of women in former African colonies like Senegal. The identities of these women as both female and African lead to combined and overlapping oppressive forces seeking to control their bodies. Senegalese society exerts this subjugation based on gender, while various international forces such as laws, the “Western” media, and global organizations seek to exert control based on both gender and race. I will apply intersectionality as a theory throughout this thesis and take it a step beyond the work of previous international
intersectionality scholars to consider the colonial history of one’s country—one’s “colonized identity”—as an intersecting factor in how one is treated. I will also apply Collins’s matrix of domination in different sections to understand the numerous forces at work in the regulation of Senegalese women and their bodies. I expand her theory to consider how both domestic and international forces might exert control through the matrix of domination. Throughout this thesis, Collins’s theories will provide a framework for my analysis and arguments in the area of intersectionality.

Racial capitalism and neocolonialism are closely connected, but they have not been widely applied to African countries. Racial capitalism theory holds that capitalism incentivizes wealthy groups to exploit poorer groups, and that this power differential splits along racial lines. Dominant racial groups can then exploit the image of marginalized racial groups to justify or increase their monetary gain. Their monetary gain at the expense of the marginalized group then further decreases the social power and standing of that group, and thus the cycle reinforces. Racial capitalism elaborates neocolonialism by illuminating the fact that the persisting colonizer/colonized power dichotomy not only endures because of social and political hierarchies, but because capitalism actively enables it to do so. Additionally, some scholars have shown how racial capitalism depends upon the exploitation of women’s sexuality and reproductive capacities. However, racial capitalism is a very young idea—Nancy Leong first identified its systemic structure in 2012, and that was only applied to the United States. It has not yet been applied to African nations like Senegal, where it would be very useful in understanding current economic and gender dynamics.

While a number of studies have focused on female oppression in Senegal, they are limited in topic or scope. Whether they highlight the failure of the law to protect
women from domestic violence, the control of women enacted through bodily mutilation, or women’s empowerment and resistance through textile exchanges, they have not been connected to wider theoretical patterns of intersectionality, neocolonialism, or racial capitalism. In this thesis, I seek to apply these theories to the current state of women in Senegal. Senegalese women continue to face social, political, economic, and legal barriers to autonomy. They often face violence and oppression along the way. I hope to ultimately use the analysis of Senegalese women’s experiences— with both internal and external forces of patriarchal oppression and resistance—to suggest a framework for analyzing the experience of marginalized groups in developing, former colonial nations as a whole.

Methods (In Brief)\(^8\)

Through this thesis I apply the above theories to original research and fieldwork I conducted in Dakar, Senegal and Paris, France during the summer of 2018. I used a variety of different qualitative research methods in sociology and cultural studies. First, I used ethnographic methods during my stay in Dakar. I lived with a Senegalese host family in the centrally located Amitié III neighborhood, gathering observations of my family, the neighborhood, and the situations I encountered. My host family included a father, a mother, a 17-year-old daughter, a 12-year-old son, and a live-in maid who was about 20. I also interacted with many other Senegalese people in various parts of Dakar and its suburbs. I recorded all relevant observations using sociological fieldnotes.

---

\(^8\) I have an in-depth Appendix at the end of this thesis to explain my methodology and data in more detail.
In addition, I conducted five formal interviews with Senegalese participants. One was an employed middle-class woman in her early forties with four children; one was a male doctor, professor, and minister of health in his sixties; one was a female doctor and cancer researcher in her forties; one was a female community health activist in her forties; and one was a female accountant in her forties who had immigrated to Paris in her adulthood. I conducted all interviews except the first in French. I also relied upon numerous informal conversations and interviews during my month-long stay in Dakar. I talked with dozens of Senegalese people and learned new information from several of my interviewees through informal conversations after their interviews. I transcribed and coded these interviews using an open coding scheme and then tied the themes I observed in the interviews to the four general categories that emerged from my research as a whole: historical roots of oppression, marriage, pregnancy and fertility, and sexuality. In each category I sought to analyze how Senegalese women were portrayed, how they were treated, and how they responded to that treatment.

To learn important background information for my thesis I took a class called “Public Health and Development in Senegal and Africa” taught by a Senegalese professor with many years of experience in the health sector, including working with rural populations in both low-level and leadership positions. We learned about communicable and non-communicable diseases in Senegal, major health threats, and the position of women and children in particular. Through this class I visited a Catholic health clinic and a research nonprofit focusing on the exploitation of women in the Senegambia region; the group was currently working on a project about female genital mutilation. I took ethnographic field notes on my site visits as well.
Given that I was especially interested in representations of women, their bodies, and Senegalese history, I visited many museums and sites relevant to my thesis. These included the Maison des Esclaves [House of Slaves] museum and the Gorée Island Historical Museum, both on Gorée Island; the Musée de la Femme [Museum of the Woman] in Dakar; and the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac [Quai Branly Museum], the Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration [National Museum of the History of Immigration], and the Musée de l'Homme [Museum of the Man] in Paris. I took pictures at all of these locations and noted important works that spoke to my thesis topic. I also analyzed how these museums contextualized these works and told the story of Senegalese women, and whether this representation accurately portrayed them. For the museums in Paris, I used ethnographic observations and analysis to assess whether the museums portrayed Senegalese and African peoples using a colonial lens.

I also engaged with a variety of cultural texts, including movies, books, art, newspaper articles, and advertisements, in order to provide more context for Senegalese women’s experiences and learn more about hegemonic representations of women in Senegal. I incorporate qualitative analyses of cultural texts that share or comment on issues faced by Senegalese women in society. In a cultural studies sense, I sought to discover why these texts were created and how their messages operated within the wider discourses of Senegalese or global society. In a sociological sense, I saw these texts as content evincing specific ideas about Senegalese women, and I looked for commonalities and differences across the texts. I used an interdisciplinary approach to this project, combining methods in cultural studies and sociology in order to paint a comprehensive picture of the various ways Senegalese women are restricted and how they have responded.
This thesis is divided into four general sections focusing on different issues related to women’s bodies. In each chapter, I examine the context of the issue, my research findings as to the nature of this topic and how it affects Senegalese women, several cultural texts that discuss the topic, and this topic when viewed through the lens of the theoretical concepts I’ve laid out.

In the first chapter I explore the roots of international subjugation of Senegalese women, beginning with Senegal’s history with slavery and colonialism. I highlight Gorée Island as a site of memory and representation of this brutal past, examining how women of the region were specifically treated, including efforts to regulate and control their bodies. For this chapter I draw on my ethnographic observations on Gorée and in Dakar, numerous academic and newspaper articles, and representations of Gorée in popular media. I will apply Collins’s (2000 [1990]) theory of the matrix of domination and Vergès’s (2017) theory of racial capitalism to the exploitation inherent in the enslavement and colonization of Senegalese women. I also discuss Abdellatif Kechiche’s film Black Venus, which showcases the “Western” view of African women in the nineteenth century. Kechiche masterfully demonstrates the European obsession, sexualization, and exploitation of the African female body as he tells the story of Saartjie Baartman, an African woman displayed in freakshows across Europe in the early 1800s. Using a nineteenth-century poster advertising an exposition of Senegalese women in a similarly exploitative show, I tie Kechiche’s film back to Senegalese women and their experiences during slavery and colonialism. I will use this chapter as a foundation for later arguments regarding current treatment of Senegalese women.

In Chapter 2, I explore the institution of marriage in Senegal, comparing how Senegalese marriage is represented in the “Western” media and how Senegalese women
actually experience it. I argue that women experience oppression and restrictions within marriages from various angles, including the way they are portrayed publicly and the ways in which they are treated privately. However, women are often cast as helpless victims in a society in which they are constantly working to reclaim power and redefine traditional practices. I begin by examining the Senegalese practice of polygamy and how the “Western” media demonizes those who choose it, when many women do so for legitimate empowering reasons. For this section, I analyze a well-known Senegalese novel, Mariama Bâ’s (1979) *Une si longue lettre*, as well as Ousmane Sembène’s (2004) film *Moolaadé* for how they represent polygamy. I also draw on my content analysis of numerous newspaper articles about polygamy, a brief history of its legal foundations, and the interviews I conducted for this project. I then discuss the state of LGBTQ relationships in Senegal, highlighting the fact that queer-identifying individuals do not have the right to marriage but that many advocacy groups exist which are making crucial steps towards progress. In this section I also analyze the work of the international media in claiming credit for this progress and hypocritically demonizing the Senegalese officials who do not support gay marriage, while failing to acknowledge the prevalence of the same beliefs in “Western” countries. I conclude the chapter by exploring different ways Senegalese women have defied the convention that a woman is defined by her marriage. I highlight the stories of many women who have chosen not to marry or have strategically negotiated unmarried positions through divorce to ensure their own autonomy. I seek to show that women are redefining and dismantling the connection between marriage and womanhood that has been forged by patriarchal societies over time.
In the third chapter, I conduct the same framework of analysis with the topic of pregnancy and fertility in Senegal. I review the international restraints and ideologies imposed on Senegalese women, including the recent Mexico City Policy as well as the aggressive family planning campaigns promoted by some researchers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Though these campaigns and policies come from all over the political spectrum, I argue that they have one thing in common: the presumption that Senegalese women do not deserve to make their own decisions about what to do with their bodies. This presumption is rooted in an obsession and desire on the part of “Westerners” to control African women’s fertility, a desire dating back to slavery and the onset of colonialism. I highlight the ways this narrative, and responses to it, play out in the media. I briefly review the facts and trends on African birthrates to show that the “overpopulation problem” is misconstrued and the blame is all-too-often cast on African women. As in the previous chapters, I discuss my findings from my interviews on this topic and my analysis of cultural texts, in this case posters about abstinence, which convey specific ideologies to Senegalese women.

In the final chapter, I focus on sexuality. I review how Senegalese women have been sexualized and objectified both domestically and internationally, and how they have responded by redefining and strengthening their role in society. Beginning with Léopold Sédar Senghor’s famous poem *Femme Noire*, which celebrates Senegal while relegating Senegalese women to the role of sexual object, I analyze the public messages sent about Senegalese women’s sexuality. In a direct response to *Femme Noire*, I explore how Calixthe Beyala’s (2003) controversial erotic novel *Femme nue femme noir* contests the sexualization of African women by men and reclaims the right for African women to make their own sexual decisions. I then highlight several
ethnographic research projects exploring how Senegalese women construct and enact their sexuality, with a focus on mokk pooj, the traditional Senegalese practice of leveraging seduction and sex to advance a woman’s power in a relationship. I also review activist work by Senegalese women trying to take control of their own sexuality, including the #Nopiwouma movement against sexual harassment as well as women-led volunteer organizations dispensing contraception and sexual education services. I conclude the chapter by reviewing the work of Senegalese female artists who have challenged the male gaze in Senegal through their work.

In my conclusion, I extend intersectionality theory with a new element: Colonized Identity Theory. Building off the work of Collins and Vergès, I argue that intersectionality theory should be applied to women in developing, formerly colonized countries and that a person’s country of origin should be considered as an identity unto itself that affects their opportunities and experiences. Just like gender, race, and class, where one comes from—and whether that place is a powerful former colonizer or a still-recovering former colony—affects one’s outcomes in life. Additionally, I argue that women in developing countries like Senegal face two prongs of oppression and respond with two prongs of resistance. They are affected by their own country’s ideologies about women as well as the ideologies and acts of their former colonial oppressor, which still exerts influence in their country through neocolonialism. These theories fill a gap in the research and offer a new way of understanding and exposing the oppression marginalized groups face in developing, formerly colonized countries all over the world.

This thesis proves that the “Western” world continues to operate in a neocolonial fashion by exploiting Senegalese women legally, socially, and economically. “Western” media and governments operate in a racial capitalism framework to portray Senegalese
women in specific ways in order to uphold colonial power dynamics. These actions are compounded by the existing patriarchal structure within Senegal, which defines women as sexual objects, as mothers, and as wives. However, my research shows that Senegalese women are working together inside these systems to gain power and outside of the systems to dismantle them entirely. The monument to the African Renaissance, perched on a hill in Dakar, was built and designed by men. The world it portrays, where the woman waits so powerlessly, is an imaginary one.
Chapter 1

Women’s Bodies Under Slavery and Colonialism

On Gorée Island, just a fifteen-minute boat ride off the coast of Dakar, Senegal, there stands a haunting statue of a man and a woman clutching each other. Amid the waving palm trees, picturesque beaches, and old pastel-colored colonial mansions, the man breaks apart his chains as the woman wraps her arms around his waist, staring up at him in seeming disbelief and elation. This is La Statue de la Libération de l’Esclavage—the Statue of the Liberation of Slavery—a testament to Gorée’s haunting history as a departure point for enslaved peoples forcibly taken away from their homeland. Though the number of Africans who embarked against their will from Gorée has been disputed by historians (Murphy 2004; Wikle and Lightfoot 2014:26), they agree it was at the very least in the tens of thousands. Regardless of the number, with historians estimating that 1 in 6 Africans shipped to the Americas came from the Senegambia region alone (Wikle and Lightfoot 2014:26), Gorée represents the devastating subjugation that took place in the area. The island represents a key site in the collective memory of the history of African enslavement as a whole.

As many as 200,000 people from across the world (Murphy 2004) visit Gorée each year to reflect on the brutal exploitation of Africans then and now. In this way many consider Gorée a symbolic landscape; “for the universal conscience, this ‘memory island’ is the symbol of the slave trade with its cortege of suffering, tears and death” (UNESCO 2018).
For descendants of enslaved people and slave traders alike, it provides “a pilgrimage destination for the African diaspora, a foyer for contact between the West and Africa, and a space for exchange and dialogue between cultures through the confrontation of ideals of reconciliation and forgiveness” (UNESCO 2018). However, here one also finds the roots of disparate, gendered treatment, of a deep and insidious control exerted over the women who were enslaved. Where the island offers “enduring reminders of
incomprehensible cruelty and suffering inflicted by humans on other humans” (Wikle and Lightfoot 2014:15), it also reminds visitors of the gender-based cruelty and suffering inflicted on women. This chapter demonstrates how the African woman’s body was an object of both desire and repulsion for Europeans, who sought to claim it and violate it. This mindset and history set the stage for many barriers African women still face today.

From the moment of first contact, European slave traders viewed female and male Africans differently. Gender became a fundamental factor in determining an enslaved person’s treatment and price. As part of the regulation of these sales and purchases, “before their shipment to Gorée, slaves were classified by age, sex, and tribal group and branded with the insignia of their trading company” (Wikle and Lightfoot 2014:21). Once they arrived upon the island, they faced further humiliation and denigration. An exhibit in the Maison des Esclaves describes how the traders psychologically and physically began the process of dehumanization:

The servitude of the slave begins with the loss of freedom. Then begins a process of enslavement in order to undermine morale, to inculcate fear with the goal of making the slave a submissive being. Chained, half naked, branded with a hot iron, the slave becomes an anonymous being, without family or proper name. Identified by a number, the slave wears, like a burden, the exterior signs of a servile condition.⁹

After being held in cells beneath houses, the enslaved men and women were then “stripped naked and gathered in the courtyard in the middle of the house” (Barnett

---

⁹ In French, the masculine pronouns *il* and *lui* are also used to describe a neutral non-gendered person; despite the male pronouns in the French text, this passage was intended to apply to female slaves as well. I eliminated pronouns in my English translation to convey the universal applicability of this dehumanization. Original text: « La servitude de l’esclave débute avec la perte de la liberté qui en découle. Ensuite commence un processus d’asservissement visant à saper son moral, à lui inculquer la crainte et la peur en vue d’en faire un être soumis. Enchaîné, à moitié nu, marqué au fer rouge, l’esclave devient un être anonyme, sans famille ni nom propre. Identifié par un numéro, il porte, tel un fardeau, les signes extérieurs de sa condition servile. »
2012) so that Europeans could observe them. Asserting physical dominance, “the buyers and traders would lean over the balcony overlooking the courtyard and observe the slaves while negotiating prices” (Barnett 2012). While Africans of both sexes suffered this degradation, the nakedness of the women served another purpose: assessment of sexual viability. Not only did slave traders want to know if a woman was of reproductive age, they also sought to evaluate her as a potential “treat” for the men involved in the trade. To this end female slaves on Gorée were often kept close by as “domestic servants,” while “men were assigned to construction projects such as crushing rock for the island’s two forts” (Wikle and Lightfoot 2014:26). While the women were exempted from the grueling physical labor forced on the men, they were instead fetishized and abused, many of them repeatedly raped. According to Eloi Coly, site manager at the Maison des Esclaves, “all parts of the house were utilized to facilitate the slave trade: small dark rooms underneath the staircases were used as punishment rooms, and the damp little rooms kept young girls and children separately from men for sale or the pleasure of the traders”10 (Barnett 2012).

10 Emphasis added.
A sign over a block of cells reading JEUNES FILLES [“Young Girls”]. Photo by author.
Today the Maison also serves as a museum chronicling the slave trade as a whole, not just on Gorée Island. Its upstairs exhibit, in the former master’s quarters, states that slave traders were particularly interested in African teenagers around the age of puberty because of their work capacity and reproductive potential. One panel in the museum describes how “in systematically selecting the pubescent young men and young girls, the slave traders, depopulating the black continent, deprived it of its most valid arms and mortgaged its chances of repopulation.”

It was in the traders’ best interest to undermine the power of African societies; if the traders forcibly removed a large chunk of the young population, the society would find itself crippled in terms of future leadership and labor. Europeans could then perpetuate the slave trade more easily and continue to take young people from the population.

Françoise Vergès (2017) captures this notion perfectly as she theorizes about the intersections of capitalism, racialization, and feminism. She defines the concept of *capitalisme racial*, or “racial capitalism,” as “the possibly of extracting worth from the exploitation of a racialized being, which grants economic value to the white man in the capitalist economy” (Vergès 2017:18).

Under this theory, if there is a possibility of extracting worth through the subjugation of African people, white Europeans and their descendants will do so. However, to be successful, they must “racialize” the exploited group; in other words, they must play on stereotypes and fears about the group’s race to portray its members as subhuman or monstrous. If society accepts this characterization

---

11 Translated from French. Original text: « En sélectionnant systématiquement les jeunes hommes et les jeunes filles à l’âge de la puberté, les négriers, dépeuplaient également le continent noir, le privaient de ses bras les plus valides et hypothéquaient ainsi les chances d’une bonne reconstitution de sa population. »

12 Translated from French. Original text: « Capitalisme racial : la possibilité d’extraire de la valeur de l’exploitation d’un autre qui a été racisé et qui donne une valeur économique au « Blanc » dans l’économie capitaliste. »
of the exploited group, then it is much easier for the oppressors to justify their oppressive actions in the public eye (Blumer 1958). Europeans and their descendants achieved economic, capitalist dominance over Africans using “racialization” as a key tool.

Not only did the traders want to hobble the economic, political, and social power of African societies in order to facilitate further mass kidnapping and European dominance, they sought to ensure a steady stream of enslaved peoples for generations to come. As such, as argued by legal scholar Priscilla Ocen (2012:1264), “the degradation and control of Black women’s reproductive capacities was central to the operation of the system of slavery.” In order to exploit these reproductive capacities, “their bodies were treated as sexually violable commodities” (Ocen 2012:1264). In accordance with racial capitalism, African women were not only treated as economically viable objects for labor, they were treated as sexual objects for reproducing the slave population as well. This latter part did not require the woman’s consent—she was “violable” by members of the dominant group. As Vergès (2017:10) puts it, “the woman’s body becomes an instrument for the interests of the State,”13 and she no longer has a say. According to Vergès (2017:12),

The history of the management of women’s wombs in the [global] South appears to be not only the assignment of women to reproduction, but the racialized dimension of this assignment.14

This tracks with Patricia Hill Collins’s (2000 [1990]) theory of intersecting oppressions; dominant groups construct stereotypes and beliefs regarding the groups they seek to

13 Translated from French. Original text: « Le corps des femmes est instrumentalisé pour les intérêts de l’État. »

14 Translated from French. Original text: « L’histoire de la gestion du ventre des femmes dans les Sud fait apparaître non seulement l’assignation des femmes à la reproduction, mais la dimension racialisée de cette assignation. »
oppress, and if an individual belongs to more than one of these groups, that individual suffers the consequences of all the stereotypes, combined in unpredictable ways. African women were racialized, yet they were also treated as sexual objects. Patriarchal societies have long valued women for reproduction and motherhood above all else, and so women’s identities become linked—or “assigned,” as Vergès puts it—to their sexuality and reproductive capacities in the public view. Vergès dubs this the “capitalized womb” (2017:102). This damaging belief rationalizes sexual violence and oppression in the name of reproduction. As shown above, the colonizers depended on enslaved women to supply new slave populations in perpetuity, and so they treated the women as subhuman, racialized and sexualized objects in order to justify the rapes committed.

Conception and pregnancy under slavery were brutal and dangerous; many of the enslaved women did not carry children by choice. Some became pregnant following assaults by Europeans or fellow slaves, while some engaged in consensual sex with African partners. However, they all had few, if any, methods to prevent pregnancy. According to the Maison des Esclaves exhibit, many pregnant women performed their own abortions in an act of “refusal...to give birth to children in captivity.”¹⁵ This was especially true for those women who had been forcibly assaulted. As described by historian Darlene Clark Hine, “Black women who were raped by their masters often turned to abortions as a means of resisting the institution of slavery and sexual exploitation” (qtd. in Ocen 2012:1267). This represents an early method of resistance to the control exerted by European slave traders and masters on African female bodies.

¹⁵ Translated from French. Original text: « Du sabotage des biens du maître, à sa séquestration ou à son élimination physique, en passant par le suicide et le refus des femmes qui se faisaient avorter pour ne pas mettre au monde des enfants nés en captivité, tous les moyens étaient bons. »
Though these self-performed abortions incurred enormous risks of injury or even death, many women preferred this risk over being forced “to bear children who were conceived in acts of violence or to raise their children in a state of bondage” (Ocen 2012:1267).

Women who did not want to or were not able to terminate their pregnancies were not exempt from physical abuse because they were pregnant. In a particularly chilling image, the museum exhibit describes the nature and effect of this abuse:

The use of the whip was permitted and regulated by the Black Code, which fixed the number of blows at 29. An instrument of correction and enslavement, it was served to everyone, and without any derogation, including women in the state of pregnancy. “When one of these unfortunate women was pregnant,” Schoelcher\textsuperscript{16} wrote, “a hole was dug in the ground to house her pregnancy while she received the 29 regulatory lashes that tore her flesh.”\textsuperscript{17}

The whipping of pregnant African women was widely practiced in European colonies. Writing about the treatment of female slaves in America, Ocen (2012) describes how pregnant women were often forced to work up until they gave birth, and despite the physical limitations of pregnancy, they were beaten for not working fast enough. She argues that “while Black women’s identities as mothers were not valued, their children were highly valued as property” (Ocen 2012:1266). This meant that “in a perverse physical representation of this contradiction, pregnant women were whipped in such a manner so as to protect the fetus while at the same time disciplining women as workers” (Ocen 2012:1266). The woman’s body and health did not matter, only what was contained within her uterus. An overseer in the American colonies commented that a

\textsuperscript{16} Victor Schoelcher was a 19\textsuperscript{th}-century French abolitionist writer. His work contributed to the final abolition of slavery in France and French colonies in 1848.

\textsuperscript{17} Translated from French. Original text: « L’usage de fouet était permis et réglementé par le Code noir qui en fixait le nombre de coups à 29. Instrument de correction et d’asservissement, il était servi à tout le monde, et sans dérogation aucune, y compris aux femmes en état de grossesse. ‘Lorsque l’une de ces malheureuses était enceinte,’ avait écrit Schoelcher, ‘un trou était creusé dans le sol pour loger sa grossesse pendant qu’elle recevait les 29 coups de fouet réglementaires qui déchiraient ses chairs.’ »
"woman who gives offense in the field, and is large in a family way, is compelled to lie down over a hole made to receive her corpulency, and is flogged with the whip or beat with a paddle, which has holes in it; at every stroke comes a blister” (Ocen 2012:1266). This practice represents a devastating and unconscionable exertion of control by a white man over a black woman’s body.

In order to analyze the treatment of enslaved African women in the colonies, one must understand the laws that governed race and reproduction. Women from the Senegambia region were taken all over the world, and faced different treatment based on the beliefs of the people who enslaved them. In French colonies, the Black Code spelled out their fate. Written by King Louis XIV in 1685, the Black Code laid out regulations and laws enslaved people were mandated to follow. Many rules specifically addressed women, pregnancy, and childbirth. Contrary to the English colonies, where children of enslaved women and their masters became the masters’ slaves as well, a Frenchman who impregnated his slave would lose ownership of her and the child. However, if an unmarried free black man impregnated an enslaved woman, the Code required him to marry her in the Catholic Church; both the mother and the children would then be free (France TV Éducation 2019: Article 9). This may have allowed some women to find power in their pregnancy and use it to improve their station under some circumstances. A child’s status and ownership were also determined through the position of the mother. Article 12 of the Code held that children of slave marriages where the mother and father had different owners would belong to the mother’s master, while Article 13 held that children were free when a slave husband married a free
woman but enslaved when a free man married an enslaved woman. This double-edged sword meant that under certain circumstances pregnancy could be a path to freedom, but in others it could doom a woman’s descendants to slavery after her. Either way, the French court heavily regulated pregnancy under the Black Code, demonstrating the magnitude of its economic and social interest in African women’s reproductive capacities.

The Black Code standardized and legitimized the treatment of African women as objects of economic value, as property. First shown by the Code’s rules regarding pregnant women, this view appears throughout in descriptions of the punishments for certain acts, the binding of slaves to their masters in all respects, and the protocol for inheritance. In various articles the Code lays out whipping, the cutting of body parts, branding with the sign of the fleur de lys, and death as punishment for insurrections.

Under Article 28 slaves were allowed no personal belongings other than those provided by their masters; anything they acquired elsewhere had to be handed over. They could pass nothing to their children and had no rights to inheritance either. Upon the master’s death, slaves were subject to property laws, part of the inheritance passed by the masters to their offspring. Article 44 states that slaves should be “equally divided among the coheirs...to be subject to customary dower, feudal withdrawal, and lineage” (France TV Éducation 2019). The Black Code freely declares “les esclaves être meubles”—the slaves were objects, assets, possessions, akin to furniture. Women had added value because they had the ability to expand the coffers of their owners, and so French society

---

18 The Code is unclear on this point, as Article 9 allows women to be freed under some marriages. Despite the contradiction however, it is likely the French deferred to Article 13, the rule that allowed slaveowners to retain the children when the mother was enslaved.

19 Translated from French. Original text: « ...se partager également entre les cohéritiers...n’être sujets au douaire coutumier, au retrait féodal et lignager... »
commodified, commercialized, and regulated their bodies through a fundamentally gendered lens.⁰

Even as public opinion began to turn against slavery in Europe and its colonies, the population maintained a derogatory view of African women and their bodies. In addition to their legal and economic commodification, African women were fetishized and exploited for profit in the public media. As with enslavement, this media representation was directly tied to their sexual and reproductive capacities. The case of Saartjie Baartman provides an instructive example. Baartman, originally from the Khoikhoi tribe in southern Africa, was taken to Europe in the early 1800s by a white man and exhibited in freakshows as the “Hottentot Venus.” The “Venus” played on Venus de Milo, while “Hottentot” was a term for people of Khoikhoi origin that was often misused and attributed to all African people. By the time Baartman arrived in Europe, the word “Hottentot” already conveyed images of savagery, brutality, and primitivism due to racialized tropes spread by the media and pop culture of the time (Qureshi 2004). Key in this trope was the idea that Africans were closer relatives to apes than were Europeans, which “scholars” supported through dubious phrenology and biased racial conclusions. In particular, they argued that the elongated labia and the large buttocks of the “Hottentots” indicated this close simian ancestry.

I want to note again here the differences between French and English colonial treatment of slaves. In the English colonies, under no circumstances did female slaves gain freedom through pregnancy. Children born to slave women, regardless of the father, remained enslaved. Additionally, the Black Code held that slaves in French colonies should be baptized and educated within the Catholic Church (Article 2). While this evidently represents forced religion and attempted brainwashing towards the enslaved Africans, the English government generally forbid any education of slaves at all. Worried about giving the slaves any tools that might lead to rebellion, many colonists also believed that Africans were irredeemable in the eyes of God and education was thus useless. Some religious education was allowed but it wasn’t regularly enforced as it was under the Black Code. In both types of colonies Senegambian women were exploited, but in slightly different ways.
Baartman’s body was sought after not just by the masses, but by the men of the Académie Royal de Medicine and the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. Tunisian-French director Abdellatif Kechiche’s film *Black Venus* (2010) opens on a wax model of Baartman’s body presented at the Académie in 1815 to a roomful of white men. The presenter, Georges Cuvier, refers to her as a “Bushman” and compares her to a baboon in a calm, scientific tone; according to him, all African women share large buttocks that resemble those of a baboon. He then passes around her genitals, preserved in a jar, showing her elongated labia. The men look on, nodding. Now that Baartman has died, they have finally taken her sex from her. Her vagina is their final “proof” of her racial inferiority and base sexual purpose.

The film jumps back in time to show how Baartman’s body ended up on display—indeed, in real life her brain, a wax model of her body, and her preserved genitals were on display at the Musée de l’Homme for over 150 years. Millions of people gazed upon the African woman’s intimate parts in the name of “science” before her remains were returned to South Africa in 2002—less than twenty years ago. The film follows her “performances” in London and Paris, where her “employer” keeps a leash around her neck and feeds her from the palm of his hand as she makes grunting noises and lashes out at the crowds. After he has her do her “savage dance of Africa,” where she shakes her body and butt, he invites people up to touch her butt, which they do in awe. At each performance the touching begins with one person hesitantly poking, which quickly devolves into the crowd savagely grabbing at her, everyone trying to feel her behind. Most of the performance is, of course, playacted to earn money. However, Baartman’s dissatisfaction with the touching and the degrading nature of the performance is real. The audience learns she came to Europe hoping to sing and dance, and she instead must
sell a false, primitive, and racialized portrayal of her people to salivating crowds at the
direction of a white man. Over time, the male employers grow more desperate for funds,
and the act turns darker as they begin allowing spectators to ride Baartman like a horse,
whip her, and even touch her vagina. When she continually protests, the white men
become angry. Her first employer, calling her a “fat Negress,” tells her, “they come to
admire your backside...a fat healthy ass they can touch...your body enthralls them, you
should be proud” (Kechiche 2010). When she refuses to show her labia to researchers
from the Académie, as her employers promised in a contract she would do, the
researchers try to persuade her, trick her, and even spy on her as she undresses. Her
employer later screams at her, “You were paid to spread your legs. Why is it a problem
for you to spread them for such illustrious men? It’s an honor” (Kechiche 2010).

Baartman’s only funds come from the hands of people who exploit her sexuality
and race, who become angry when she won’t give every part of herself to the crowds for
money. They repeatedly tell her it should be an honor to suffer the dehumanization and
objectification to which they expose her. Trapped by her lack of money and power, she
ultimately dies penniless and diseased after contracting a sexually transmitted infection
in a brothel. In a last money-making scheme, her French employer sells her body to the
Académie. They gleefully take the genitals and labia she refused to show them when she
was alive.

While Baartman came from South Africa and not Senegal, her plight illustrates
the treatment and view of African women in the European press in the 1700s and 1800s.
As Vergès (2017:108) describes, the bodies of black women and girls were used
pornographically; as she puts it, “in a world where women’s bodies must not be shown
publicly, the naked body of black women and girls is regularly exhibited publicly,” in
“sales, punishment, torture, illustrations, photography.” The same rules of femininity and purity for white European woman of the era did not seem to apply to black women, whose images could be used and misused at the public’s pleasure. Baartman sadly serves as just one example of African women exhibited in Europe between the 17th and 20th centuries. In her book, Collins (2000 [1990]:5, 78-79) discusses the outcome of this early exhibitionism and identifies several “controlling images” of black women in the media, among them the “breeder” image, originating in the slave era. Collins argues that society portrayed black women as “more suitable for having children than white women,” claiming that they could “produce children as easily as animals” (2000 [1990]:78). This “breeder image” provides “an ideological justification for efforts to harness black women’s fertility to the needs of a changing political economy” (2000 [1990]:78), because if they are hypersexual beings who can bear children at the drop of a hat, then it’s only natural for the government to try to harness their power. In sum, Collins (2000 [1990]:78) argues that:

Slave owners wanted enslaved Africans to “breed” because every slave child born represented a valuable unit of property, another unit of labor, and, if female, the prospects for more slaves. The controlling image of the breeder woman served to justify slave owners’ intrusion into Black women’s decisions about fertility.

Women like Baartman were thus key to the continued justification and implementation of slavery in European colonies. The public display of their bodies ensured the endurance of stereotypes and tropes about African women and their reproductive capacities, which fostered public support for enslavement and oppression. In Black Venus, at an 1815 show in Paris, the white employer encourages people to grab at

21 Translated from French. Original text: « Ces pratiques confirment aussi l’utilisation des corps des femmes et des petites filles noires dans des buts pornographiques : dans un monde où le corps des femmes ne doit pas se montrer publiquement, le corps nu des femmes et des petites filles noires est régulièrement exhibé publiquement (ventes, punition, torture, illustrations, photographie). »
Baartman’s body more, to get a piece of her. “Come closer!” he shouts. “It'll make you fertile!” The crowd surrounds her and pounces. Everyone wanted the African woman, the “breeder,” the vessel that would satisfy their economic goals and their sexual fantasies.
A poster from 1894 advertising an “ethnographique” [ethnographic] colonial exhibition in Lyon, France, featuring Senegalese women on display.

The poster above illustrates the trend of “colonial exhibitions,” events used to exploit, sexualize, and exoticize African women. This exposition, in the city of Lyon in 1894, featured a troupe of 160 indigenous women, among them Senegalese women. The images on this poster reflect Collins’s “breeder” image and align perfectly with the sexualization of Saartjie Baartman: the woman has her breasts prominently displayed and outlined with a length of rope. She has a cloth reminiscent of a bedsheets draped around her waist, and she seems to be wearing a touch of lipstick. The planners of the event surely sought to create as exotic and enticing of an image as possible to draw visitors, and this one displays a woman in a state of nudity and sexuality that would likely have shocked and tantalized the French public in 1894. Additionally, within the circle on the right side of the poster stand residents of an African village; a mother carries a child on her back while at least four other children and another topless woman surround her. This reinforces the notion that African women are prolific “breeders” and sexual temptresses. At the same time, the images of animal tusks and an archery bow seem to fulfill stereotypes of a “primitive” culture. This poster encapsulates the sexualization and exploitation of Senegalese women in the European press and within a public sphere which sought to display them for profit.

From Gorée Island to American plantations to Parisian freakshows, we can see the root of international control over African women’s bodies. From the point of first contact, Europeans viewed African women as objects up for possession to whoever claimed them. They exerted this control in brutal rapes, whippings of enslaved pregnant women, legal ownership of female slave’s offspring, and sexualized and racialized
representations of African women in the media and pop culture. Media representation and physical exploitation during slavery reinforced each other, so that the public continued to support slavery and began to think of African women as lesser beings, as sexual animals. In later chapters I will explore how this foundation contributes to the modern-day perception and treatment of Senegalese women. As Collins rightly notes, imagery that began in slavery, like the “breeder,” persists today. Likewise, Kechiche did not create Black Venus simply as a historical record. People take stories from the past and create art with them because those stories have relevance today. Saartjie Baartman’s suffering as represented by Kechiche features many struggles African women still face, and indicates that there is much more work to do in fighting the legacy of enslavement.

Once again, we consider the Statue of the Liberation of Slavery, standing resolute underneath the sun and palms of Gorée Island. What does it show, in light of the sexualization and exploitation of Senegalese and African woman during slavery? It does show a moment of joy, of bitter relief: the chains of bondage are finally broken. However, only the man breaks those chains and holds them triumphantly in the air. The woman, half-nude, wraps her arms around him and presses her breasts against his body, looking up. Why wasn’t she in chains? Is it because she had another purpose, a sexual or reproductive purpose, that required her to be unchained and close to the masters? Or is it because she is again an addendum to the suffering of the male, a spectator to his liberation just like us? It is impossible to know. However, the statue, with its different roles for men and women, illustrates the enduring gender divide in the treatment and representation of African people and marks the passage of Senegalese history when foreigners first sowed the insidious seeds of control over women’s bodies.
Chapter 2

Senegalese Marriage in a Changing Society

Though societies and cultures evolve over time, people see certain things as constant. Family, trade, and education might make the list. People take these as givens because reproduction, the exchange of currency or goods for other goods, and the spread of knowledge down through generations have all been part of human civilization since the beginning. Another institution considered similarly resilient is marriage. Though human cultures are incredibly diverse, most groups have some form of union for adults that demonstrates their legal and social partnership and oftentimes their shared commitment to having children. However, marriage is practiced differently around the world, and in Senegal, it has evolved over time to reflect the changing needs and values of Senegalese society. This chapter explores how marriage affects women in Senegal in both positive and negative ways, and how women have resisted oppression within marriage by reinventing traditional practices like polygamy. I will discuss the restraints placed on women through marriage, the history of marriage law in Senegal, and the representation of Senegalese marriage in literature, film, and the news media. I will then examine the biased lens with which “Western” media or voices critique Senegalese practices, and the ways in which Senegalese women have created cultural change and found empowerment in marriage over time.

Polygamy in Senegal: A Thing of the Past, or of the Future?

Within heterosexual marriages in Senegal, people can choose from multiple options: a monogamous marriage or a polygamous marriage. About two thirds of married people are monogamous, while about a third are polygamous. Since Senegal is
already perceived as a “third world” or “Global South” country based on economic and social markers of development, the presence of polygamy as an institution tends to reinforce that perception in the eyes of “Western” observers. It then becomes the perception of all marriage in Senegal, which simply defies statistics. Though polygamy is the exception rather than the rule, observers fixate on it and cast it as a deviant sexual practice. In this section I seek to show the history and role of polygamy in Senegal, while complicating the traditional narrative that a polygamous state is an uneducated state.

Polygamy plays a controversial role worldwide: an ancient practice in Senegal and elsewhere across the globe, many “Western” nations view it as backwards, and various international organizations seek to reduce its rates. However, criticism of polygamy, as with other African practices like female genital modification, reflects an enduring power differential where high-income “Western” countries criticize low-income developing countries as primitive or immoral. This replicates the oppressive power structure of “Western” nations enslaving and colonizing African nations. Therefore, this issue must be handled very carefully and considered within a conscientious lens, acknowledging the “Western” viewpoint I (and a good number of my sources) bring to this issue. With that in mind, I argue that while polygamy and polyamorous relationships cannot be judged morally bankrupt or wrong on principle—indeed, many Senegalese women choose to enter polygamous marriages, and evidence suggests polyamory is on the rise in “Western” nations (Hogenboom 2016; Klesse 2016; Sevcenko 2016)—the practice becomes problematic when it is abused to restrict the autonomy or power of a group. In accordance with traditional Senegalese views of women as subservient to men, the practice has historically been used in ways that keep women in second-class positions and prevent them from accessing equal rights and
justice. I will examine instances and ways in which polygamy limits female autonomy. However, some Senegalese women, including highly educated professionals, have sought to reinvent the practice and actively choose it in a way that enhances their independence. Looking towards the future, I discuss possible paths to reducing oppressive polygamous practices while preserving Senegalese traditions and each woman’s right to choose her ideal relationship.

If they know of it at all, non-Senegalese people know of Senegalese marriage and polygamy from Une si longue lettre, a celebrated 1979 novel by Mariama Bâ that was published across the world. The protagonist, Ramatoulaye, writes a long letter to her best friend Aïssatou about the death of her husband Modou. Ramatoulaye reflects on the life she and Modou built together, which was interrupted when Modou suddenly took a second wife after thirty years of marriage. In many ways, the book reads like any introspective novel about marriage, covering the rise and fall of the couple’s intimacy and the struggles of raising wayward children. Ramatoulaye’s daughter, named Aïssatou after her best friend, gets pregnant out of wedlock. Ramatoulaye catches her other daughters smoking. She manages the advances of potential suitors and follows the mourning period dictated by her Muslim faith. Throughout the story, Bâ explores themes of motherhood, friendship, sexuality, modernity, and love, showing Ramatoulaye’s journey towards independence and strength after heartbreak.

However, the book’s detailed discussion of the marriage and family dynamics surrounding polygamy distinguishes it from similar “Western” novels and speaks to wider trends in the female experience in Senegal at the time the book was written. Both Ramatoulaye and the elder Aïssatou found themselves marginalized within their marriages by their husbands’ choices to take on second wives. Modou became a “sugar
daddy” for one of Ramatoulaye’s daughter’s friends, Binetou, who then entered the household as Ramatoulaye’s co-wife. Reeling from Modou’s decision and searching for answers, Ramatoulaye chose to stay in the marriage, though her children advised her to leave. Modou gradually cut off financial support and resources and created a new life with Binetou for four years until his death, all the while remaining legally married to Ramatoulaye. Aïssatou, on the other hand, chose to divorce her husband Mawdo after he married his first cousin Nabou under pressure from his wealthy family. Aïssatou moves to the United States with her children and achieves an independent life. However, this is only possible due to Aïssatou’s social standing and connections, which allow her to immigrate, support her family, and on the whole choose options unavailable to many Senegalese women negatively impacted by polygamy.

Importantly, the polygamous relationships in the book do not result in ideal situations for the new wives either. Both marriages are orchestrated by the women’s families—indeed, by other women—who see social or economic potential in those unions. Binetou’s family pressures her to marry Modou for the wealth he can provide, while Mawdo marries Nabou under fear his mother will become distressed or fall ill if he doesn’t fulfill her wishes. The second wives themselves find tension and abandonment from husbands who divide their time between multiple women, and rather than finding allies in the first wives, their “sisters,” they face resentment. In her narrative Ramatoulaye refers to Binetou as l’enfant, “the child,” and bristles when she and Binetou have to stand next to each other as family representatives at Modou’s funeral. She writes,
Our step-sisters treat with the same equality thirty and five years of married life. They celebrate, with the same ease and the same words, twelve and three maternities (Bâ 1979:17).\textsuperscript{22}

Ramatoulaye feels that their sacrifices and contributions to the family will never be equal and should not be treated as such. Regardless of the truth or untruth of this belief, she makes clear to Binetou that they are not friends. She resents Binetou for her role as an interloper without fully acknowledging the pressures Binetou herself faced to enter the marriage. Modou created a situation that benefited him while two women suffered, and he in essence pitted them against each other, managing to evade Ramatoulaye’s blame at Binetou’s expense. Patricia Collins’s (2000 [1990]) matrix of domination features not only a \textit{structural} domain, where oppression is organized through institutions like marriage, but also an \textit{interpersonal} domain, where oppression is legitimized through micro-level control of the consciousness, self-image, and opportunities of marginalized people. In seducing Binetou and blind-siding Ramatoulaye with his new marriage, Modou somehow convinces each woman that their struggles under this system are their own or the other wife’s fault. Both women’s extended families, particularly the female matriarchs, further perpetuate these skewed views of femininity because they believe it is the way of the world and economic success sometimes supersedes personal happiness.

Mariama Bâ’s (1979) story has resonated with women across the world and exposed readers to the complex dynamics of marriage and womanhood under polygamy. After years of silent suffering and a difficult divorce, Bâ sought to highlight the marginalization and inequality felt by Senegalese women. Her work “focused on the

\textsuperscript{22} Translated from French. Original text: « Nos belles-sœurs traitent avec la même égalité trente et cinq ans de vie conjugale. Elles célèbrent, avec la même aisance et les mêmes mots, douze et trois maternités. »
grandmother, the mother, the sister, the daughter, the cousin and the friend, how they all deserve the title ‘mother of Africa,’ and how important they are for the society” (The Patriotic Vanguard 2018). Une si longue lettre is a foundational text for researchers seeking to understand the experience of Senegalese women and its representation through literature. However, it must be noted that many women disagreed with Bâ’s views, especially at the time the novel was written. Bâ saw many women as “blind” to the power structures that propped up men within families while simultaneously punishing women. Thus, her writing represents one perspective on polygamy and reflects her own standing as an educated, wealthy woman in Senegalese society. She argued that books can be “a peaceful weapon” (The Patriotic Vanguard 2018) to empower women and fight inequalities in Senegal. However, to take her account as gospel would be to ignore key perspectives and background that complicate the issue. If many women vocally support and arrange polygamous marriages, can polygamy be determined to be an anti-feminist issue? How much of that judgment is rooted in “Western” critiques of African society? Have polygamy and attitudes towards it changed since the book was published forty years ago? Using this novel as a jumping-off point, it is necessary to analyze polygamy in Senegal in a holistic manner, beginning with its legal foundations.

The right to polygamy is enshrined in Senegal’s Family Code, created in 1972 by then-President Léopold Senghor. The Code is largely understood as a compromise between “aspects of French, Muslim, and African laws and norms” (London 2010:239) crafted in an attempt to showcase the young nation’s power and stability in a post-colonial sphere. According to Scott London (2010), Senghor sought to create a new code mirroring the Western style, to pioneer a “single body of law that would supersede the ethnic, regional, and religious differences that had characterized family law under
colonialism” (240). Ideally, it would also placate as many groups as possible, from the urban elites and potential donors enamored with what they saw as the “progressive and democratic” standards of gender equality in the West, to the powerful Muslim brotherhoods with more traditional views of gender roles (London 2010:240-241). Polygamy, though derided by the French, was a key tenet of traditional Senegalese marriage practices and had been melded with Islamic practice in Senegal. The Code thus mandated that husbands register their intent at the time of their first marriage. They had three options: monogamy, limited polygamy (up to two wives), and “unlimited” or full polygamy (which allowed up to four wives). This provision stands today, and the most recent data indicates that just over a third, or 35.2% of marriages, are polygamous (Kane 2018).

In creating the Family Code, Senghor was drawing from a patchwork structure of courts and influences that had developed over the course of colonialism. During French rule, colonizers realized that rather than fight the protracted and likely impossible battle of removing Islamic courts and inhibiting the power of imams over Senegalese life, it was better to form coexisting French and Senegalese legal systems. In the mid-1800s the French created a network of tribunals overseen by local leaders, who were selected and controlled by colonial administrators. At the appeals level, a French military commander headed the court and was joined by two European and two indigenous assessors. After independence the elaborate colonial structure remained, as did the mix of French, Islamic, and African influences. However, these traditions contain “competing ideologies regarding the legal protections afforded to women” (Bop 2010:207) and thus the Family Code, the descendant of the colonial and Islamic legal
systems, contains many contradictions, omissions, and loopholes that allow for the exploitation and control of women.  

Additionally, when it comes to social practices like marriage, the power of customary laws and Islamic brotherhoods cannot be understated. Senegalese family law “acknowledges custom as a determinant of the law” (London 2010:206) and so when it comes to marriage, customary laws have legal standing. Further, “the marabouts who lead the major Muslim brotherhoods encourage ‘passive noncompliance’” (London 2010:206) of the Family Code provisions with which they disagree. Outside of major urban areas, there is little recourse for women suffering within a marriage, as they have minimal knowledge of the law and access to the courts. Additionally, the Family Code is applied inconsistently depending on the judge, attorneys, and jurisdiction. This fallibility of the Family Code based on location and education further opens the door to exploitation and abuse. However, it also creates a flexible structure for future reforms and adaptations.

In accordance with the Senegalese implicit and explicit designation of the man as the leader and head of household, the husband may choose his marriage “type” without ever consulting his wife. In many cases, women find their spouse making a decision on the day of the marriage that takes them aback and immediately forces them into an inferior role. For example, Khady Ndiaye, a civil engineer then in her thirties, told the Associated Press in 2004 that she didn’t discuss the matter with her husband before their marriage in 1996. She assumed that since they were both educated professionals, they would be monogamous, as prevalence of polygamy tends to split along

---

23 For example, one of the most critiqued aspects of the Family Code is its failure to acknowledge marital rape as a criminal act (Bop 2010, London 2010).
socioeconomic lines. However, when they registered their marriage at the town hall in Dakar, her husband told the bureaucrat that he would opt for polygamy. Ndiaye fainted. Eight years later, she said, “I felt betrayed and still do” (Diouf 2004). The husband has no obligation to involve his wife or wives in his marriage choices.

Men can also weaponize polygamy against their wives if they perceive them to be acting out, disobeying orders, growing too old, or gaining too much power. In a research article on Senegalese women in politics, Ibou Sané (2014) describes the case of one influential female politician whose husband punished her for succeeding in her field. The 57-year-old woman told Sané (2014:75):

I attended a meeting of the political bureau of my party from 5 p.m. until 5 a.m. the next morning because the agenda was very important for me...When I got home between 6 and 7 a.m., I found to my surprise a woman lying on a couch; she had just been married to my husband. He had got exasperated by my frequent meetings and my working at night. He came up to me, rosary in his hand, and said in a firm voice: “Well then, will politics marry you? Will politics give you more children?”

The woman’s husband attempted to use a second marriage as leverage to force his wife to conform to his plans for her. In this sense, the second wife was used as a pawn to influence the first. Men don’t necessarily need to marry to exert this pressure; simply threatening second or additional marriages can serve as a psychological weapon. Moustafa, an immigrant to France, told The New York Times that, “One wife on her own is trouble. When there are several, they are forced to be polite and well behaved. If they misbehave, you threaten that you’ll take another wife” (Simons 1996). Birame, a university professor, told Le Monde that he had chosen polygamy at his marriage registration, but that he didn’t expect to take on another wife. He elaborated:
I do not have the means to have two wives. However, I have a security net, a power against my spouse. It’s like a weapon of dissuasion so that she doesn’t make war against me. (Kane 2018)²⁴

In this way even the simple threat of polygamy can be used to force wives into subservience and virtually hold them hostage in a marriage. It is unclear how often this occurs, but the phenomenon has been widely reported in both media and research.

The conventional view, that espoused by most “Western” media outlets and research bodies, is that polygamy in Senegal is a gross human rights violation with exclusively negative impacts on women. The Inter Press Service reported that some women in polygamous marriages “are prohibited to speak to strangers, including neighbours, women’s rights activists or marriage counsellors about their matrimonial problems” (Da Silva 2012). Additionally, they “do not have the right to complain unnecessarily as long as they have ‘everything,’ which includes food, clothes and sex” (Da Silva 2012). Senegalese women interviewed in articles for major “Western” outlets have harsh words for polygamy. Aminata, a woman from Dakar, secretly advises women in polygamous marriages, and argues that, “Polygamy is a form of modern slavery...women involved in this form of marriage have no voice and no channels to complain” (Da Silva 2012). In agreement, Rokhaya, a recent university graduate in a polygamous marriage to a man twice her age, states that “Polygamy is hell and a pack of lies” (Da Silva 2012). Rokhaya’s husband forbade her from following her career and travel goals so she could serve him instead, making her feel “trapped.” These types of

²⁴ Translated from French. Original text: « Je n’ai pas les moyens d’entretenir deux femmes. Mais j’ai un filet de sécurité, un pouvoir face à mon épouse. C’est comme une arme de dissuasion pour qu’elle ne me fasse pas la guerre. »
restrictions have brutal impacts on women and severely limit their autonomy and voice within a marriage.

Most research on the topic notes that illiterate rural women are more likely to be in polygamous marriages. Overall, about 44% of women and 23% of men are in a polygamous union (Enquête+ 2015).25 Those numbers change based on location, with 48.6% of women and 23.1% of men in rural areas being polygamous compared with 37.8% of women and 18.3% of men in urban areas. However, as can be seen, the numbers don’t diverge markedly. Polygamy is a sizable presence no matter the type of community. Literacy rates are low for Senegalese women, with just 39% of women being literate. Several researchers and activists point to this fact as one of the reasons women enter polygamous marriages and stay even in the face of unhappiness or abuse. Ibou Sané (2014:72) comments that:

Generally Senegalese men do not give much respect or credibility to women who appear to function without guardianship (whether from husbands or parents), and women are almost never independent or autonomous.

While this is certainly not true in every case, many women may seek marriage to boost social capital, credibility, and access to resources, especially in rural settings. Social worker and gender activist Fanta Niang argues that “sadly most wives in polygamist marriages are illiterate and unaware of women’s rights and the right to equality” (Da Silva 2012) so they value the benefits a polygamous marriage might bring over its harmful effects. Amsatou Sow Sidibe, law professor and director of the Human Rights Institute at Dakar University, concurs that, “For a Senegalese woman, being unmarried is not highly regarded...they would rather share a husband than remain single” (Diouf

---

25 All the statistics in this paragraph come from this article, which summarizes a national report.
For an illiterate woman with few or no job prospects, or perhaps no expectation that she will work, earning status as a married women within her community can be worth any downsides of being a co-wife.

Some modern accounts of conflicts between co-wives reflect Ramatoulaye’s tension with Binetou in Une si longue lettre (Bâ 1979). Diatou, a second wife, says that her husband’s first wife is “mean” and refers to her only as “witch,” saying that she provides support for her husband in the face of her co-wife (Diouf 2004). She elaborates that, “sharing a partner is already extremely tough, so I don’t even want to pretend I like her.” Similarly, two of the wives of Ousmane Gaye, a man from Dakar, reportedly beat his third wife because she was Ousmane’s favorite (Da Silva 2012). Despite his insistence that his wives “love one another and live in harmony and peace like three sisters,” wives Fatou and Awa beat Aissatou, insulted her, and accused her of bewitching Ousmane to make him love her the most. These sorts of conflicts are reportedly common. Men also look admiringly upon other men who can “tame” their wives and create a harmonious household (Diouf 2004). In this way the women can be dehumanized and treated as warring animals over which the husband has control and responsibility.

The Senegalese people I interviewed for this research had a generally negative view of polygamy and its outcomes. Particularly in the realm of female health and wellness, polygamous structures mean a division of resources and attention between multiple wives, and sometimes disastrous consequences. One interviewee, an expert in Senegalese reproductive health, described how in polygamous unions in rural areas, each wife is expected to handle her own healthcare as well as the healthcare of the children she bears for the marriage. The older or least favorite wives often receive less
funding or support to do so, and many women can only use money borrowed from their husband. The interviewee offered an example of how this might harm women. If a wife in a rural area is pregnant and having complications, she might need to travel to a clinic to get assistance. Arriving at the clinic, they inform her that she has an infection and needs immediate care at the nearest hospital, fifty miles away. Her husband only gave her enough money to get to the clinic, and somewhere in the process of traveling back to her village, finding her husband, requesting more money, procuring a car and someone to drive it, and traveling to the hospital, she dies. The same could happen in a situation in which a young child is sick. Travel and limited funds eat up crucial time when a life could be saved. However, when a man has multiple wives and often over fifteen children between them, some might slip through the cracks or the family simply might not have the funds to afford the care.

All this being said, the portrayal of Senegalese polygamy in the international media is skewed to reflect “Western” perceptions of a supposedly backwards, primitive culture. Women have more options to leave polygamous unions than otherwise apparent, and the landscape of Senegalese polygamy is changing so that more educated women are choosing polygamy. Additionally, the focus on tension and conflict between co-wives misses the strong relationships and bonds women can form under polygamy and the ways that many women work together to raise their children in a communal setting. These nuances reveal that it is not the practice itself that is inherently harmful, but the ways it is used by some husbands to exert control. Other polygamous marriages are healthy and productive, as I will explore momentarily. Polyamorous relationships exist all over the world, including the United States, and the harmful humanitarian outcomes of the practice in specific Senegalese unions do not mean that it should be
eliminated as a choice for the women and men who seek to continue this longstanding Senegalese tradition.

Many of the “Western” news articles that report on Senegalese polygamy frame the issue in a suspect manner that hints at exoticism and xenophobia. Several of the articles from which I drew quotes were helpful in providing the stories of individual Senegalese women and men, but the articles as a whole framed Senegal with derision. For example, one was titled “Polygamy Throttles Women in Senegal” (Da Silva 2012), a violent and evocative description seemingly intended to shock Western readers. The article limited its quotes to women against polygamy, rather than trying to get the perspective of women who had actively chosen it. This conveys the idea that only men support polygamy and only women oppose it, to no avail. The truth is much more complicated.

Similarly, an older *New York Times* article about Senegalese immigrants to France was titled “African Women in France Battling Polygamy” and described the polygamous married life of a woman named Khadi as “a nightmare of pregnancies, babies, nasty fights and long, hostile silences” (Simons 1996). The article classified Khadi as one of few African women in France “now willing to speak openly about the secrets of polygamy and about the strains, the anger and the humiliations of their marriages.” This language casts polygamy as an inherently secretive, abusive, and primitive practice, and makes it seem as if the French are now “cracking the code” by speaking to informants. The American government forbids polygamous marriages and does not admit polygamous immigrants; at the time the article was written, France had recently changed its policy to not recognize polygamous marriages either after a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment. The article features comments from an official that channel
derisive views of poor people needing welfare: he comments, “Consider the costs...One husband with three wives and a team of children may need government health care, education and subsidies for up to 20 people. Is this fair?” The article further demonizes poor immigrants by saying polygamous families live in “rickety neighborhoods” and “glum suburbs,” and that they are “large tribal families,”26 a word choice playing into colonial stereotypes about Africans being primitive. The author also says that the men return to Africa periodically to “buy new, young brides” who then return to give birth in France and secure citizenship. Simons (1996) is an American author, and this language reflects the “anchor baby” trope perpetuated in the United States, which holds that immigrants will exploit citizenship laws to have children on American soil. This trope has little factual basis and is primarily used to foster fear of immigrant populations growing and gaining power (Ormunde 2012). In sum, the article purports to be a factual news story but instead uses dangerous colonial language and fear-mongering rhetoric about immigrants with different social traditions, such as polygamy.

I reviewed two other articles that demonstrate how the “Western” media exoticizes and sexualizes the act of polygamy while demeaning the people who participate in it. An article published in the Los Angeles Times was titled “On Thursday, It’s Wife No. 3 in Polygamous West Africa” (Diouf 2004). This sort of language exoticizes West Africa and its people and ignores the two-thirds of Senegalese people who are in monogamous marriages. It also seems intended to shock Western readers, implying that everyone in that region is polygamous and men have a daily schedule for the wives they sleep with. The same article repeatedly uses the phrase “black West

26 Emphasis added.
Africa” with no clear reason for the racialized adjective. The text slips in and out of a sardonic tone that seems to mock the sincere beliefs and choices described by the article’s interviewees. Rather than provide a detailed overview of a phenomenon, it casts Senegal as an alien and strange place, where men participate in exoticized unions featuring sexual encounters with multiple women per week.

In the same vein, an article in *Forbes* titled “How Senegal’s Dakar Will Surprise You” (Tapon 2018) criticizes and misrepresents Senegalese polygamy while also expressing shock and disbelief at common Senegalese practices. Even though some of these practices occur in the “Western” world, the clear implication is that they are strange and alien in their Senegalese form, betraying the writer’s own bias. Before the male author criticizes polygamy, he describes a woman serving food on a roadside while periodically breastfeeding. However, instead of using that language, he says she would “heap the rice while her breasts flopped around for all the customers to see” (Tapon 2018). This language dehumanizes the woman and makes her seem like a primitive sexualized being, tying these actions to her African-ness, while in fact many women in the “Western” world also breastfeed while working. The author expresses surprise that in Dakar, “all the important streets have paved roads, making you think that it’s a modern city,” as if an African city could never be truly modern by his standards, and says of the religious Senegalese population, “they seem fanatical but they’ve never committed a major terrorist attack” (Tapon 2018). Evidently he expects that a religious African nation would of course have committed such an act and assumes all of his readers agree. Needless to say, this article, published by a major news source, buys into countless stereotypes about African people and takes as a given that they are somehow less developed than so-called Westerners. When it comes to polygamy, this tone
continues, with the author referring to his polygamous host as a “bigamist,” a criminal term in the United States. Since only monogamous marriages are authorized in the U.S., someone who marries a second person while already in a legal union can be prosecuted for the crime of “bigamy.” The word thus has a deeply negative connotation for American readers, even though it doesn’t accurately apply to Senegal, where multiple marriages are legal. However, the author either didn’t bother to research the difference or doesn’t care about misrepresenting Senegalese polygamy and casting his subjects as criminals in the eyes of his readers.

The author takes further liberties in the assumptions he makes about the relationship between his polygamous host’s wives. Referring to his host, the author opines that “his two wives seemed to get along but perhaps they were just acting” (Tapon 2018). To him, women must be unhappy in polygamous unions because the system is inherently oppressive and the nations that practice it are inherently backwards. The women must be acting, and these nations must naturally be inferior to the U.S., with its enshrined monogamy. However, he doesn’t bother to ask his host’s wives about their marriages or share their voices in his article. Instead, he includes the image below, with the caption “Aren’t I enough for you?” Somehow, he manages to sexualize the subject of the photo while also evoking pity for her, furthering his misrepresentation of Senegalese life and marriage.
Articles about polygamy attempt to titillate readers while also disparaging Senegalese culture for a practice that remains a small aspect of Senegalese life. The coverage of Senegalese polygamy in the “Western” media highlights its differences from “Western” practice and condemns its negative effects on women without adding nuance, leaving the overall impression of a primitive society with deviant sexual practices. This fits into Vergès’s theory of racial capitalism—it is advantageous for powerful “Western” forces like the American media to represent African nations as poor, weak, or deficient in some way. It affirms the supposed superiority of America and Europe, justifies their economic and political interventions into poorer countries, and reinforces a racialized power dynamic where light-skinned groups criticize dark-skinned ones.

In contrast to prevailing portrayals in the “Western” media, in some marriages, women respond to polygamy by forming bonds with their co-wives and raising children.
as a small community. This subverts traditional power dynamics and gives the women more collective influence over the household. Ousmane Sembène (2004), a famed Senegalese director, illustrated this communal support in his seminal film *Moolaadé*. In a small West African village, four young girls flee from the ritual practice of female genital modification (FGM) and take refuge in the home of Collé, the second of three wives. She opposes the practice of FGM and casts a sacred spell, the *moolaadé*, so that the female elders who perform the ceremony cannot enter her home and take the girls. Though at first she faces some pushback from her co-wives, they quickly begin to support her and protect the girls alongside her. Even when their husband beats Collé in front of the villagers in an attempt to force her to submit, her co-wives support Collé and her efforts to make change. Throughout the film there are numerous scenes of the women passing time together laughing, doing chores, dancing, or caring for children. United against the female elders and their husband, they are stronger than Collé alone.

This film revolves around the issue of female genital modification, and Sembène (2004) takes a strong stance against it. Companies from various countries helped produce it, including Senegal, France, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Morocco, and Tunisia. The message of the film is that FGM is a harmful practice and should become a thing of the past. However, Sembène and the production companies decline the opportunity to make such a statement about polygamy, and instead portray polygamous marriages in a fairly positive light. Indeed, Collé’s polygamous marriage is essential to helping her take a strong stance in the village against FGM, because without the support of her co-wives she could have been silenced or overpowered within her home and forced to relent. This film shows that in some cases, women can turn polygamy into a positive vehicle for community, strength, and mutual support. Perhaps this was meant to counter
“Western” perceptions of polygamy as a solely harmful and backwards tradition; regardless, this no doubt reflects the experience of some Senegalese women in polygamous marriages.

Women can also gain economic benefit in polygamous unions, and a new generation of educated, successful women is choosing polygamy to boost their financial stability and careers. Coumba Kane (2018) reported for Le Monde that the practice is “decreasing globally but spreading in intellectual circles.” About a quarter of Senegalese women with a university degree entered marriage as a second, third, or fourth wife, according to the country’s 2013 census. In the same article, Anta, a successful 27-year-old journalist and a second wife, explained that she had wanted to be polygamous since she was a girl, and that “it’s a form of freedom, because I have time for myself when my husband is at the first wife’s house.” She is thus able to pursue her own projects and her own career, as is her co-wife Djenaba, who works in tourism. Women who seek financial support as they embark on burgeoning career paths may find polygamy to be the most convenient option for them.

Additionally, the perception that women in polygamous marriages are always unhappily trapped is directly contested by the prevalence of divorce in Senegal, a route which many women choose whether they are monogamous or polygamous. During my time in Senegal, my interviewees spoke of family members and acquaintances who had divorced quickly and easily, for financial, social, or personal reasons outside of the type of marriage they were in. One interviewee spoke about a woman who had divorced her

---

27 Translated from French. Original text: « La pratique recule globalement, mais se répand dans les milieux intellectuels. »
28 Translated from French. Original text: « C’est une forme de liberté, car j’ai du temps pour moi quand mon mari est chez la première épouse. »
husband when he married a second wife, just as Aïssatou did in Une si longue lettre (Bâ 1979). The personal experiences of my interviewees are reflected in research and recent, less biased media coverage. Legally, either a husband or a wife may seek divorce, and as divorce is relatively common there is not an outsized social stigma against it. In a New York Times article titled “A Quiet Revolution: More Women Seek Divorces in Conservative West Africa,” Dionne Searcey (2019) documents how women are developing more avenues to seek divorce in West African nations, and they are feeling more empowered to do so. Searcey argues that:

Women are more educated now and in some areas marry later in life, factors that academics say lead to more stable marriages. At the same time, more women are moving into cities and joining the work force, empowering more of them to discard bad marriages.

Dakar’s Association of Female Lawyers has seen its caseload grow exponentially over the past few years, with its members now helping as many as three times as many female clients seek divorce as they did in 2015. Compared to the past, when many women weathered bad marriages because they felt it was their best option, more women are choosing to marry or divorce for love and seeking husbands who support their personal and career choices. As the female politician in Ibou Sané’s (2014:75) study shared, her husband’s effort to silence her by marrying a second wife fell flat:

But as luck would have it, the next day he heard on South FM radio that I had been named as Minister… He rushed to congratulate me and asked if I could come back home because, as he said, I had children who needed my education and human warmth. I replied that politics had lifted me up to an elevated height and he had remained small because of his petty opinions.

Women’s roles are changing in Senegal, as they are globally, and more women feel enabled to choose the work, partner, and life they envision.
After independence, many elite Senegalese men and women sought to prove Senegal’s modernity and attempted to curry favor with “Western” countries like the United States and France. Senghor acted in this vein in incorporating so many French legal and social ideas into the new Codes passed by his government. Polygamy was cast as “retrograde” (Kane 2018)\textsuperscript{29} by the elite population, with the knowledge that “Western” countries abhorred it. Publishing in 1979, just nineteen years after independence and seven years after the Family Code, Mariama Bâ belonged to the upper crust of Senegalese society and would certainly experience a boost in international readership by taking an anti-polygamy stance. The acclaim she received for *Une si longue lettre* can be understood in the context of its strong stance on women’s issues, but also within this international context of the politics of polygamy. While the negative perception of polygamy reinforced by this book has persisted, as shown by the skewed media coverage of the practice, many women are now making changes and transforming polygamy into an advantageous position for themselves. As women gain rights in Senegal and advance further and further into powerful positions, they are defying “Western” stereotypes and empowering themselves while reinventing an ancient Senegalese tradition.

*Movements and Misrepresentations in Senegal’s LGBTQ Community*

In Senegal, only heterosexual unions are recognized under law. According to Article 319 of the Senegalese Penal Code (1966), “whoever will have committed an

\textsuperscript{29} Translated from French. Original text: « ...la polygamie, perçue comme rétrograde par ces premières élites d’après l’indépendance... »
improper or unnatural act with a person of the same sex”\(^{30}\) can be imprisoned for one to five years and fined 100,000 to 1,500,000 francs, the equivalent of $200 to $3000 under current exchange rates. If the act is committed with someone under the age of 21, the maximum penalty is applied. Gay men and women face extreme discrimination in Senegal, including beatings by both civilians and police, disownment from families, and criminal prosecution, as shown above. A 2013 Pew Research Center survey found that 96% of Senegalese people believed society should not accept homosexuality. In that same year, President Obama made a widely celebrated visit to Senegal; an extremely popular figure, his image appears everywhere from posters to street art to museums.\(^{31}\) However, Obama caused controversy when he praised the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act and urged African nations to ensure that their governments do not discriminate against gay people. President Macky Sall responded by saying that Senegal was “not ready to decriminalize homosexuality” (Nossiter 2013), a reaction lauded by the Senegalese public. Some even said Sall didn’t go far enough and should have stated that “this can never happen here” (Nossiter 2013).

Clearly this view on homosexuality represents a large barrier for queer Senegalese people, including women, to live freely and autonomously. Some enter heterosexual marriages to escape suspicion, resulting in mental health issues raised by a life lived in fear. According to research by Human Rights Watch, religious leaders “regularly issue inflammatory statements condemning gay men and lesbians, even

---

\(^{30}\) Translated from French. Original text: « Sans préjudice des peines plus graves prévues par les alinéas qui précèdent ou par les articles 320 et 321 du présent Code, sera puni d’un emprisonnement d’un à cinq ans et d’une amende de 100.000 à 1,500.000 francs, quiconque aura commis un acte impudique ou contre nature avec un individu de son sexe. Si l’acte a été commis avec un mineur de 21 ans, le maximum de la peine sera toujours prononcé. »

\(^{31}\) When I lived there this past summer, people still talked about his visit and praised him whenever the United States was mentioned. He is widely adored as the first American president of African descent.
recommending that they be killed” (Nossiter 2013). Many are afraid to go to doctors about sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS, because of the stigma and feared retribution (Nossiter 2013; Lopez 2018). By all accounts, Senegal will not legalize gay marriage in the near future. However, though “Western” media often takes credit for Senegalese progress on queer issues and misrepresents Senegalese culture to reinforce colonial power dynamics, grassroots efforts by gay men and women have resulted in substantial strides towards equality and glimmers of a different marriage landscape in years to come.

“Western” news articles about Senegalese homophobia tend to follow the same tactics as the ones about polygamy: they criticize not only Senegalese policies, but Senegalese culture, and they fail to fully acknowledge the people fighting to make changes. The title of an article in The Daily Beast, “I Don’t Go Out During the Day’: Inside Senegal’s LGBT Crackdown” (Lopez 2018), draws readers’ attention using the violent word "crackdown" and the frightening message of not being able to leave the house. The short summary at the beginning of the article states:

Reviled, exiled, jailed, raped, beaten, deprived of medical care—the list of abuses goes on. Despite an American push for progress, an anti-gay backlash has made matters worse.

This claims American responsibility and credit for progress, casting America as the good guy and Senegal as the bad. However, the content of the article clearly demonstrates that many Senegalese people are fighting for change. Djamil Bangoura, a local LGBTQ activist and leader of Association Prudence, the first queer advocacy organization recognized by the Senegalese government, speaks in the article about work by Senegalese activists. Grassroots organizations like Prudence and Sourire de Femme [Woman’s Smile], Senegal’s only lesbian activist group, have made important changes
and work tirelessly to improve conditions for queer people in Senegal (Elzas 2017; Diamond 2016). However, in one sentence the article dismisses this work and hypocritically casts America as the savior and champion of gay rights, when just six years ago, in 2013, gay marriage was illegal in most American states.

Furthermore, the evidence seems to indicate improvements in conditions for Senegalese LGBTQ people: the government officially recognized Prudence almost fifteen years ago, in 2005, and in 2016 Awa Marie Coll Seck, the Minister of Health, invited Bangoura to represent key Senegalese populations at the United Nations (Diamond 2016). Though police abuses of queer people continue, the government has also sought to punish those who commit hate crimes against queer people. In 2014, police arrested four men in a suburb of Dakar who sought to “clean their neighborhood” of homosexuals (Associated Press 2014). In a widely publicized incident, a judge declined to charge four lesbian women whom the police had arrested for allegedly publicly displaying their sexuality at a restaurant (Associated Press 2013). However, The Daily Beast article skips over this evidence and instead focuses on a more negative portrayal of Senegalese laws and culture. Even the quote excerpted in the title is misleading and inflammatory: a trans woman, Marie, stated that she does not go out during the day in Dakar, but the article muddies this so “Western” readers scrolling past might assume this is true of the entire LGBTQ population. This makes Senegal seem far behind America or other “Western” nations when it comes to LGBTQ safety and visibility, when the reality is much more nuanced. In many “Western” countries, including areas of the United States, trans people do not feel comfortable going out publicly either (Levy 2018; Milligan 2017; Kosciw et al. 2018). However, the characterization of Senegal in this
article again reinforces the idea that America equals advanced and Africa equals primitive.

While Senegal certainly has room for improvement in LGBTQ+ rights, support, and legal protections, the American characterization of the Senegalese atmosphere for queer individuals distorts the truth and once again casts Senegal as an underdeveloped nation. When it comes to marriage, Senegalese activists, including lesbian activists, are taking steps towards achieving same-sex marriage in their own right and not because of a so-called “American push for progress.”

*The Forgotten Resistors: Unmarried Senegalese Women and Wives of “Absentees”*

Senegal is often portrayed as a place in which marriage is essential to a woman’s life, a place where marriage is a rite every woman must go through. It does remain an important aspect of women’s lives and an expectation for almost every woman. However, as the Senegalese economic and social landscape changes, women have challenged this role and found new ways to avoid marriage or achieve virtually single lives within legal marriages. According to research by Ellen Foley and Dinah Hannaford (2015:212):

As Dakaroises are confronted with the increasingly tenuous economic prospects of marriage, women are improvising within marriage to satisfy essential needs and to accommodate ever-expanding social standards for conspicuous generosity and consumption. Some are diversifying their strategies by seeking multiple male partners, while others compromise on the romantic and intimate aspects of marriage for the possibility of economic security from absentee husbands.

Though news sources, particularly “Western” outlets, would like to ignore them, this section explores an oft-forgotten group of Senegalese women: the unmarried and the un-reliant on daily male support.
One strategy women use to increase economic and social independence is *mbaraan*, both a verb and a noun in Wolof, generally meaning having multiple male partners. Among critics, including male Senegalese scholars and community leaders, the negative connotation is that women are using their *mbaraan* for material gain. However, women may seek multiple partners for many reasons, including a sexual and romantic feeling absent among their potential marriage prospects. Foley and Hannaford (2015:212) describe *mbaraan* as a new kind of “social insurance,” a new way of “wresting social and economic security from relationships with men.” Women use this practice before getting married, during an unfulfilling marriage, or in the newly single period after divorce. Researchers have found that this time after divorce can be an especially fruitful period for unmarried Senegalese women; according to Sylvia Lambert, Dominique van de Walle, and Paola Villar (2017:2), “early divorces may be a means for women both to escape family authority, and to climb the social ladder.” They have married before, so they have established a social status, but they are free from the constraints of watchful parents and an undesirable husband and thus have more freedom to control their own schedules and choices. The same researchers also found that “women who have the option not to remarry seized it eagerly...such women tend to talk about married life as an ordeal they are happy to be in the position to avoid” (Lambert et al. 2017:3).32 Many women do eventually remarry, but as shown above many savor their single period and are eventually better able to choose second

---

32 Within this same source, on page 9, the researchers attempt to estimate how many Senegalese women are currently single. They discuss a 2010 study estimating that as many as 9.2% of women are widows and a 2005 study estimating that 5.4% of women are currently divorced. While these numbers are slightly out of date, it is probable that at least one in ten adult women is currently unmarried, which constitutes hundreds of thousands of women. The authors also address the fact that it is easier for “educated and urban women” to remain single, because they are better able to support themselves and resist familial and financial pressures to remarry (2017:13-14).
marriages on their own terms. Like any social practice, mbaraan has its downsides; some women report being worried their husbands will find out about their affairs or if single, that they will be discovered or contract a sexually transmitted infection like HIV (Foley and Hannaford 2015:222). However, the practice represents an expansion of women’s confidence and abilities to navigate their romantic lives. In analyses of marriage prospects and culture for Senegalese women, scholars tend to focus on inflammatory issues like polygamy or child marriage rather than contemporary empowering developments for women, like mbaraan.

Other women successfully negotiate complex family and marriage politics to get an education and hold off marriage until they have established their own financial support. In her 2012 book Muslim Families in Global Senegal, based on a years-long ethnography within a Dakar family, Beth Buggenhagen describes Rama, an independent woman in her thirties who successfully fends off marriage proposals to support her own interests. After completing a business degree at a private university in Dakar, Rama built a respectable business trading cloth and couture to Mali and other countries. Buggenhagen (2012:95) comments that Rama and her friend Ami, in the same business of cloth trading, belonged to “an emerging circle of women entrepreneurs: cosmopolitan women who traveled abroad, trucked in beauty supplies, opened tailor shops, and attracted clients and dependents.” These women are able to build their preferred lifestyles and evade marriage if they choose, leading to new freedoms, as Buggenhaggen (2012:96) describes:

Both Rama and Ami remained unmarried well into their late thirties. Marrying later, or not at all, was a trend among Dakar women, as growing numbers of men have moved abroad since the 1990s. ... Some women, like Rama, were able to remain unmarried through the support of their brothers abroad who sent them
trade goods, which they sold locally. ... Rama and Ami’s successful trading had enabled Ami to leave her family home.

Rama’s business employed three tailors and sold clothes as far away as Paris, and she was able to leave her home as well and rent a room. Contradicting prevalent beliefs about unmarried Senegalese women, Rama “constructed her social persona as someone with fit ak fayda (courage and importance)” (Buggenhagen 2012:99), and was able to build a stellar reputation in society and in business without a husband. Though unmarried women are the minority in Senegal, Buggenhagen’s detailed research tracks a growing group of successful single businesswomen who defy the conventional view of both Senegalese men and “Western” observers: the view that a Senegalese woman must also be a wife.

Another strategy Senegalese women use to increase autonomy is finding “absentee husbands”—forming what Foley and Hannaford (2015) call “transnational relationships.” These women seek partnerships where the husband will travel to another country for work and send remittances back. This way, the wife obtains financial support and social status, but she is able to live as an independent autonomous woman within her Senegalese community. She can go where she pleases and do what she likes without the close eye of a controlling husband. This approach does have downsides—many women report feeling lonely, struggling with housework and childcare, and feeling disappointed when remittances are lower than expected (Foley and Hannaford 2015:217-220, 222)—but it does allow women a measure of autonomy and household control they might not have otherwise. As the economic landscape changes in Senegal and working abroad becomes more feasible and desirable for Senegalese men, more
women are turning to “transnational relationships” as a way to secure their social and financial status while retaining autonomy in household decision-making.

As can be seen, those who assume women in Senegal are defined solely by their relationship status are woefully misguided. Senegalese women have worked to defy conventional roles and develop alternative life paths in an era of changing economies and evolving social norms. “Western” commentators with a laser focus on practices like polygamy, attempting to portray Senegal as a primitive and exotic nation, miss the country’s monogamous marriages (two thirds of all unions) and the ways women are flipping the script. Through innovation and creativity, Senegalese women are establishing their worth and influence in society regardless of marital status.
Chapter 3
Who Is Telling the Story? Pregnancy, Childbirth, & Fertility

The Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, a sleek, modern affair of black glass with geometric cubes lining its outside walls, sits on the edge of the Seine in Paris. One side of the imposing building is lined with lush plants and moss in a sort of “vertical garden.” Opened in 2006 and commonly known as the “Quai Branly Museum” in English, the museum contains indigenous art and cultural artifacts from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. Inside, visitors find darkened rooms with smooth glass dividers and imposing masks staring out from dimly lit cases. Upon following a winding river-shaped pathway lined with leather, the permanent exhibits open up with images of trees and underbrush peeking out from the walls. It looks like a jungle; indeed, that seems to be the intent.

Though it purports to celebrate the peoples and cultures once colonized by France and its fellow European powers, the museum has had a controversial history since it opened. Its motifs and atmosphere have been criticized for exoticizing “non-Western” peoples. In the words of New York Times critic Michael Kimmelman (2006), it is:

An enormous, rambling, crepuscular cavern that tries to evoke a journey into the jungle, downriver, where suddenly scary masks or totem poles loom out of the darkness and everything is meant to be foreign and exotic. The Crayola-colored façade and its garden set the stage for this passage from civilization.

This description reflected my own experience walking through the museum, my own fascination at the polar differences between the light-filled halls of European art in the Louvre and the same city’s view of a fit atmosphere for non-European art. In 2006, the Quai Branly’s director of collections explained that “the jungle theme is meant to seem
mysterious and chaotic, but, like the jungle, to slowly reveal its logic, symbolizing the complexity of non-European societies that are closer to nature than we are” (Kimmelman 2006). Kimmelman (2006) rightly dubbed this “the old noble-savage argument...heart of darkness in the city of light.” This argument divides the world into “Western” and “non-Western” halves and implies that the latter is somehow less developed mentally and physically; “closer to nature” is just code for “primitive.” While it is true that European and non-European styles of art are different, and the museum has a striking exhibit style that distinguishes it from other Paris museums, individual art styles and movements within the African, Asian, Oceanian, and indigenous American traditions differ greatly as well. However, the Quai Branly lumps them all together. Though some of the art comes from places as disparate as the Arctic tundra and the mountains of southern Asia, the jungle theme is used for all. All are “non-Western,” and therefore all exist within the jungle of undeveloped civilization.

---

33 Emphasis added.
Here is visible the main floor of the Quai Branly, its red-and-black décor, and the masks and statues aligned to make it seem as if they are looming out of the darkness. Photo via Getty Images.

Yet more controversial than the museum’s appearance is its content. It contains roughly 70,000 pieces from sub-Saharan Africa amid hundreds of thousands of other pieces forcibly taken from colonized groups; a full 2,281 objects come from Senegal alone (Sarr and Savoy 2018). A recent report by Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr and French art historian Bénédicte Savoy (2018) calls for the restitution of this art to former colonized nations who request it. Sarr and Savoy estimate that 90 to 95 percent of Africa’s cultural heritage is held in overseas museums like the Quai Branly, the British Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Senegal’s culture minister, Abdou Latif Coulibaly, has argued that Africans should get back their artwork, saying that “these works were taken in conditions that were perhaps legitimate at the time, but illegitimate
today” (Mufson and Boko 2018). In Senegal, French colonialists stole, forcibly removed, or exploitatively bought34 pieces of Senegalese art and cultural history, often taking advantage of times of war or economic unrest to make their acquisitions.

Senegal has been at the forefront of many nations demanding the return of their cultural heritage and the decolonization of museums across the globe. In Coulibaly’s view, “We cannot go to France and take them by force as they did in the days when they took them from our people...France, on the other hand, should help us identify artworks that originated in Senegal. We will then work together in bringing all of them back here” (Searcey and Nayeri 2019). Senegal is already taking steps towards this goal, having just opened the visionary Musée des Civilisations Noires [Museum of Black Civilizations] in Dakar this past December to showcase the art of Africans and their descendants from all over the world (Agence France-Presse 2018).35 According to Kwame Opuku (2016), writing for the pan-African news source Pambazuka News, “Westerners and their museums seem very keen to tell the history of Africans but they do not seem to understand or envisage that Africans might also want to tell their own history.” With the restitution report and the new museum, Senegal will be able to tell its story with its own cultural heritage for the first time since the pre-colonial era.

Between the design of the Quai Branly Museum and the controversial history of its content, what do visitors learn about African culture? As we have seen, they may get

34 Colonists often paid for the works they collected, but they bought priceless cultural objects at a fraction of their true value, sometimes using colonial power dynamics as leverage to complete the sale.  

35 The opening of this new museum effectively combatted critics’ claims that African nations should not be allowed to reclaim their art because they did not have the museum infrastructure or the knowledge to handle the pieces correctly. These claims had more than a tinge of colonialist and condescending language. For more information on these claims and responses to them, see: Agence France-Presse 2018, Mufson & Boko 2018, Opuku 2016. Says Opuku, “These Westerners often hide their true position behind arguments relating to the safety and security of artefacts in African countries. But who looked after African artefacts before they were looted by Europeans? Besides, since when is it appropriate for looters or their successors to complain about the insecurity of the place from which they looted precious objects?”
the impression that African peoples are primitive, “closer to nature,” savage. This view is also affected by the nature of the pieces featured in the museum; visitors use these to make conclusions about Senegalese and African values. In the Quai Branly, many objects relate to fertility, sexuality, and puberty. I saw a display of Senegalese fertility dolls, poupées de fécondité, alongside masks used during puberty rituals and statues of nude figures. While these are by no means the only type of objects in the museum, they are indeed a focus, as they were for many museums I visited for this research. Many fertility and sexuality objects currently on display at the Quai Branly came from the Musée de l’Homme, the anthropological museum with a history of displaying African women’s sexual organs, as I discussed in Chapter 1. Even the Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration [National Museum of the History of Immigration] in Paris, meant to celebrate the country’s diversity and tell the stories of immigrants coming from all over the world, features a shocking colonialist mural with dozens of sexualized, semi-nude African women gazing at white men. Though this hyper-focus on fertility and sexuality might not exist today in the Quai Branly’s modern acquisitions, the colonial legacy of obsession with African female fertility and sexuality persists in the objects displayed for the more than one million annual visitors to the museum.
The mural in the National Museum of the History of Immigration, featuring semi-nude Africans kneeling before a white figure. Photo by author.
A Senegalese mask in the Quai Branly used for circumcision rituals at the time of puberty.\textsuperscript{36}

This chapter explores how the legacy of African fertility obsession in “Western” museums is also reflected in modern “Western” concerns about African birthrates and overpopulation. I lay out the “Western” focus on African fertility and methods of regulating and controlling African pregnancies, within the context of theories of racial capitalism. I then explore how Senegalese women have resisted this characterization and dehumanization to assert that they are more than just uteruses, more than just \textit{ventres}, and the focus on their birthrates is misguided and problematic.

\textsuperscript{36} Displayed in the Quai Branly. Inventory no. 71.1943.0.324 X.
As I showed in previous chapters, attempts to control African pregnancies and fertility began hundreds of years ago with the establishment of the slave trade. European traders claimed a right to the offspring of enslaved women in order to increase the holdings of plantation owners all over the world. They were often willing to rape and abuse enslaved women in order to create those offspring. The French government laid out specific rules about children born into slavery in its *Code Noir*, and women who “acted out” were whipped and chained in a way that protected their fetuses, the enslavers’ economic bounty. This ugly history has supposedly been eradicated with the abolition of slavery and the fall of colonial empires. However, a legacy of obsession with African fertility and birthrates remains, and “Western” democracies continue their attempts to control them.

To counteract their loss of direct influence and control over African birthrates, “Western” nations create international laws and policies which implicitly serve that function. This is the essence of neocolonialism—former colonizers seek to maintain their power in covert ways, now that the explicit channels of control are gone (Hall 1996). These laws and policies make the distribution of crucial health and development funds to African nations dependent on those nations conforming to specific “Western” ideologies. The laws thus serve to keep African nations in a subordinate position by holding funding for crucial health services over their heads, forcing these nations to comply with the “Western” governments’ requirements. A prime example is the Mexico City Policy or the “Global Gag Rule,” originally created during the Reagan administration, rescinded during the Obama administration, and reinstated under President Trump. This policy prohibits foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) receiving U.S. funds from providing abortion services, counseling or referring patients...
regarding abortion, or advocating for abortion rights. If the organizations do any of the above, the U.S. withdraws its financial support. While under Reagan the U.S. would only withdraw its family planning funds, totaling about $575 million, Trump greatly expanded the policy to apply to U.S. global health assistance as a whole (Human Rights Watch 2018). This affects roughly $8.8 billion in funds, including:

Support for family planning and reproductive health, maternal and child health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS—including the President’s Plan for Emergency Relief for AIDS (PEPFAR), prevention and treatment of tuberculosis, malaria (including the President’s Malaria Initiative, infectious diseases, neglected tropical diseases, and even to water, sanitation, and hygiene programs.37

As can be imagined, this has devastating consequences for NGOs working towards development, empowerment, and health across the globe, but especially in Africa. The United States is the largest global health donor. Without its support, organizations may be forced to cut services for child health, vaccinations, HIV/AIDS treatment, endemic diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, and nutrition and hygiene. By forcing other nations to subscribe to its anti-abortion ideology, the Trump administration and U.S. conservatives have endangered the lives of billions of people. According to research, rather than minimizing abortion globally, this law actually increases it by forcing NGOs to cut contraception distribution, leading to more unplanned pregnancies and more women forced to conduct unsafe abortions. Millions of women may die because a U.S. political party forced its beliefs on overseas humanitarian groups.

The Mexico City Policy has already begun to affect African nations. Human Rights Watch (2018) research found that the organization Family Health Options Kenya refuses to comply with the mandate and thus will lose up to 60% of its budget, leading to

37 This quote is from the same source, Human Rights Watch, and much of the information in this passage relies on this article.
the cancellation of 100 outreach events for cervical cancer and HIV screening as well as family planning counseling, events which could have reached up to 10,000 people. FHOK already closed one of its clinics within six months of Trump’s announcement. Reproductive Healthcare Network Kenya was forced to slash its budget by two-thirds and end crucial health programs such as training on safe abortion care for doctors, while Reproductive Health Uganda, serving millions of people per year, has by necessity eliminated programs in every category of women’s health, not just abortion. These findings have been replicated by other scholars researching dozens of African reproductive health NGOs (Rodgers 2018). Even compliance with the rule can have a devastating ripple effect; programs which receive U.S. aid to distribute contraceptives are not allowed to send these contraceptives to clinics which do provide abortion services or counseling, meaning women getting abortions have minimal access to further protection against pregnancy. These studies are examples of the overall trend, in which NGOs are forced to make terrible choices between their abortion services and their overall budget.

A recent report by reproductive health organization PAI (2018), titled “Access Denied: Senegal: Preliminary Impacts of Trump’s Expanded Global Gag Rule,” details the effects of the Global Gag Rule on Senegal specifically. Over 90% of Senegal’s contraceptive funds come from the U.S., and this rule combined with Trump’s defunding of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) will wipe out those funds nearly completely within the next five years. The rate of unplanned pregnancies and unsafe abortions has already begun to increase. As in Kenya and Uganda, major Senegalese NGOs have been affected by the policy. Marie Stopes International (MSI) Senegal, which provided services to over 65,000 clients for family planning, 23,000 for
cervical cancer testing, and 15,000 for STI treatments in 2017, has decided not to comply and will lose about 45% of its budget (PAI 2018:5). MSI Senegal has been forced to leave Neema, a major USAID contraceptive and health service distribution project in Senegal, in which the organization played a lead role (PAI 2018:5). In its wake, the project has struggled to continue its work and has fallen months behind.

The Association Sénégalaise pour le Bien-Être Familial [Senegalese Association for Family Wellbeing] (ASBEF), the local member of the international Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), has also been shut out of USAID funding. As a result, it will serve 30,000 fewer clients than it could have over the next several years (PAI 2018:6). ASBEF already closed several clinics and created semi-annual outreach programs in those areas to try to meet the same needs. One of these places was Guediawaye, a suburb of Dakar, where according to health workers, “the damage is clear” (International Planned Parenthood Federation 2019). They have already noticed “an increase in unsafe abortion, teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, and women waiting until health conditions are more serious before seeking medical advice” (International Planned Parenthood Federation 2019). Additionally, many Senegalese activists feel that the policy has emboldened conservatives and set back the progress of women’s rights in Senegal. Said a Senegalese journalist, “I have to admit I’m a little terrified. I spent the better part of my career fighting for women’s rights. This policy risks a ricochet effect with an increase in conservatism. It’s an impact for human rights and it will set us back” (PAI 2018:8).

The Global Gag Rule, along with the defunding of UNFPA, represents an attack by American conservatives on the ideologies and practices of women’s health NGOs in Africa and other areas. It also maintains American control and influence over the bodies
of African women. However, American conservatives are not the only group attempting to assert this control. While many researchers and organizations do important work to provide health services and education to African women, some do so in service of a broader goal: to reduce the African population and maintain international power dynamics. These researchers tend to blame African women with large families for the poverty of African nations. Disregarding the centuries of enslavement, the oppressive colonial practices, and the structural barriers that fostered enduring African poverty, these scholars demonize African women and misrepresent history to justify their proposed birth control practices. The next section explores this trend and demonstrates how American conservatives are not the only ones perpetuating the colonial legacy of fertility control.

John C. Caldwell, one of the most influential demographers of the twentieth century, wrote numerous articles blaming African culture and religious values for the continent’s high fertility rate. His work has since influenced many demographers and journalists in their analysis of global overpopulation and their fixation on Africa as the source. He often wrote with his wife Pat Caldwell, also a demographer. Arguing that high African birthrates were the reason for African poverty, the Caldwells believed that “fertility control” was key to solving both African poverty and global overpopulation. In a key 1990 article in *Scientific American*, titled “High Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa” (Caldwell and Caldwell 1990:118), they claim that:

> African women want families twice as large as do people in even the poorest Asian or Latin American countries, and African men, commonly polygamous, want much larger families still. Elsewhere in the developing world women are only too happy to cease childbearing with four living children, but not in Africa.

---

38 As I stated in Chapter 2, the prevalence of polygamy is commonly overrepresented by “Western” researchers—that trend continues here.
The Caldwells cite no evidence for their argument that African people want families “twice as large” as people desire in poor countries elsewhere, and their rhetoric portrays Africa as a divergent and singular place where people will stop at nothing to keep having children. Throughout the article, the Caldwells go to extreme lengths to isolate Africa and portray the continent as entirely separate, both culturally and religiously, from every other continent in the world. They claim that Europe, Asia, and the Americas have one view of fertility, and Africa has another. For example, they state:

> The socioreligious system that accounts for sub-Saharan Africa’s persistently high fertility differs greatly from those that pervade Europe, Asia and the Americas. It is not more traditional, primitive or backward; it is simply very different, and the differences have profound implications. The core of African society is its emphasis on ancestry and descent... It is important to recognize that the African worldview and social structure are part of a seamless whole. (1990:119)

Not only does this comment lump together the vastly diverse traditions and cultures of four different continents, it turns Africa itself into a monolith by arguing that a continent with over 630,000,000 people (just in 1990) and over fifty countries has a worldview and social structure that is “part of a seamless whole.” Additionally, though the couple claims that they don’t see Africa as “traditional, primitive or backward,” this is just lip service—they spend most of the article arguing that Africa is behind the rest of the world developmentally and it is its beliefs and culture that is holding it back. They have voiced this argument many times over; their other articles include “The Cultural Context of High Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa” (1987) and “Cultural Forces Tending to Sustain High Fertility in Tropical Africa” (1990), with both titles indicative of their belief that sub-Saharan Africa’s culture is to blame for its perceived fertility problems.

Ignoring the fact that many of the phenomena they discuss also occur in the United States, the Caldwells criticize or even outright misrepresent African practices
and beliefs. In the *Scientific American* article, they claim that “in Africa the obsession is focused on fertility” (1990:120), and further assert, contradicting all evidence I encountered, that a woman is not judged or punished for births out of wedlock because “her lineage usually accepts the children as a recruitment to its strength...virtue lies in reproducing the lineage rather than in female premarital chastity” (1990:120). This makes it seem as if women are looking left and right for someone to impregnate them to strengthen their family line, and that marriage bonds mean nothing. This line of thinking reflects Collins’s “breeder” image, in which African women are represented as animalistic, hyper-fertile, and hyper-sexual creatures who constantly want to breed. On the contrary, through my interviews and research for this project I found that women typically face social stigmas or even disownment for premarital or extramarital pregnancies, as they do in many other parts of the world, including many areas of the United States. Though the Caldwells contend that “the emotional and economic bonds of marriage in sub-Saharan Africa are fairly weak, and in many parts of the continent separation rates are fairly high”39 (1990:120), I found that marriage unions were a key goal for many families, and emotional fulfillment was a key tenet and value of Senegalese relationships.

The Caldwells’ retelling of history and recommendations for future action reinforce colonial power dynamics and racial capitalism. To start, they describe a

---

39 This assertion also ignores high divorce rates in the United States and other “Western” nations. Rather than seeing the prevalence of divorce in sub-Saharan Africa as a sign of development and women’s rights, or as a characteristic shared between that region and the “Western” world, the Caldwells manage to spin it as a way to distinguish sub-Saharan Africa and portray it as inferior. In fact, best estimates for the American divorce rate have sat between 40-50% of all marriages since 1990 (Amato 2010; National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS] 2015). In Senegal, an estimated 46.8% of marriages have ended within 15-19 years by both divorce and dissolution; official divorce sits at just 19.7% (Clark and Brauner-Otto 2015:593). Recent findings have shown that at roughly the same point, within 20 years of marriage, the American “marriage disruption” rate is 53% (NCHS 2015). In this context it seems rich for the Caldwells to argue that marriage bonds are “weak” in sub-Saharan Africa compared to the United States.
“Eurasian” (1990:121) society with characteristics including cultivation with a plow, land ownership, and a conjugal family social structure with monogamous marriage. This society apparently encompasses all civilizations other than Africa. Remarkably, the Caldwells claim that “this system and its accompanying beliefs have spread through five continents” (1990:121). Not only does this statement ignore instances of polygamy in Asia, the Middle East, and various sects in the Americas (such as Mormons), they seem to believe that sub-Saharan Africa does not have private land ownership, any monogamous marriages, or a social structure based on the family unit. They even ask the question, “Why has the African social structure persisted over millennia during which the Eurasian model could have supplanted it?” (1990:121) This seems to imply that the African structure is divergent and deficient, and the so-called “Eurasian” structure should have supplanted it. In the future, it appears the Caldwells would like to forcibly impose some sort of fertility policy on sub-Saharan Africa. They praise Asia’s “strong governmental family-planning programs” (1990:118), formerly the strictest in the world, which for decades limited Chinese families to one or two children and imposed fines and punishment on people breaking the rule (Scharping 2003). These policies also led to millions of deaths, adoptions, and abandonments of baby girls, as parents wanted sons to carry on the family’s name and heritage (Johansson and Nygren 1991). Though this policy has a controversial legacy, the Caldwells apparently wish to implement it in Africa, writing an article titled, “Is the Asian Family Planning Program Model Suited to Africa?” (1988) They conclude their Scientific American article with an ominous idea:

How will sub-Saharan Africa cope with its persistently high fertility? It would be imperious to suggest that this society and belief system should be radically
changed just to reduce its rate of population growth. Yet a continuation of present rates will probably ultimately prove disastrous. (1990:123)

Indeed, it would be imperious to do what they suggest—but they imply that it must be done. This paragraph betrays their colonial and imperial thinking and reflects the trend of “Western” researchers attempting to control the sexuality and fertility of African women and blaming African cultures for societal problems, either real or imagined.

At first glance, these two examples of controlling African fertility appear to contradict each other. With the Global Gag Rule, conservative American politicians sought to control women’s access to abortion, and in doing so also reduced access to contraception, prenatal care, and reproductive health services. The result was an increase in birthrates. With scholars such as the Caldwell, the concern is the birthrate itself, and they research how to control and decrease fertility. The Global Gag Rule has the same outcome as the slavery-era efforts to encourage slave pregnancies and thereby increase the enslaved population, while the Caldwell’s theory comports with Vergès’s (2017) research on the forced sterilization of black colonized women on the island of Réunion during French colonial rule, which sought to limit the colonized population. However, despite the contradiction, both modern practices I discussed impose an ideology on the fertility of African women. Whether that ideology is anti-abortion or anti-population growth, “Western” groups do not allow African women to choose for themselves. In fact, “Western” thinkers appear to believe that African women are not capable of making safe and healthy fertility choices, when in fact their options have always been limited by foreign intervention and they are just as entitled to their rights as any other woman. Whether they are promoting a belief system without regard for women’s health consequences or professing to care about women’s health but blaming
women and limiting their choices, “Western” leaders and intellectuals seem to believe it is their right to control African women’s fertility wherever they can.

The media serves as a battleground between arguments about controlling African birthrates and critiquing the “Western” world’s neocolonial efforts on this subject. Though few media outlets take stances supporting the Global Gag Rule, many otherwise politically liberal sources take “concerned” positions regarding African fertility and end up emulating the Caldwells’ patronizing tone. For example, writing in *The Guardian*, Joseph Bish (2016) argues that the African population is rising on a clearly separate trajectory from the rest of the world. In a poignant apocalyptic-style image, Bish argues that by 2050, “African population growth would be able to re-fill an empty London five times a year.” Perhaps this is true—when one thinks it through for more than a minute, the thought that the annual population growth of an entire continent will equal five times London’s total population is not very alarming. However, the imagery of a growing African population walking the empty streets of a powerful “Western” capital seems designed to trigger fears of an African takeover. It is inflammatory and unduly dystopian considering the actual numbers. The title of Bish’s article, “Population growth in Africa: grasping the scale of the challenge,” seems to invite readers to undertake the “challenge” and limit African fertility themselves.

Similarly, an opinion article in *The Economist* entitled “‘Babies are lovely, but…’: Africa’s high birthrate is keeping the continent poor” (2018) directly blames African societies for their fertility rates without any consideration of the colonial institutions and history that may have contributed. The article holds that increasing contraception, stability in the Sahel (an area that runs through northern Senegal), and education for women are the primary ways to slow African birthrates. On the whole, these are
legitimate suggestions supported by research. However, the article demonizes the beliefs and decisions of African peoples, beginning with an anecdote about the president of Tanzania saying that birth control is “a sign of parental laziness” and finishing with the comment that “like so much in Africa, almost everything depends on the quality of government...and that, sadly, is hard to decree” (2018). This seems to convey an overall distaste and contempt for African government, when in fact every nation in the world depends on the quality of its government and there are plenty of “Western” nations with politicians criticizing birth control (such as the United States).40

*The Economist* also describes the Sahel as “lawless and universally poor” and holds that “because women’s power in the Sahel is undermined by widespread polygamy, people still desire many children” (2018). This logic implies that if polygamy were limited, all women would desire smaller families, an unsupported claim that exoticizes and demonizes the concept of polygamy. The article offers no evidence to show a causal link between polygamy and high birthrates, but its mention of polygamy fulfills a familiar media pattern of “Western” obsession with the practice and its effects. It is also difficult to imagine a prominent “Western” journalist describing any region of the world with a white population as “lawless and universally poor,” even one mirroring the characteristics of the Sahel. To top it off, the phrase “Babies are lovely, but...” as part of the title implies that African families are not rational or realistic about their fertility.

40 In recent years, American Republican politicians have repeatedly criticized contraception and offered claims about it that defy scientific research. Rick Santorum, a former Senator and presidential candidate, stated that contraception is “not okay” and “a license to do things in a sexual realm that is counter to how things are supposed to be” (Baumann 2012). Vice President Mike Pence claimed that condoms were “too modern” and were “a very, very poor protection against sexually transmitted diseases” (Heing 2018). These comments surely rank with Tanzanian president John Magufuli’s comments on “parental laziness.” However, these comments are used against African leaders as if they represent the beliefs of their countries as a whole, while the same logic is not applied to the United States. Magufuli’s comment is used in this article to paint Africa as backwards and unscientific, when we are likely to hear the same sorts of comments from the mouths of American politicians.
choices. Combined with the picture below, which is featured below the headline and seems designed to trigger “Western” fears of too many African babies born at once, this article inflames the emotions of readers and portrays African fertility as a global threat to “Western” life.

*The photo featured at the top of the Economist article (2018). Taken in the context of the article’s argument, this provokes readers into thinking that there are too many unhappy African babies without proper economic and familial support.*

In a similar article published in *Reuters* called “West Africa population planners battle to woo Muslim hearts,” Tim Cocks (2017) argues that population planners must use the teachings of Islam to justify their efforts and gain the support of powerful imams. Cocks sees the issue as a conflict between West African governments, U.N. agencies, and charities on one side, all wanting to cut birth and maternal mortality rates, and West African imams, who resent this intrusion.41 He portrays imams as reactionary

41 By mentioning West African governments first, Cocks makes it seem as if the imams are the only group that needs to be convinced of the need for these programs and that all educated non-religious people “see the light” when it comes to overpopulation. This undersells the “Western” world’s involvement in this debate; in reality, a few powerful nations like the United States and France wield great influence, and
traditionalists who are clearly standing in the way of population justice. The article repeatedly references “the puritanical Wahhabist form of Islam” (2016) and juxtaposes the comments of imams with those of “population experts” (2016). The word “puritanical” is a loaded one in the United States and England, conveying the idea of a rigid, conservative, and irrationally strict belief system. In pitting the African imams against the “Western” scientists, Cocks reproduces the colonial power dynamic of “Western” science supposedly trumping African religion. Colonial powers consistently derided and devalued African religious practices while promoting the alleged pure scientific truth and power of their own cultures. Implicit in the article is the idea that the imams, who say that “Western nations are pushing birth control because they fear being outnumbered by Africans,” (2016) are conspiracists with no legitimacy behind this claim. However, given all the historical evidence of “Western” intervention in African fertility matters, including population control tactics (Vergès 2017), are the imams really so off base to think, as Dakar imam Hassane Seck does, that “the West’s policy is about reducing our numbers” (Cocks 2016)? Considering the inflammatory language throughout these articles and Bish’s (2016) apocalyptic vision of a ghostly London teeming with African arrivals, Seck’s observation that “there are going to be many more of us, and they’re afraid,” (Cocks 2016) grows more prescient daily.

Despite Bish’s (2016) claim that “the dynamics at play are straightforward,” the statistics are actually much muddier than they appear, as demonstrated in articles challenging the neocolonial view on African fertility. In a direct response to Bish’s article, African writer and activist Mawuna Remarque Koutonin (2016) wrote an article

---

many West African leaders and public figures oppose the extent of “Western” involvement in family planning.
in *The Guardian* entitled “Isn’t it Europe that is overpopulated, rather than Africa?” Koutonin points out that European countries are much more crowded and use many more resources than African countries. For example, France is five times smaller than the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but both have about 67 million inhabitants. Belgium is 167 times smaller than the Congo, but has 11 million residents, meaning it has 365 people per square kilometer compared to just 30 in the Congo. Additionally, it is the populations of “Western” nations using the most energy and creating the biggest impact on our natural environment. Koutonin points out that the U.S. makes up just 5% of the world’s population but consumes 25% of global resources. Though the U.S. and Europe represent under 15% of the global population, a study has found that the U.S., Europe, and Japan combined use 80% of global resources (Koutonin 2016). Koutonin argues that “overpopulation is a fraud and a convenient ideology” (2016) that allows the “Western” world to control African birthrates even when it is the West’s birthrates that serve as the greatest threat to our future.

Koutonin’s final argument describes a powerful incentive for “Western” nations to shift the narrative on birthrates.

It is only in Africa that we talk about having population reduction funded by western NGOs and governments. Is it because Africa does not have resources to feed 2 billion people? No. It’s because some other nations want those resources for their own people instead. (2016)

This argument speaks directly to Vergès’s (2017) theory of racial capitalism. “Western” nations use non-white, poorer nations as scapegoats for world issues, such as overpopulation or climate change, when it is their own inhabitants who use the most resources and most advance these problems. By shifting the blame, they can maintain or even increase their resource use in accordance with the capitalist system. This is even
evident in the way *The Guardian*, a widely read British newspaper, tagged this article; under the headline, it says, “Why do westerners think that Africa is the continent with the problem, wonders Mawuna Remarque Koutonin, in a *light-hearted* look at global population issues” (2016). For Bish’s (2016) article, the tag was, “While population growth slows in the rest of the world, it continues to rise in Africa. What are the implications?” These articles were posted on the same day as competing perspectives, yet only Bish’s appeared to receive full consideration on merit. The tags used by *The Guardian* state Bish’s argument as fact but use Koutonin’s name to contextualize his claims, making it seem as if the article is just Koutonin’s “light-hearted” perspective and should not be considered carefully. Koutonin offers a final plea to his readers: “I hope you won’t bite on this new covert war on the poor—another distraction from the real culprits. The world is overpopulated, so let’s have less rich people” (2016).

In an opinion article in *The New York Times* called “Fear of a Black Continent: Why European elites are worrying about African babies,” columnist Ross Douthat (2018) argues that European fears of being outnumbered by Africans, as well as fears of immigrant groups changing European culture, explain Europe’s fixation on African population control. Douthat’s argument specifically attacks French president Emmanuel Macron, who frequently talks about African birthrates and said in 2017 that Africa’s problems are “civilizational” (Douthat 2018). At a 2018 Gates Foundation conference, Macron told the crowd, “I always say, present me the woman who decided, being perfectly educated, to have seven, eight, or nine children” (Douthat 2018). These comments have provoked outrage in various circles, with some calling Macron racist.

---

42 Emphasis added.
However, he is not the only one; Douthat goes on to describe a wider “population-bomb anxiety” (2018) in Europe and among “Western” world leaders. His explanation for this trend aligns with Koutonin’s. Based on population growth projections, “in the late 1990s Europe and Africa had about the same population; a hundred years later there could be seven Africans for every European” (Douthat 2018). “Western” leaders fear being outnumbered; at its core, population control is about economic and social power. Whether consciously or subconsciously, “Western” efforts to control African fertility align with efforts to keep the “West” in its position of colonial dominance.

It is no coincidence that many well-known “Western” philanthropists and organizations have focused so heavily on African birthrates. Douthat (2018) also mentions Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft and co-founder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the largest foundation in the world (by the numbers, it has a $50 billion endowment). The Gates Foundation has made population research and control a focus, writing in their 2018 Goalkeepers Report:

To put it bluntly, decades of stunning progress in the fight against poverty and disease may be on the verge of stalling. This is because the poorest parts of the world are growing faster than everywhere else; more babies are being born in the places where it’s hardest to lead a healthy and productive life. (Klein 2018)

The Gateses then immediately home in on Africa as the main source of this “stalling” of “stunning progress.” They write that “Africa as a whole is projected to nearly double in size by 2050, which means that even if the percentage of poor people on the continent is cut in half, the number of poor people stays the same” (Klein 2018). This juxtaposition of ideas puts the blame on Africa for halting “Western” progress in allegedly solving the world’s problems. This recreates dangerous colonial power dynamics and falsely attributes all progress to “Western” thinkers, ignoring the important activist work from
all over the world and the “Western” role in creating many of these problems in the first place. The Gateses’ research agenda implies that if “Western” philanthropists could just “fix” Africa, then everything would be easy. Needless to say, this dismisses the autonomy of African nations and leaders, muddies the statistical evidence, and ignores Koutonin’s (2016) key point that high per capita populations in “Western” countries have a much larger impact on natural resources.

It is true that philanthropic work is extremely helpful in combatting poverty, disease, and violence across the world, including in Africa, and that this work often has noble intentions. This is not to say that this work should not occur. However, its framing all too frequently implies blame on the part of the countries being helped and fails to account for the role of “Western” states in creating persisting inequalities. Additionally, philanthropic humanitarian organizations are often susceptible themselves to stereotypes and false media narratives with roots in colonial oppression; they simply cover them up with professional language and scientific arguments. As Douthat (2018) comments:

The fixation will be genteel and diplomatic and couched in the language of development but the upshot will be clear: We must find a way to convince African women to stop having so many babies.

In all of these conversations about birthrates, there is always one person who takes the blame: the African woman. Whether she is mentioned explicitly or not, she is the scapegoat for all of Africa’s perceived problems, and by extension the “Western” world’s problems. Her alleged drive to have children is cast as the reason behind overpopulation and every major world issue that supposedly results from it. This once again reflects Collins’s (2000 [1990]) breeder trope, and it is a tired one. We must challenge this fixation on African birthrates, advance accurate statistical evidence and research about
global populations, and call out the true motives of those who claim Africa is endangering the world’s future. African women deserve the right to make their own choices about pregnancy and childbirth, outside the purview of international politicians and research groups.

The research unequivocally shows that most countries in Africa, including Senegal, have seen drops in their fertility rates over the past forty years. When researchers use benchmarks such as mortality rates, African fertility is where one would expect it to be. According to Lyman Stone (2018) of the Institute for Family Studies, in an article titled “African Fertility is Right Where It Should Be,” the United Nations has repeatedly made incorrect forecasts of African population growth, and “rather than give a good explanation about why that is, the development community is responding by faulting Africans for having kids.” It is easier to shift blame to a vulnerable population than to confront incorrect estimates or take on “Western” power dynamics.

Additionally, researchers and newspapers rely on overly broad future estimates which have historically been unreliable in predicting fertility.

As can be seen, the estimates for 2100 have a huge error range, and the 2050 estimates have changed over time as we have gotten closer to that date. Still, these numbers are used in the media to shock “Western” readers and scare them with images of global African dominance. They mislead people to believe that the African fertility rate is rising, when in fact, the “entire scary story about African fertility really boils down to fractional differences in the rate of future fertility decline” (Stone 2018). In other words, birthrates are falling, the question is just how quickly. Stone explains simply that “Africa’s ‘problem,’ as far as U.N. demographers are concerned, isn’t women having
seven kids today; it’s women having three kids, 40 years from now when they ‘should’ have had just two.” This again reflects an arbitrary line drawn by “Westerners” who fault Africans for making family-planning decisions that fail to align with this nebulous future standard. As Stone says, “Western organizations have no right, and no moral credibility, to step in and tell African women what they should or shouldn’t do with their bodies.”

Sub-Saharan Africa's Fertility Is Steadily Falling

World Bank World Development Indicators Total Fertility Rate (Expected Births per Woman) for Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960-2016

According to the World Bank (2016), Senegal's birthrate aligns with the overall African decline; it peaked around 7.3 children per woman in 1980 and now sits under 4.8 children per woman. The x-axis of this graph goes from 1960-2016.

Building on the theme I discussed with the Gates Foundation, researchers have drawn explicit lines between the work of charitable organizations and the framework of population control laid during colonialism. Stone (2018) comments that:

White westerners complaining about African population is a time-honored tradition; that is, it’s part and parcel of old-school racist colonialism. Colonial regimes often tried various inhuman measures to reduce population growth. It’s no surprise the successors to colonial regimes, do-gooder “family planning” NGOs, are pushing the same concerns.

Scholar Monica Bahati Kuumba (1993) created a framework for analyzing this phenomenon which aligns well with the work of Vergès (2017) and Ocen (2012) I discussed in previous chapters. Though some population control arguments are explicitly racist, and others appear to be benevolently motivated, almost all of them have
the same effect: attempting to blame African women for their fertility, and then proposing a plan to dominate them. Kuumba (1993:80) argues that:

The wombs of women of color, in general, and of women of African descent, specifically, have become the frontline of a global struggle. The depressed conditions of African women render them vulnerable for the Malthusian-inspired assumptions that logically conclude that they are to blame for their own poverty and underdevelopment as a result of their population growth.

This speaks directly to the subjugation of African women under racial capitalism. One must interrogate how “the strategies and programs of the international population establishment are confounded with a race, class, and gender bias” (Kuumba 1993:79) before accepting the mission and agenda of international family planning aid work.

The interviews I conducted with Senegalese health workers confirmed this perception of international aid. While the health minister I interviewed took a positive stance on international aid overall, he described how that aid often seemed to be misplaced, limiting the overall good that Senegalese health offices could do. His most poignant example involved family planning aid versus aid for malaria prevention and treatment. He shared that oftentimes the government received funds earmarked for birth control, when in certain areas malaria prevention tools like mosquito nets and pills were urgently needed and took immediate priority. The health offices attempted to change the funding structure to reflect the country’s most urgent needs. However, the government could not shake the aid organizations on their family planning agenda, even as the health minister wondered how they would use the birth control funds if the women who needed them were dead.

Through ethnographic and content analysis research I conducted in Senegal, I also encountered birth control messages and fertility reduction tactics. In a Catholic health clinic, posters from Senegal’s Ministère de La Santé et de l’Action Sociale
[Ministry of Health and Social Action] lined the walls and attempted to teach visitors about the consequences of premarital sex and pregnancy. The clinic was bustling, with hundreds of visitors, and had offices for gynecology and obstetrics in addition to a pharmacy, dental services, and cancer screenings. Many women waited in a large room with their young children to do nutritional checkups. On one wall, I saw the poster below, created by the Ministry of Health and Social Action and appearing to be sponsored by the World Health Organization [Organisation mondiale de la Santé], IntraHealth, USAID, UNFPA, and fhi360.

A poster on the wall of the clinic. Photo by author.
In the left panel, the teenage girl says, “Boys are making advances towards me, what should I do Mom?” Her mother replies, “Listen my girl, you must abstain from all sexual activity until marriage.” On the right panel, the girl says, “You tricked me...I didn’t know that one sexual encounter could lead to pregnancy.” The boy replies, “Me! I’m not old enough to have caused a pregnancy...I’m only 17 years old.”

This poster contains a fascinating blend of international reproductive health efforts and elements of Senegalese culture. The characters voice ideas and concerns that align with the birth control goals of the organizations that sponsored the poster, but the scenes have been adapted to appeal to Senegalese teenagers. In the left panel, the mother wears a traditional Senegalese boubou and has a pot in front of her that appears to have rice or couscous, both popular bases for Senegalese dishes. As is typical, there is a generational divide in clothing, where the younger characters wear more “Westernized” clothing. This poster teaches young people that one sexual encounter can indeed lead to pregnancy but offers abstinence as the sole solution to the problem. I did not find any posters or materials in the clinic that explained contraceptive options. This is likely due to the fact that it was a Catholic clinic, but as this poster was created by the Senegalese Ministry of Health and Social Action and sponsored by several international organizations, it can be presumed that it was used elsewhere.43 This poster demonstrates some current strategies being used to reduce fertility among Senegalese women: target unwanted teenage pregnancies by educating teenagers with content they find relatable.44

43 As I previously discussed, Senegal is 95% Muslim. Catholic clinics are popular and widely used, but the Ministry of Health provides materials for all types of clinics, not just Catholic ones. Therefore, it is likely that this is one of several posters created for Senegalese clinics as a whole.
44 This is not a critique of this strategy; it is a viable tool to eliminate unwanted pregnancies. Similar educational strategies are being used in the United States and Europe. I merely present this evidence to
Although I was unfortunately unable to locate this poster online, despite searching all of the websites of the sponsoring organizations and the Ministry of Health, I came across another interesting find: a mural on the wall of a Senegalese school that appears to be directly based on the posters I saw at the clinic. This school, a middle school in a suburb of Dakar, had copied the posters nearly word for word. The image in the upper right also appeared in the clinic, and reads in English, “No to every sexual advance. I am responsible and sure of myself. I resist all temptations.” The lower right says, “To refuse all sexual activity outside marriage is to protect against an early show that the strategies are being used and they appear to follow a “Western” template that is then adapted for specific countries using cultural references that will be understood by each country’s young population.
undesired pregnancy and its consequences.” Though my attempt to find more information was mostly unfruitful, since these were on the wall of a middle school I gathered they were a type of extra health education for the students. I noticed that in the original poster, the crying girl’s top was sleeveless and had thin straps, showing her shoulders. Though this outfit is widely acceptable in the United States, Senegalese women generally cover their shoulders. The mural at the middle school gave the girl a white dress with long billowing sleeves that appeared more modest by Senegalese standards. I also found the tone of these messages very interesting; they all convey an abstinence-only message, and the “temptations” one on the upper-right calls upon viewers to identify with the girl and her first-person statement that she “resists” because she is “responsible.” Though the original source of this message remains unclear, it does reflect current U.S. conservative abstinence-based sexual health messages putting the onus on the girl to “resist temptation,” and by extension blaming her if she is unable to do so. All of these posters feature a young woman as the central character, seemingly to attract young women as an audience, and through this implying that sexual health and pregnancy are their responsibility alone. This suggests that the Ministry of Health’s views align with U.S. abstinence-based programming, or perhaps U.S. policy and perspective had an influence in creating the poster via the sponsoring organizations. Given the U.S.’s existing influence on family planning programs in Africa, and Senegal’s traditionally conservative gender roles and sexual expectations, both options or even a combination are possible.

The Senegalese women I interviewed spoke extensively about their experiences with pregnancy, demonstrating that it was a deeply personal choice for them and that they valued the ability to make their own decisions about children and healthcare. One
woman, Fatou,⁴⁵ had had four children and visited private clinics for her prenatal care. She had had four Caesarean sections and experienced bleeding during her first pregnancy. When she was not taken seriously by her first gynecologist, she switched to a new one and had a “wonderful” experience for the rest of her pregnancies. Though she said she never used contraception such as condoms or an intrauterine device, she was very familiar with family planning and had practiced the Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM) after giving birth. She had also undergone tubal ligation after her fourth child was born, which she described as an easily accessible procedure with no judgment from any medical personnel. She gave the impression that she was very proactive with her pregnancies and her reproductive health, and she expressed gratitude for how easy many of the procedures were for her, knowing that many women could not access them.

The importance of a woman’s autonomy over her own pregnancy is reflected in her choices about the wearing of gris-gris, sacred cultural objects such as belts, shells, precious stones, or bracelets worn for protection and good fortune. They can be used for everything from getting a promotion at work to ensuring the safety of one’s children to increasing the wearer’s fertility. Fatou discussed the role of gris-gris in pregnancy and how they interact with cultural ideas about the sanctity of pregnancy. Many women wear special gris-gris meant for pregnancy to keep the baby and the mother healthy. Fatou personally did not use gris-gris but wore some during her first pregnancy for the benefit of her in-laws, thereby enacting their wish for the safety of the children.

Fatou’s story demonstrates the evolving opportunities and social norms for pregnant women in Senegal. She described how in Senegal there is a belief in the “evil

⁴⁵ Name changed.
“eye” harming a pregnancy if you tell too many people about it, so some women in rural areas wait until they are showing to tell others or begin their prenatal care. However, as a city dweller, this was not Fatou’s experience; she told her close friends and family when she got pregnant and chose when and how she would wear gris-gris or follow other norms of Senegalese pregnancy. Fatou’s experience illustrates not only how certain Senegalese social practices enshrine the importance of an expectant mother’s choices over how to handle her pregnancy, but also how women are modernizing past traditions and making them their own.

Through my research I found that Senegalese men still contributed to or reinforced barriers for pregnant Senegalese women, but that women were working in various ways to change the social expectations of them. For instance, Fatou described how sometimes when a girl got pregnant in school, she was expelled and nothing of consequence happened for the boy. Additionally, some families disowned young girls who got pregnant out of wedlock. However, various women’s groups in Senegal are working to change the stigma, and homes for unwed mothers help these young women find support, employment, and stability. For instance, the Maison Rose [Pink House] sits in Guediawaye outside Dakar and welcomes women fleeing abuse, trauma, forced marriage, or family disownment (Peyton 2017). Since its 2008 founding, the shelter has housed hundreds of women and offered art and music therapy outlets as well as job training programs. Women can stay as long as they like and return whenever they choose. The shelter even facilitates conversations with women’s families, if the women want them, to try to help them rebuild broken relationships. The Maison Rose is part of a movement of organizations working to tear down stigmas of unmarried pregnancy and provide support and empowerment for Senegalese women.
The landscape of pregnancy in Senegal is also changing as women wait later to have children and activists and doctors work to combat the stigma of infertility in the country. Though almost all women still choose to have children, there are more options available for women who struggle to do so and stigma against infertility is gradually shrinking. Jane Labous (2018), in an article for the British news source Geographical titled “Breaking the silence: infertility and stigma in Senegal,” describes how more women are waiting to have children as they advance in their careers. In her words:

Dakar is a city in flux, just south of the Western Sahara, perched on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean and perched too on the brink of a social revolution... As the poor become middle-class, educated young couples are choosing to live not in the family compound with their parents, siblings and grandparents, but in flats of their own. And Senegal’s young women are finishing secondary school, going to university, forging careers – and leaving it later and later to marry and have children. Rising infertility rates are, as in Europe, also a consequence of social change.

Reïssa, a successful 39-year-old accountant, is one of these women. From interviews with Labous (2018), Reïssa describes how as her career took off, she focused on economic success and waited until she found a relationship serious and loving enough to turn into a marriage. After marrying at 35, she struggled getting pregnant and she and her husband went through IVF at the clinic of Dr. Rokhaya Ba, a Senegalese gynecologist who discreetly offers infertility services to women in Dakar. Though her IVF treatment unfortunately failed, she represents a new group of older Senegalese women seeking treatment and combating infertility in ways that were not previously widely available. Ba treats women from all over the socioeconomic spectrum and sees her role as crucial in breaking down stereotypes about infertility and helping women of many different age groups get pregnant.
Though it is illegal and dangerous in the country, abortion is also a way for Senegalese women to choose pregnancy on their own terms. Abortions are only allowed in situations where a woman’s life is at stake, and then approval from two doctors is required; women who are raped must still see the pregnancy through. Many women in desperate circumstances are forced to turn to clandestine abortion or infanticide. The stories and voices of these women express the heart-wrenching pressures they face.

According to research by National Public Radio (Gaestel 2018):

The women we interviewed had what would be termed an ‘unwanted pregnancy’ in public health jargon, but the term doesn’t capture the profundity of their feelings. An impossible pregnancy might be closer. One teenager was raped while working as a maid. Another woman had a brief extramarital affair after her husband left the country for work and she was living with her in-laws.

Other women were desperately poor and couldn’t face the prospect of yet another child when they already had seven or eight to feed. These women turned to infanticide as the only solution they thought possible, and instead found themselves in prison. Other women gave birth to stillborn children and were then arrested by police for murder.

Regardless of the true facts of the cases, the numbers are staggering: a 2015 study by the United Nations Office for Human Rights in West Africa found that 19% of incarcerated Senegalese women were in prison for infanticide and 3% for clandestine abortion (FIDH 2015). A Senegalese delegation to the United Nations estimated that in 2012, 51,500 women had illegal abortions (FIDH 2015). After drug trafficking, it is the second-most common reason women are incarcerated (Gaestel 2018).

However, many Senegalese women are working to end the stigma against abortion and to liberalize laws to allow women more options for their pregnancies. The Maison Rose has welcomed women who were disowned by their families because of accusations of infanticide. Additionally, the Association of Senegalese Women Lawyers
is one of the foremost organizations challenging current laws and representing accused women (Gaestel 2018). According to Amy Sakho, a lawyer there, “these women are monsters” in the eyes of the Senegalese media (Gaestel 2018), and her organization works to humanize them and dismantle stereotypes. Dr. Seynabou Ba, who works at the Ministry of Health, is another woman trying to improve pregnant women’s prospects. She argues that “the link we must make is between an unwanted pregnancy and infanticide...those who commit infanticide could not access a safe abortion” (Gaestel 2018). She hopes laws will eventually change but says that “the law comes at the end of a process,” and “we are working first on society, mentalities and acceptance” (Gaestel 2018). To that end, pro-abortion activists have held debates on TV and radio “to try to gently bring people around to the idea that in the cases of rape or incest, abortion could be permissible” (Gaestel 2018). There is also a task force of women lawyers, activists, and politicians examining the issue and trying to propose a bill with the rape and incest exceptions. Lest the blame for the infanticide and unsafe abortion deaths be laid at Senegal’s door, we must remember that part of the blame is due to the U.S. Global Gag Rule, which has historically increased unintended pregnancies and limited access to abortion and contraceptive services in Senegal. This issue represents another arena in which Senegalese women are fighting for rights and justice and challenging the constraints that have traditionally limited them.

Pregnancy has long been considered a special time in a woman’s life and an integral part of her identity. Across the world, a woman’s identity is tied to her fertility by patriarchal systems and sets of norms that seek to constrict her. In Senegal it is no different; both domestic and international forces have set down rules, policies, and portrayals of Senegalese women’s fertility that do not match the actual experience of
women there. People from all over the political spectrum have imposed their own ideologies regarding fertility on Senegalese women. Even international museums have robbed Senegalese women of the right to tell their own history. However, through this chapter I have shown how Senegalese women have fought against these representations and carved out new female identities that don’t depend on pregnancy. With new museums, organizations, and activist groups, Senegalese women have claimed the right to tell their own stories of their bodies.
Chapter 4

Plus que Ventres, Plus que Corps: Breaking Free of the Chains of Sexualization

« Femme nue, femme noire / Vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté. »

Naked woman, black woman / clothed with your color which is life, with your form which is beauty.

Léopold Sédar Senghor’s (1945) famous poem « Femme noire », or “Black Woman,” has entranced generations of readers. His ode to the beauty of Senegalese women plays double as an ode to the country itself. Writing of the “sculpted tom-tom,\textsuperscript{46} taut tom-tom which rumbles under the fingers of the conqueror,” Senghor describes the power of Senegalese culture and tradition in resisting colonialism. During a time where the colonial state was beginning to crumble, this poem helped empower the rise of the independence movement. However, in describing the metaphorical woman at the center of the piece, the multi-talented future first president of Senegal also gave her a bewitching sexuality. He writes of the “ripe fruit with firm flesh, dark ecstasies of black wine, mouth making lyrical my mouth” and the “delights of the Mind, the reflections of gold across your watered glinting skin.”\textsuperscript{47} She is his fantasy, his goddess, his right—just like the country of Senegal, she is the Terre promise, “Promised Land,” and he will have her.

This poem is one of the most renowned in Senegal’s history and represents a celebration of Senegalese womanhood intertwined with Senegalese national strength.

\textsuperscript{46} A drum used in Senegal.
\textsuperscript{47} Translated from French. Original text : « Fruit mûr à la chair ferme, sombres extases du vin noir, bouche qui fais lyrique ma bouche ». « Délices des jeux de l’Esprit, les reflets de l’or ronge ta peau qui se moire. »
However, the womanhood it describes is a narrow one. Though the poem is a beautiful work of art with great significance in the country’s history, the sexualization of the Senegalese woman within it solidifies the woman’s role as an object. The poem rejects the colonial oppression of black women by celebrating their beauty, but it is still the man speaking, and it is still the woman’s looks that matter. The woman is naked, beautiful, and silent. This chapter explores the role of Senegalese women as sexual objects and how they have resisted and challenged this narrative, reclaiming the right to tell their own stories and represent themselves as they see fit.

In one of the most famous rebukes to Senghor’s work, Calixthe Beyala (2003) wrote a novel titled *Femme nue femme noire*, after the first line of the poem. A Cameroonian-French writer, Beyala is known for her prolific work on African women, relationships, and sexuality. The book is an erotic novel that contains a deeper message of resistance to the norms of womanhood that have been historically dictated by men. Though it has been seen as controversial because of its explicit sexual content and its shock value, the narrator Irène being a self-identified kleptomaniac and nymphomaniac, it is one of the boldest challenges yet to the work of a man seen as an untouchable legend by Senegalese and African society (Moudileno 2006; Asaah 2007). It may be bold, but its message is simple: a woman deserves her own narrative. She should decide her identity and whether and how she wants her sexuality to be a part of it. The first page of Beyala’s (2003:11) novel sets the stage for this message:

“Naked woman, black woman, clothed with your color that is life, with your form which is beauty…” These verses are not part of my linguistic arsenal. You’ll see: my words jingle and rattle like chains. Words that detonate, decay, deviate, tumble, dissect, torture! Words that spank, slap, break and grind! That the one who feels uncomfortable goes on his way... Because here, there will be no lace bras, fishnet stockings, expensive silk panties, perfumes of roses or gardenias,
and even less these ritual approaches of the femme fatale, borrowed from films or television. I trifle in the bowels of the earth...48

As can be seen, the protagonist, Irène, begins her story by flatly stating she is not like the woman in Senghor’s poem. She does not speak like her, she does not look like her, and she does not act like her. Her words are harsher, and they might hurt you; they “jingle and rattle like chains.” She refuses to conform to ideals of female sexuality in dress, comportment, or speech, and her claim to this power is refreshing and glorious. She refuses to be silent. Beyala’s work, however controversial it might be, shows what can be done when a woman gets to speak about her own body and identity. Senghor’s femme nue, naked woman, is a flat picture who doesn’t encompass how African women see themselves or their roles in society. Beyala creates a character who denies Senghor and other men the right to define her and instead crafts her own personal history and sexual expression with the words she has chosen. These words “detonate, decay, deviate, tumble, dissect, torture...spank, slap, break and grind,” and they are all hers.

Despite its classification as an erotic novel, many scholars have recognized the importance of *Femme nue femme noire* (Beyala 2003) in that it challenges the male gaze and allows African women to craft their sexuality, if they choose to do so at all, on their own terms. In an article titled « Femme nue, femme noire : tribulations d’une Vénus » [Tribulations of a Venus], Lydie Moudileno (2006) argues that early postcolonial works by men such as Senghor and Aimé Césaire celebrating the beauty of

---
48 Translated from French. Original text:
« Femme nue, femme noire, vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté... » Ces vers ne font pas partie de mon arsenal linguistique. Vous verrez : mes mots à moi tressaient et cliquetten comme des chaînes. Des mots qui détonnent, déglinguent, dévissent, culbutent, dissemblent, torturent! Des mots qui fessent, giflent, cassent et broient ! Que celui qui se sent mal à l’aise passe sa route... Parce que, ici, il n’y aura pas de soutiens-gorge en dentelle, de bas résille, de petites culottes en soie à prix excessif, de parfums de roses ou des gardénias, et encore moins ces approches rituelles de la femme fatale, empruntées aux films ou à la télévision. Je trifouille dans les entrailles de la terre...
the African woman in fact reinforced their colonial-era sexual exploitation. Moudileno’s (2006:147) first contention, aligning with my prior arguments and those of Collins (2000 [1990]) and Vergès (2017), is that:

The body of the African (wo)man is one of those which has most haunted the western imagination. From negrophobes to negrophiles…travelers, writers, and western audiences did not stop—and do not stop—to read and write on the black body the signs of a difference more or less radical. 49

Moudileno discusses the “Venus Hottentot,” Saartjie Baartman, who I wrote about in Chapter 1, as the prime example of the “Western” obsession with possessing and inscribing the African female body. However, she then argues that instead of challenging this obsession, Senghor and his male peers in the Négritude movement in fact reinforced it by speaking in a “Western” language about African women and by continuing to sexualize and debase them through their work. While Moudileno takes issue with Beyala’s (2003) focus on sex and eroticism in the novel, which reproduces the connection between African women and sexuality, there is at least a new voice expressing ideas about this connection: the woman herself. Similarly, Augustine Asaah (2007) argues in an article comparing the poem and the novel that they have an “intertextual” relationship, that they are intertwined. According to Asaah, the novel provides the female voice and perspective that the poem lacks. Considering the arguments of both Moudileno and Asaah, Senghor’s poem cannot be taken on its face. The Négritude movement, despite the pride and power it brought to African peoples, denied women a voice in many respects, and it is only in recent years that women like

49 Translated from French. Original text: « Le corps de l’Africain(e) est l’un de ceux qui ont le plus hanté l’imaginaire occidental. Des négrophobes aux négrophiles…voyageurs, écrivains et publics occidentaux n’ont cessé – et ne cessent – de lire et d’inscrire sur le corps noir les signes d’une différence plus ou moins radicale. »
Beyala have been able to fully challenge it and reclaim the right for African women to enact their own sexuality, as Irène of *Femme nue femme noire* does so freely.

Despite the modest gains made in the literary realm, through my research I observed that Senegalese women are still frequently sexualized by both Senegalese and non-Senegalese men. The women are paradoxically expected to remain perfectly “pure” while enduring this sexualization. Senegalese men, on the other hand, have a virtually free license to engage in sexual activity before marriage. The women I interviewed generally hoped that their daughters would remain chaste until marriage and spoke gravely of the social consequences for girls who did not. The expectation was very different for men, who could sleep with multiple women before marriage and have it attributed to their sexual prowess and virility. One woman I interviewed had just had a visit from one of her best friends, a Senegalese man she’d known since childhood. During the interview, she shared a story about how he slept with multiple women before he got married, but he knew that he did not want to marry these women because they were not “pure” or “classy.” He had told her that he would know the right woman to marry because she would refuse his sexual advances. Needless to say, this puts women in a near-impossible situation of feeling pressured into sexual activity and then being judged if they acquiesce to it. Many interviewees, as well as the existing research I found

---

50 This dynamic is not unique to Senegal; the virgin/whore dichotomy for women and the double standard for male sexual activity are reproduced in many societies across the world, including the United States. However, each society expresses these power dynamics through a different lens based on that society’s culture and history. For instance, in Senegal there is a practice of a groom’s relatives checking the newlywed couple’s bedsheets the morning after the wedding for blood from the bride’s hymen (Van Eerdewijk 2009). If there is blood, this is taken as proof of the bride’s purity and her family is rewarded with payments from the groom’s family. In the United States, many women are taught explicitly during school that they will be akin to used tape or chewed gum if they have premarital sex; in many programs these physical objects are used in demonstrations, so girls deeply absorb the message that they are dirty if they do not wait until marriage (Culp-Ressler 2014; Howerton 2013). These practices represent a similar idea expressed through different cultural lenses.
in the field, felt that there was a common understanding in modern Senegal that many women did have sex before marriage, but that the appearance of virginity at the time of marriage was the most important part of preserving social power and respect.

One of the barriers young Senegalese people, especially women, still face is a lack of access to or knowledge about contraception. Though there are numerous humanitarian groups and organizations seeking to increase contraceptive use in Senegal, rates are still fairly low and the public is generally skeptical of condoms. The Guttmacher Institute (2014) found that 77% of sexually active unmarried Senegalese women aged 15-19 hoped to avoid pregnancy in the next two years but did not use a contraceptive method; the rate was about one-third for married women aged 15-19. These numbers represent an unmet need for contraception. However, times seem to be changing in terms of public conversation and awareness of contraceptive use. When I was researching in Dakar, I kept seeing the billboard below all over the city in different colors:

---

51 As I discussed in the last chapter, there is a legitimate need to reduce maternal mortality, unplanned pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections in Senegal, as there is across the world. Young Senegalese women face barriers in understanding or accessing contraceptive resources. My critique of the colonial dynamics reinforced by “Western” family planning structures being imposed on African women does not serve to deny the need for improvement in contraception delivery. It is the rhetoric used by “Westerners” in advancing this goal, and the reliance on “Western” notions of African womanhood, that are problematic, not necessarily the contraceptive distribution in and of itself. Some organizations and researchers use more questionable language and rhetoric than others in pursuing family planning improvements in West Africa.
This image also appeared in different colors and in advertisements in store windows around town. Curious about the origin of these ads, I researched DKT International, the company sponsoring the billboard.

DKT International is an American-owned worldwide reproductive health service provider which uses a targeted cultural marketing approach to increase the likelihood that a variety of populations will use its services. This approach aligns with the practice of cross-cultural medicine, which advocates for medical services to be “translated”
through a cultural lens to be more accessible to the target audience (Fadiman 1997).\textsuperscript{52} I drew a connection between this advertisement and the cartoon about teen pregnancy discussed in the last chapter; both were promulgated by “Western” groups but adapted to fit the culture and experiences of the receiving group, the Senegalese population, to increase the likelihood of engagement. According to DKT, the “Kiss Condoms” are the “first truly regional youth condom brand, designed by young people in the region through a series of focus groups...everything from the packaging and colors to the design and rollout of media campaigns was guided by young people” (2019). The inclusion of locals and members of the targeted audience in the development of a medical service or product is another key tenet of cross-cultural medicine; it gives the founding group a crucial viewpoint and perspective and ensures that the remedy being offered is acceptable to its target population.

Considering this holistic and locally-driven approach, the advertisement sends a specific message about Senegalese female sexuality and how Senegalese women should see themselves using contraception. The ad has a difficult job. It must portray a Senegalese woman as beautiful and sexually active, yet not promiscuous; it must make young women want to buy condoms without them thinking that that choice reflects poorly on them. To do this, it centers the ad around what looks to be a loving and

\textsuperscript{52} Anne Fadiman’s (1997) book, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, was a seminal text for the field of cross-cultural medicine. It describes the consequences when doctors or health service providers fail to respect the culture and practices of the group they seek to treat. It also describes successful targeted practices, including an instance where doctors made posters to encourage residents of a refugee camp in Laos to avoid stray animals and to bring their pets in for inoculation. When the residents, who were mostly illiterate, ignored the posters, the doctors organized a parade with people wearing large animal masks in the style of the refugees’ culture; the masked performers then did a skit about inoculation. This approach was much more successful. More recently, cross-cultural medicine was in the news during the 2014 Ebola crisis in West Africa, when a lack of respect and consideration for the burial practices and other rituals of the affected populations may have increased local resistance to doctors and lengthened the spread of the disease (Manguvo and Mafuvadze 2015; Basu 2014).
intimate relationship; the woman is the focus of the image as the man rests his face on hers tenderly. Both close their eyes modestly and demurely. The name “Kiss: Always with me” also conveys an idea of a strong relationship bond and fidelity between partners. As can be seen in the picture below, this ad jumps out compared to the other condoms available due to its colors—arranged, most likely by the pharmacist, in the tricolor Senegalese flag of green, yellow, and red—and its gentle and appealing couple. All of these elements might put nervous purchasers at ease by presenting them with an image of people who look like them and appear comfortable and content. This strategy is intentional, designed to appeal to Senegalese women who seek the social value and support of a stable intimate relationship. As I will discuss in the next section, there is a culture of silence around sexual intimacy outside of marriage which this ad seems designed to dismantle.
Young Senegalese activists have also played an important role in addressing sexual taboos and trying to increase contraceptive use. For an article in Reuters titled “Senegal’s youth tackle sex taboos in bid to boost contraceptive use,” Kieran Guilbert (2017) interviewed young Senegalese volunteers who advise youth about health services and family planning. According to Aissatou, age 22, “Girls are scared of seeing relatives at a health center, or being judged by staff...[so] we offer a safe space to discuss sex, contraception and pregnancy” (Guilbert 2017). Aissatou and her peers “visit homes, talk on radio shows, and work with imams to challenge stigma surrounding contraceptives,” and they do so in rural areas far from Dakar. They seek to paint a nuanced portrait of their work by making it clear that they “don’t encourage sex, or just give out condoms”—rather, according to Aissatou, they spread the message that “family planning is not about stopping births, but spacing them, and preserving health.”

Midwives, also called doulas, play a crucial role as well by serving as a resource and confidante. Fatim Fall, a midwife in Dahra, Senegal, said that some women came to talk about family planning with their husbands, while young unmarried women came secretly to get advice on sexual health (Guilbert 2017). While reproductive health workers of all kinds feel the pressure from the Global Gag Rule, they are “determined to get more women and girls in Senegal talking about sex, contraception, and family planning—and take control of all decisions concerning their bodies” (Guilbert 2017).

In recent years, studies have found that a culture of silence still exists around female premarital sex but that this silence is not an accurate reflection of young

---

53 This article is quoted throughout the paragraph.
women’s desires and behaviors. In her article “Silence, pleasure and agency: Sexuality of unmarried girls in Dakar, Senegal,” Anouka van Eerdewijk (2009) found through extensive interviews with Dakar youth that many young women were hesitant to admit to having sex, while young men bragged about sleeping with their girlfriends or with multiple women. The numbers did not match up in terms of how frequent the young men made their sexual encounters seem compared the chastity many of the young women verbally projected. Indeed, statistical research the author reviewed suggested that even in the late 1990s, as many as one-third of young women in Dakar had sex before marriage (van Eerdewijk 2009:16). However, this decision was often negotiated in a complicated dance in which the girl sought to prove her integrity and worthiness by resisting the boy’s advances until his respect and love for her was established; only at that point did the girl decide if she would go forth with the sexual activity. Reflecting the story my interviewee shared about her male friend, van Eerdewijk found through her interviews that “with respect to love and sex, boys distinguish two types of girls: their ‘real’ girlfriend and the so-called ‘easy’ girls” (2009:17). These young men claim that “they do not ‘touch the one they love’...a boy cannot ask the girl he loves to misbehave” (2009:17). However, as the author found, this is more a reflection of the norms boys are expected to enact than their actual behavior, as many do have sex with their serious girlfriends. Rather, they achieve this through the process of long-term negotiation until the girl has sufficiently achieved a dignified position, or they suggest it to her without

---

54 This number is supported by current research from the Guttmacher Institute (2014), which suggests that at least a third of Senegalese women have had sex before age 18, and that the numbers are as high as two-thirds for women in the lowest wealth quintile. The numbers are higher for populations where more women get married before age 18 (52% of the lowest wealth quintile group aged 15-19 had been married, compared to 25% overall) but the percent of women who had had sex always exceeded the percent of women who had been married. See “Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Women in Senegal” 2014 Fact Sheet for more information.
explicitly asking her to “misbehave.” As can be seen, the landscape young unmarried women have to navigate is fraught with difficulties and contradictions, with consequences if they act on their burgeoning sexual desires at the wrong moment and in doing so jeopardize their future marriage prospects.

However, van Eerdewijk’s (2009) work also revealed that young women were sometimes willing to acknowledge their desires and speak to the difficulty of living in a liminal space where they were portrayed as inherently sexual through their womanhood but expected to maintain “purity” with their partners. She found that Dakarois youth have access to pornographic materials and websites and use them to learn about sex. Some of van Eerdewijk’s interviewees talked about learning from this research how to engage in sexual activity without strictly “losing their virginities,” that is, avoiding engaging in vaginal penetration and breaking the hymen. They also discussed how “your body does not leave you at ease” (van Eerdewijk 2009:21) when exploring sexual activity and it can be difficult to resist premarital sex with a partner. Once comfortable and confident their stories would not jeopardize their social status, young women opened up and spoke about the tension between the expectations for them, their desire to pursue sexual activity, and their efforts to do so while remaining within their self-imposed limits or while keeping it a secret.

Ultimately, van Eerdewijk concluded that young Senegalese women do have power in this process. They “have agency in being seductive and sexy, and in satisfying their partner” (2009:22), and they “can use their capacity to refuse or accept to their own advantage” (2009:22). They even “encourage each other to be masters in sexually pleasing their ‘man’” (2009:22) through swapping tips and conferring on how to best avoid full vaginal penetration while achieving their own pleasure. Additionally, these
powers are not solely directed towards male pleasure, as many women expressed the view that in a good relationship their own sexual needs would be satisfied, and a good partner was the means to that end.

Other research supports the view that women wield their sexuality in a powerful way in Senegalese society and that this gives them agency over their relationships and households. One of my interviewees described her *économie familiale* (home economics) class at her all-girls school, in which she explicitly learned about navigating contraception, menstrual cycles, and sex with a future partner. Through this sort of training or through education from female family members, Senegalese women aspire to be *mokk pooj*, an important social identity taught and passed down through generations of women. Beth Buggenhagen (2012:14) describes it here:

Displaying the qualities of *mokk pooj* involves being considerate, foreseeing the needs and desires of male companions, and being docile and obliging. Although it is said that men are *boroom kërga* (heads of household), women are *boroom neeg* (heads of the bedroom), which is to say that they influence men’s decision making in matters private and public in the intimacy of their bedrooms. These bedroom secrets enable each party to save face in public by relegating contentious issues to private conjugal space. Senegalese women deploy this kind of feminine mystique by lighting incense, preparing delicious meals, and wearing *bin bin* (waist beads) to bed. By preparing for the conjugal visit in this way, women wield their power of influence so that their spouses will be more willing to consider their requests for everything from an addition to the house to an increase in the housekeeping budget. In general, the person who is *mokk pooj* is a *mokk* (expert) in managing the social dance, or *pooj*, which literally translates as “thighs.”

In *mokk pooj*, Senegalese women hold a power that the men do not, and this power translates to influence within the home and outside of it. It also involves an understanding between women that they can control much of what happens behind the scenes if they successfully use *mokk pooj* as a tool of negotiation, and they share this
knowledge communally and generationally to strengthen all of their positions within their homes.

In her article “‘A Slut, a Saint, and Everything in Between’: Senegalese Women’s Mokk Pooj, Interpretive Labor, and Agency,” Véronique Gilbert (2019) argues that while on the surface mokk pooj seems to involve female subservience to sexual norms, in practice it empowers women and serves as an important tool for them to establish their influence in the household. Gilbert finds that this tradition is conscientiously passed down through generations. She opens her piece with a vignette of a well-known seduction coach teaching a class of Senegalese women, telling them:

A man is a hunter. He needs to believe that he is making all the efforts to get you, that he’s chasing you, when in reality you have planned everything, you have created this situation without him noticing. He will think it’s all natural, that it is happening from his own doings, that he is winning you over. But it was you who orchestrated everything from the beginning. (Gilbert 2019:379)

As can be seen, Senegalese women share the understanding that they dominate this sphere even as they play the part carefully to make men feel they still have control. This quote represents an explicit acknowledgement of the power dynamics at play in sexual encounters and marriages more broadly, and how women can twist these dynamics to their advantage. Gilbert also describes how this tradition is used to bolster Senegalese women’s reputations as masterful wives; according to her research,

Throughout West Africa, Senegalese women enjoy a reputation as queens of seduction and as masters of the art of eroticism. Rumor has it that West African women from neighboring countries envy Senegalese women for their tantalizing use of traditional wrapper underskirts, waist beads, incense, and aphrodisiacs...I regularly heard comments about the sensuality of the Senegalese wife and about her abilities to toppatoo sa jëkër, to take care of her husband. (2019:379)

This “reputation as queens of seduction” clearly rests on the sexuality of Senegalese women, as does the power women gain through mokk pooj. This further solidifies the
perception of women as inherently sexual beings, which can be problematic in that it creates an expectation that Senegalese women must use their sexuality to seek power. However, within a relatively rigid marriage structure with defined social roles, it represents an expansion of the woman’s role through the limited tools available to her. Though *mokk pooj* reflects the sexualized woman described in Senghor’s « *Femme noire* », in this act women take charge and set the standard for their own behavior, like Beyala’s Irène, rather than submitting to men’s instructions for them. Gilbert (2019:381) ultimately found that *mokk pooj* was an “art of negotiation” and a “site of domination, mediation, and empowerment”; though the system remains unequal, “it is through their compliance with *mokk pooj* that women can best manipulate and benefit from a system that subjugates them.”

Senegalese women have also begun to fight against sexual harassment and oversexualization through activism and the #Nopiwouma movement, inspired by the global #MeToo movement. In Wolof, “nopiwouma” translates to “I will not shut up.” Started by blogger Ndambaw Kama Thiat and tech entrepreneur Olivia Codou, the movement has been growing since November 2017 and encouraging women to talk openly about sexual abuse (Mackintosh 2018). Sharing stories of abuse is discouraged in Senegal, and “Wolof words like ‘masla’ (to tolerate), ‘soutoura’ (discretion), and ‘muñ’ (to exercise patience, to endure)—often used when a woman is assaulted or harassed—reinforce this culture of suppression” (Mackintosh 2018). Since publicizing their movement and speaking out against sexual violence, Thiat and Codou have received hundreds of stories through forms, comment sections, and accounts they’ve set up on their websites. Despite people attempting to shut down the movement, telling Thiat and Codou it will hurt their careers or bring shame to the families of survivors who share
their stories, the two have persisted. Codou said that in light of the “backlash” from talking about abuse, “it’s necessary to have that courage” (Mackintosh 2018). They have also inspired spinoff movements and hashtags, like #Doyna, created by fashion designer Fatima Zahra Ba. Doyna means “that’s enough” in Wolof. Several initiatives, including a peer-to-peer group program for teenage women to talk about harassment and a women-only private Facebook group that serves as a safe space for women to talk about sexuality and harassment, work on a grassroots level to help women share their stories. Many young women have also been inspired to push back against the documented problem of teacher assault and sexual harassment, as reported by Human Rights Watch (Martínez 2018; Human Rights Watch 2018). These growing movements empower Senegalese women to redefine the sexual activity they want and do not want on their own terms.
Fatima Zahra Ba at a rally in Dakar. Photo by Sarah Tilotta for CNN.
A mural outside of the Musée de la Femme reads “Doyna” and “All united against the violence done to women.” Photo by Sarah Tilotta for CNN.

Women protest for the #Nopiwouma movement. Sign reads: “We break the culture of silence.” Photo by Sarah Tilotta for CNN.
Female Senegalese artists from many different fields have produced art critiquing the system of subjugation as a whole and expanding the boundaries of women’s sexuality. Many of these artists have a platform that the typical Senegalese woman, who exercises influence and autonomy through practices like *mokk pooj*, does not. Therefore, these artists are uniquely positioned with their respective skills to challenge notions of femininity and womanhood and to complicate the picture of Senegalese female sexuality presented to the public. Many of them have been prolific in doing so. This section highlights how female artists are resisting the sexualized roles created for women and critiquing them through artistic expression, provoking thought among those that consume their work.

Photography is one medium which has allowed women to comment on gender roles in Senegal and the global racialization of African women. Senegalese-French photographer Delphine Diallo has gained renown for her fascinating compositions commenting on African women’s roles in society (Jennings 2016). I analyze five of her photographs that focus on female representation and sexuality.

To begin, the image below depicts a woman nude above her waist holding a young child; both are staring intently into the camera. The woman is lathered with gold, some of which has rubbed onto the child. Their intense gazes convey an absolute strength and fortitude, and the gold glitter appears almost as armor protecting the woman from her nose to her waist. She is half-nude, but her nudity makes her strong—she literally sparkles with strength—rather than vulnerable. This work reframes motherhood in Senegal by honoring the strength and sacrifices mothers make for their children while also celebrating the beauty of the mother-child relationship.
This next image by Diallo depicts a young woman in a jumpsuit with her arms stretched elegantly into the air, paralleling the outstretched branches of the towering baobab trees behind her. The baobab tree holds special significance in Senegal; it is the national tree and has traditionally served as a meeting place, market, cemetery, religious ground, or all-purpose site of many other local functions (Searcey 2018). Many communities still revolve around their baobabs, which live for hundreds of years.
Here, the woman’s pose casts her in the role of a baobab in the midst of a forest. Just like the ancient tree, she is strong, resilient, spiritual, and powerful. This photo captures the strength of Senegalese women and the many, many ways they support their country and preserve its history. Instead of sexualizing the female form, this photo creates a striking metaphor that portrays the Senegalese woman as the backbone and spiritual center of her country.
The following picture seems to comment on the racialization and sexualization of African women and the impossible beauty standards to which women are held in modern society.

Photo by Delphine Diallo.

The woman has put on white makeup all over her face and is now painting eye after eye on her cheeks and forehead. Though the meaning is up for debate, it certainly is a striking image that provokes thought about the way “Western” media portrays whiteness versus blackness. Whiteness is constructed as beautiful and ideal, the neutral category around which every “beauty” product is designed (Picton 2013; Breshears
As a result, non-whiteness is characterized as lesser. Here, the woman has done her eye makeup and continues to draw eyes on her now-white skin as if whatever she does will never be enough to attain the perfect look. The white makeup could also speak to the popularity of skin-whitening creams and lotions in African and Asian countries, products which have been much criticized by activists in those countries for reinforcing “Western” beauty standards (Picton 2013; Del Giudice and Yves 2002; Brown 2019). However, these products remain successful partly because of companies relying on racial capitalism and selling the idea that white skin is superior and every woman should try to attain it. Women, especially women of color, are already constantly prompted to question their appearance and wish they looked different; this woman has even more eyes watching her—literally, eyes on her—fixating on her appearance. Diallo once commented that she “wanted to create a new world where all [her] subjects are connected with their soul and match a more universal idea of beauty...not one imposed by the media” (Garcia-Vasquez 2016). This photo speaks to the negative effects of the misrepresentations of African women in the media, which are rooted in a dual sexualization and dehumanization dating back to before colonialism.

The next photograph, part of Diallo’s “Highness” series in collaboration with hair artist Joanne Petit Frere, uses parts of the female body to fashion a strong and dominant warrior image. Petit Frere is of Haitian descent and uses traditional Haitian and African hair-braiding techniques to create avant-garde body pieces.

---

55 Picton (2013:86) found that advertisements for skin-lightening cream “mock and denigrate those with dark skin...they reinforce the dichotomy and hierarchy between fair and dark. Whiteness—as a marker of colonial superiority—is thus commodified and made available in something as ubiquitous as a bar of soap or a tube of cream. In this way, the adverts ascribe economic and cultural value to white skin. Moreover, by linking fairness to sexuality the adverts link whiteness to femininity.”
Photo by Delphine Diallo. Hair by Joanne Petit Frere.
Here, the woman is nude and crosses her arms to hide her breasts. However, coupled with the striking mask, her body language conveys power rather than meekness. It is as if she is saying that yes, she is a woman, but it is not her body or her breasts that make her so. The resilience in her eyes is a much better candidate. The mask covers her face and conjures images of imposing warriors from centuries past, but she is so powerful she doesn’t need traditional metal armor; her hair, part of her body, is strong enough to protect her. This image celebrates the strength of African women and transforms the woman’s sexuality into something awe-inspiring. Diallo and Petit Frere flip the script to show that instead of her power depending on her sexuality, her sexuality is now a product of her strength, should she choose to use it.

The final piece I analyzed by Delphine Diallo seeks to empower survivors of sexual assault, abuse, and mistreatment to reclaim their strength as women and to know that their stories matter. Helping survivors believe that they are more than what happened to them is a key component of disrupting the sexualization, objectification, and subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. Diallo created the image below as part of a series of collages when she held art workshops at La Maison Rose, the safe house and advocacy organization I discussed in the last chapter, for the International Day of the Girl several years ago (McLendon 2016). Speaking with the women who lived at La Maison Rose and taking their pictures inspired Diallo to create homages to them and to feature their stories. In the piece below, named “Coumba” for its subject, the leaves and flowers added to the picture show that Coumba is flourishing and has a path of positive personal growth ahead. In the upper-left-hand corner, the text reads, “‘I wanted to wait until I was married.’ I would like to continue with my hairdressing training and work so I am strong enough to support us both.”
“Coumba” by Delphine Diallo. 2016.

Coumba’s story demonstrates that our hopes as women sometimes don’t go as planned or are forcibly taken from us. However, she resolves to continue on her path and finish
her training so she can provide for herself and her baby to come. Hers is a nuanced portrait of Senegalese womanhood; she acknowledges where her path faltered but she uses her personal story, which includes her sexuality, to fortify herself for the road ahead. She is the *univers*—universe—in the bottom-left of the image. Every woman can find something to empathize with in her story, and Diallo creates a complex portrait of Senegalese femininity while also challenging existing portrayals that would erase Coumba’s experience or refuse to see the humanity in her past.

Like Diallo’s work, the music of Senegalese female rapper Sister Fa has challenged existing paradigms of Senegalese womanhood and sexuality. Born Fatou Diatta, Sister Fa defied expectations and odds in a male-dominated hip-hop world to become famous throughout the country and transmit messages of female empowerment through her music. She has also become an internationally-recognized activist against female genital modification (FGM). Sister Fa herself underwent FGM as a young girl, and now raps about the harms of the procedure and even leads her own health education classes with Senegalese youth (Mossman 2013). She is a role model for many young Senegalese women, and is not afraid to confront social inequalities and gendered power structures in her lyrics. She has said that “a rapper’s job is to tell the truth...hip-hop started as protest music, and in Senegal it still *is*” (Mossman 2013).

In one of her most famous songs, “Milyamba,” Sister Fa criticizes the gendered wealth disparity and calls for respect and attention to the hard work of poor Senegalese women. The song is written from the perspective of a female laborer speaking to a wealthy woman who spends all day indoors in luxury. Fa connects the labor of African women to the history of enslavement, rapping that, “We brave women work there in the fields / like slaves in one of these plantations / we take care of our harvest with
attention” (Africa Resource 2014). She speaks of the physical effects of hard labor and how those effects can hurt a woman’s self-esteem and damage her perception of her own beauty and sexuality. Many women never have to worry about these physical effects, and Fa’s words challenge the portrayal of Senegalese women as beautiful sex objects while men are the workers of the house. Many women work all day long and their expression of their sexuality and womanhood is wildly different from that portrayed in many pop songs, movies, or advertisements. Fa raps:

   My hard hands that do not deny the contact with the mortar
   My body damaged from my head down to my heels
   For certain outfits never include pants
   At dusk I use the last light to prepare my kitchen
   My running tears hurt my modesty
   Naked torso I work even if it’s a bit wild
   Work hard to nourish my children, that it is my work
   I have to do it before shame devastates me. (Africa Resource 2014)

This stanza shows the psychological alienation and struggles poor Senegalese women may face in their work; in a global society in which women are valued for their sexuality, women might lose a sense of self and femininity when their hard back-breaking labor robs them of the feeling of being sexy. The woman of Fa’s rap gives all to her work and her children without being able to take time for herself. However, Fa points out through

---
56 Translated from French by Afrolution. Original text: « Nous braves femmes sommes là dans les champs à tourner / Comme des esclaves dans l’une de ces plantations / Nous nous occupons de nos récoltes avec attention ».
57 Translated from French. Original text: « Mes dures mains qui ne daignent pas le contact du pilon
Mon corps épuisé de ma tête jusqu’à mes talons
Pour certains accoutrements ça ne se met jamais les pantalons
Au crépuscule je profite des dernières lueurs pour préparer dans ma cuisine
Mes larmes qui coulent tout en offensant ma pudeur
Torse nu je travaille même si c’est un peu sauvage
Travailler dur pour nourrir mes enfants c’est mon ouvrage
Je dois le faire avant même que la honte ne me ravage ». 

153
this song that each individual woman’s struggle and story is unique, and that womanhood is much more than just presenting sexuality. Fa’s music educates people on the barriers women face to equality in Senegal and around the world, and expands the notion of legitimate womanhood to include women from all over the socioeconomic spectrum.

As is the case across the world, the patriarchal society in Senegal has long defined women in terms of their sexual attraction and viability. However, while women are expected to appear beautiful for the benefit of men, they must also remain as “pure” as they can and avoid sexual activity until marriage. Once married, they must walk an impossible line between being sexy for their husbands and being too sexy to the point that it violates social norms of the modesty of mothers. Despite all these contradictory expectations, Senegalese women resist definition of their sexuality and continuously fight to break down social structures from the inside and the out. Within the confines of their role as the sexual leaders of the household, the “heads of the bedroom,” women use mokk pooj to seduce their husbands and secure what they want in the home. Some young unmarried women agitate for better contraception and reproductive health and try to educate their peers, while others communicate discreetly with their friends to gain sexual knowledge and build a wealth of communal information about how to engage in safe sex. Female activists and artists lead the way in dismantling systems of sexual assault and oppression and in creating more nuanced portraits of the Senegalese woman’s role in society. Sexuality does not make the woman; it is simply one tool in her arsenal that she can employ if she wishes.
Conclusion

Beyond the statue of the Senegalese woman waiting meekly behind her husband on a hilltop in Dakar, a “renaissance monument” that kept the woman in the same tired role to which she’d been confined for centuries, there was much more to learn about the experiences of Senegalese women facing oppression and finding resistance over time. Using Vergès’s (2017) theories of racial capitalism and neocolonial oppression, as well as Collins’s (2000 [1990]) theories of intersectionality and the matrix of domination, I sought to analyze the barriers Senegalese women face and how they have responded to them. My research applies these theories to the experiences of Senegalese women for the first time and offers a new framework, the Colonized Identity Theory and Matrix, for analyzing the oppression and resistance of women in developing countries.

I found that women in Senegal face oppression from two different prongs. The first prong is a combination of international forces such as laws, organizations, and scholarly bodies, their efforts sharpened by the “Western” media’s negative and inflammatory portrayals of Senegalese women or Senegalese culture. This prong reenacts and recreates the colonial power dynamic by casting the “Western” world as strong and advanced and Senegal as weak and primitive. Neocolonialism is the system of indirect control exerted by former colonizers on former colonized people, now primarily using economic and cultural tools instead of direct military control. Racial capitalism is a key tool of neocolonialism, in which neo-colonizers appeal to racial stereotypes and tropes to reinforce the divide between predominantly white “Western” nations and people of color in former colonies, all in the interest of economically exploiting the former colonies. “Western” countries rely on neocolonialism to maintain their political and capitalist dominance. I found that this power dynamic absolutely
affects Senegalese women. Whether it is a policy like the Global Gag Rule limiting their access to reproductive health services, French museums telling their stories for them and portraying them as overtly sexualized beings, scholars holding them responsible for having “too many” children, or journalists criticizing them for choosing polygamous relationships, Senegalese women are constantly told who they are and what they should be doing with their bodies.

The same is true of the second prong, the patriarchal systems in place within Senegal, which have historically restricted women. I sought to analyze these restrictions while being careful to avoid reproducing the same false discourses propagated by the international forces I just discussed; as I showed in this thesis, the international “Western” forces are all too willing to claim credit for Senegalese progress and to criticize Senegal for alleged human rights issues that they themselves deal with in their own countries. I showed that within Senegal, women are treated differently and face barriers to resources as well as stereotypes about how they should behave. Husbands can weaponize the threat of polygamy against their wives, queer women are not allowed to be with their partners, and unmarried women who have sex or have children outside of marriage face great social stigma. Additionally, women who seek abortions have few options and may be incarcerated for infanticide. The female statue in the Monument de la Renaissance Africaine towers over Dakar as a reminder that women are supposed to be mothers, but also lovers, sexually attractive, but also modest, and supportive, but also silent. The Senegalese patriarchal society has historically set definitions for women as wives, mothers, and sexual beings, restrictions which still exist today.

The charts below illustrate my theory about the two-pronged patriarchal system Senegalese women, and women in developing countries generally, must face.
Intersectional Oppressive Forces

This chart illustrates the two-pronged oppression which women of color in former colonies face. This is a new interpretation of Collins’s (2000 [1990]) intersectionality concept, in which a woman’s nationality—if she is from a “Western” country or a “non-Western” formerly colonized country—also affects her treatment and the barriers she faces. Intersectionality theory has been applied to international human rights issues on a limited scale, generally only addressing the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender in the oppression of women in countries outside of the United States (Bond 2003; Green 2002). It has not been applied based on the colonizer/colonized dichotomy of a person’s country of origin until this research.

Intersectional Oppressive Forces

This chart illustrates how race and gender factor into the intersectional oppression of women of color in former colonies. Their gender identity as women dictates the treatment they receive from both forces, but from an international standpoint, they are also racialized. These forces are clearly exercised for different reasons—the international / “Western” force serves neocolonial and racial capitalism purposes—but
they complement each other and together make it more difficult for women in these countries to gain autonomy over their own bodies and stories.

I found that these two prongs, domestic and international patriarchies, reinforce each other, each attempting to keep Senegalese women “in their place”; however, I found that women have risen up and challenged these forces. Female artists and authors like Sister Fa, Mariama Bâ, Delphine Diallo, and Calixthe Beyala have defied conventions of female behavior through art and given women a voice in the battle for their own bodies. Other women have begun dismantling these patriarchies through academic research, advocacy, or activism, distributing contraception and arguing that women deserve to make their own life and health choices. My research introduces the concept of this two-pronged patriarchy women in developing countries face, as well as their resistance against it. Though their burden is higher because of the added intersectional identity of being a person in a former colony, women resist both forces to try to elevate their own positions.

**Intersectional Oppressive Forces**

*This chart illustrates how women of color in former colonies have a greater burden in resisting patriarchal forces, because they have to address both international and*
domestic discourses to do so. Despite the challenges, women in Senegal and across the developing world are actively working together to do this.

This work has yielded new theories about postcolonialism, intersectionality, and gender; I collect the new ideas under the name “Colonized Identity Theory” as a whole, with two main subset tools. I call the first tool the “Colonized Identity Theory of Intersectionality”; this simply means that the colonial history of someone’s country of origin, whether it was formerly colonizing or formerly colonized, should be considered as a factor in their identity when examining their intersectional experiences. If someone is from a formerly colonized state that is still developing, it is likely they face increased marginalization and oppression because of persisting neocolonial interventions into their country. This identity would join the ranks of gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability status, among other characteristics, in assessing the barriers a person faces using intersectionality theory. It would allow intersectionality theory to be applied internationally, which has been done on a limited scale and not in recent years (Bond 2003; Green 2002). As far as I have found, it has never been used to incorporate a person’s formerly colonized status (or that of her ancestors within her country) into an analysis of her experience.

The second tool I created relates to the forces enacted upon people in formerly colonized states, and I dub this theory the “Colonized Identity Matrix.” As I showed in the last chart above, marginalized people in formerly colonized nations face two prongs of oppression: domestic oppression based on their identity (such as domestic ideas about what it means to be a woman) and international interventions based on that same identity (such as international laws that restrict women’s rights in that country). These international interventions come primarily from the former colonizer(s), because they
still exert influence over their former empire under neocolonialism. This theory matters because powerful countries who were never colonized were never financially and physically exploited or made dependent on any country with whom they formerly held a relationship. This matrix also includes resistance; marginalized people in formerly colonized nations must resist both the domestic oppressive forces and the neocolonial international forces. Therefore, the matrix looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonized Identity Matrix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oppression</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Neocolonial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forces</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways the marginalized group is currently oppressed by “Western” neocolonial forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resistance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways the marginalized group resists “Western” neocolonial forces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can also consider my findings as a whole and the Colonized Identity Matrix in the context of the matrix of domination (Collins 2000 [1990]). The international and domestic patriarchal forces I outline seek to exert control over Senegalese women in the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains laid out by Collins, and women face oppression and resistance in each of them. I have reviewed examples of each of these four domains in both international and domestic contexts throughout the thesis. Below I address Collins’s four domains individually using examples of one
international and one domestic instance each for both oppression and resistance, to fit with the table I proposed for the Colonized Identity Matrix above.

1. The *structural* domain organizes power and oppression through institutions. When it comes to structural oppression, domestically, Senegalese women do not have a legal say in which type of marriage they would like to have, a barrier organized through the institution of the law. In an international context, at one time they and their children were legally considered the property of the French Empire under the *Code Noir*, another legal barrier. One of the gains Senegalese women have made in recent years in the domestic structural domain is the passage of the law of *parité* in 2010, which requires equal gender representation in political bodies. Internationally, Senegalese female-led organizations have resisted structural oppression by refusing to cut abortion and reproductive health services from their programs even in the face of the Global Gag Rule policy.

2. The *disciplinary* domain punishes women who resist oppression. An early example of the disciplinary domain on an international scale was the whipping of pregnant enslaved Senegambian women who acted out on colonial plantations. Domestically, in modern times, women in desperate circumstances who commit infanticide or have stillborn children are criminalized and incarcerated despite the fact that their acts often result from desperation, abuse, and lack of resources. As for resistance, the continued fight for abortion services and funding also represents a challenge to the disciplinary domain in an international context, because the law seeks to punish women and organizations who do not comply with the anti-abortion ideology of the law's proponents. Domestically, as I discussed in Chapter 3, women like attorney Amy Sakho and Dr. Seynabou Ba
lobby political bodies for more lenient abortion policies and decriminalization of infanticide in cases of rape or incest, thus challenging discipline systems.

3. The *hegemonic* domain legitimizes oppression through larger societal attitudes. In an international context, the “Western” media plays a huge role in spreading false beliefs about Senegalese women, such as the idea that African women can’t stop having babies and they are thus responsible for overpopulation problems; this reflects Collins’s theory of the “breeder” controlling image as well. In the domestic sphere, women face the societal belief that they are impure if they have sex before marriage, while men do not face the same standard. Both of these are hegemonic ideas that women must contest. In resistance to international hegemonic oppression, Senegalese women write books and articles that challenge “Western” characterizations of them and allows them to voice their sexuality on their own terms. Domestically, women create organizations like the Maison Rose to support women facing social stigma, help them rebuild their lives, and dismantle hegemonic perceptions of women who defy social norms.

4. The *interpersonal* domain impacts women’s consciousness, self-image, and opportunities through micro-level interactions. Internationally, this manifests in the constructed “Western” association between beauty and whiteness in media and pop culture, which casts non-white women as less desirable and may impact the self-image of Senegalese women. This skewed media representation creates a market for products like skin-whitening creams. Domestically, I reviewed instances of Senegalese men gaslighting women in individual marriages by threatening to take another wife if the woman misbehaved, limiting the woman’s autonomy. In resistance to international forces, women have created art
celebrating the beauty and power of Senegalese women and their skin color; Delphine Diallo’s photography work in particular is an excellent example of this critique of beauty-as-whiteness. Resisting domestic forces, women use *mokk pooj* to increase their power in micro-level marriage interactions.

### Considering the Colonized Identity Matrix within Collins’s Matrix of Domination

#### Examples from the Senegalese Female Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Domain: <em>oppression through institutions</em></th>
<th>Disciplinary Domain: <em>oppression through punishment</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>Code Noir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Law of <em>parité</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>Whipping pregnant women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Fight for abortion funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hegemonic Domain: <em>oppression through social attitudes</em></th>
<th>Interpersonal Domain: <em>oppression through interactions</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>“Breeder” image in media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Artistic / academic expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>Beauty-whiteness construct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Art / academic expression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes, I do recognize the abundance of matrices here. However, both theories are extremely useful in understanding the experience of women in developing countries; my
theory is a modification of Collins’s that allows it to be applied in an international context. I found one instance where Collins’s matrix of domination theory was applied to South African student protests (Gouws 2017), but other than this it has almost never been applied to the experience of women in developing, formerly colonized nations. It is a strong theory with the potential to offer insights into the oppression faced by marginalized groups all over the world. This thesis fills a gap in the research by demonstrating the international applicability of this theory in a postcolonial context, and by advancing the Colonized Identity Matrix and Theory of Intersectionality, a key tool to understanding the experience of marginalized groups in developing, formerly colonized nations.

One final word: I set out on this project hoping to learn about the barriers and constraints Senegalese women face in the modern world. I did learn about that; I learned how the history of abhorrent exploitation by Europeans under slavery and colonialism has laid the groundwork for current neocolonial interventions into the country. I learned about the persisting oppressive forces within Senegal’s own patriarchal system. However, I truly was not expecting the strength and resilience I found again and again when researching how Senegalese women have responded to these forces. I was humbled and inspired by the activist and artistic work produced by Senegalese women to challenge their oppressors. I was expecting to find female resistance, but I had no idea how much I would find. In that sense I suppose I had to decolonize my initial expectations along with decolonizing the debates around the issues I researched. In marriage, pregnancy, fertility, sexuality, and so many other areas of life, Senegalese women challenge tropes and stereotypes and fight to reclaim their history and tell it for themselves.
Appendix

Methodology: Data

Through this thesis I apply the theories of intersectionality, the matrix of domination, racial capitalism, and neocolonialism to original research and fieldwork I conducted in Dakar, Senegal and Paris, France during the summer of 2018, and literature-based research I conducted in Williamsburg, VA in the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019. I ultimately reveal an important extension of Collins’s intersectionality theory, regarding the role of a country’s colonial history in affecting current treatment of marginalized groups within that country.

To conduct this project, I used an interdisciplinary research strategy combining methods in Sociology and Cultural Studies (specifically French & Francophone Studies). Both disciplines have a strong tradition of qualitative research, and I sought to meet the standards of both by collecting a wealth of data sources and applying several different qualitative methods that could complement each other and fill in the gaps that might exist if only one method was applied. With that in mind, I used ethnographic fieldwork, formal and informal interviews, content analysis, cultural text analysis, and literature analysis to come to my conclusions. I used an inductive research method, following an open coding and then focused coding scheme across data sources to theorize about the phenomena I observed (Charmaz 2014).

I drew inspiration for this research design from the scholars of intersectionality, racial capitalism, and neocolonialism who provided the theoretical background for my project: Patricia Hill Collins (2000 [1990]) and Françoise Vergès (2017). Collins combines many methods to arrive at a rich and diverse set of conclusions and theories
about black feminist thought. She considered “involvement in the everyday,” or ethnographic fieldwork, to be crucial in gathering data and organizing her thoughts about her research. She also analyzed representations of black women in the media to form her conclusions about “controlling images” such as the “breeder” image I have discussed extensively. These methods, among others, overlap and complement each other. Vergès researched historical events and drew causal lines from those events to current practices and beliefs about women in former colonies, an approach I sought to use with the control of Senegambian women’s bodies under slavery and colonialism. Vergès weaves historical methods in with content analyses of laws and policies and syntheses of other theories in a variety of fields. Following both women’s example, I chose to contextualize my arguments about the current experiences of Senegalese women by providing a historical background, reviewing data from both primary and secondary sources, and combining multiple methods of data-gathering and analysis for a stronger overall project. According to Kathy Charmaz (2014:33), a study with complementary detailed methods is superior to a study rich in detail with limited data: for example, “an ethnographer who engages in detailed sustained observation and concludes the study with ten intensive interviews of key informants has far more to draw on than someone who has simply conducted ten rich interviews.” I tried to gather as rich of a data pool as possible by using overlapping methods.

Additionally, I was inspired by Collins’s approach to academic writing and wanted to make my project accessible to people from all walks of life, including those with no experience in academia. Collins was an early proponent of the theory that academics often make their work so esoteric and complex that it is incomprehensible to the very populations they write about. She writes:
Theory of all types is often presented as being so abstract that it can be appreciated only by a select few. Though often highly satisfying to academics, this definition excludes those who do not speak the language of elites and thus reinforces social relations of domination... I felt that it was important to examine the complexity of ideas that exist in both scholarly and everyday life and present those ideas in a way that made them not less powerful or rigorous but accessible. (2000 [1990])

Like Collins, I wanted to write and analyze and theorize in a way that was accessible to anyone who was interested, regardless of their experience. It is especially important for scholars in Sociology, who write about marginalized communities, to avoid high-brow language and to craft their work in a clear, direct, and engaging tone. With that in mind, I chose to write my thesis in the format of a book. I organized my chapters by broad topics, like marriage, fertility, and sexuality, so my train of thought was easy to follow. This allowed me to gather my findings on a given topic from all of my research methods and keep them in the same place, rather than going through each of my methods one by one. I began each chapter with an anecdote about a piece of art, a place, or an object that represented the topic of that chapter, in an effort to draw readers in and frame my arguments before I moved into my analysis of the chapter's topic. I also included many pictures along the way to help my readers visualize and understand the power dynamics I spoke about. My final step was consolidating my description of my methods in this appendix, so that I didn’t chop up the flow of the argument with an in-depth scientific justification of how I constructed the project.

This accessibility-driven approach, including the use of vignettes to open chapters and the placement of the methods description in an appendix, is commonly used in sociological books. In Everyday Illegal: When Policies Undermine Immigrant Families, Joanna Dreby (2015) uses interviews with undocumented residents of the United States to critique the humanitarian cost of the immigration policies that affect
them. She opens each chapter with an anecdote or excerpt from one of her interviews, which then sets up that chapter’s topic, and occasionally includes pictures to help readers visualize her research. She also includes her methods in an appendix so that the main section of her book can focus on her findings and conclusions. Jennifer Carlson (2015) uses a similarly accessible approach in her book *Citizen-Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline*. She opens her first chapter with a riveting story of a Detroit man gunning down a teenage robber in his convenience store, establishing the subject of the book, before going into a brief description of her methods and the overall outline of the book. She gives each chapter an intriguing title and weaves her interviews, ethnographic observations, and content analyses in through her arguments about the state of gun politics in America as a whole. Finding the work of both Dreby and Carlson extremely compelling and clear, I sought to emulate their narrative approaches in my own project. Both women also used multiple overlapping qualitative methods, which further supported my choice of research design.

*Ethnographic Data*

Each data source I chose explored a different idea or perspective I hoped to include in my project. To get a sense for Senegalese women’s experiences, roles, and treatment in society, I used ethnographic methods during my stay in Dakar. As I discussed in the introduction, I lived with a Senegalese host family in the centrally located Amitié III neighborhood. My host family included a father, a mother, a 17-year-old daughter, a 12-year-old son, and a live-in maid who was about 20. I also interacted with many other Senegalese people in various parts of Dakar and its suburbs. I was most interested in how gender informed the work divide and roles in the household, and how it played into Senegalese people’s interactions in public. I recorded all relevant
observations using sociological fieldnotes. Since I was using a grounded approach, in which the researcher starts the project with an open mind and builds her theories and ideas based on the data itself (Charmaz 2014), I open-coded the fieldnotes for themes related to women’s roles in Senegalese society.

Interview Data

In order to further understand the perspectives of Senegalese people and their perceptions of the women’s role in society, I conducted five formal interviews with Senegalese research participants. My original goal, before my research topic expanded, had been to research women’s health barriers within the country. As such, I sought to find employees in the health sector who could give me helpful information on that topic. I also wanted to interview women who could tell me about their experiences within the healthcare system. As this was my first time in the country and I had limited resources (being an undergraduate student), I used convenience sampling and snowball sampling to recruit interview subjects. Some were relatively easy to recruit, as through a public health class I took in Senegal I was introduced to various Senegalese healthcare professionals. Other subjects came to me in surprising ways; one was a doctor who took care of a sick friend of mine during a weekend trip to a resort. I ended up interviewing four women and one man; three of the subjects were health professionals and two were Senegalese women employed in different fields. In total, one subject was a male doctor, professor, and minister of health in his sixties; one was a female doctor and cancer researcher in her forties; one was a female community health activist in her forties; one was an employed middle-class woman in her early forties with four children; and one was a female accountant in her forties who had immigrated to Paris in her adulthood. I conducted all interviews but one in French, and I took notes during and after the
interviews. I transcribed and coded relevant parts of the interviews using open-coding, and I then connected those codes with the ones I had found in my ethnographic fieldnotes. I then categorized and synthesized codes across these multiple data sources, in a process known as focused coding; essentially, focused coding is the recognition of commonalities in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

I also relied upon numerous informal conversations and interviews during my month-long stay in Dakar. I talked with dozens of Senegalese people and learned new information from several of my interview subjects through informal conversations after their interviews. Researchers often use this approach to help their interview participants get comfortable, prompting them to open up and provide new information in subsequent sessions. For example, Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas (2005) conducted a massive qualitative interview study of over 150 young poor unmarried mothers. They interviewed each woman at least twice and found their subsequent interviews and conversations to be much more fruitful in terms of data. Additionally, they used snowball and convenience sampling and wrote their book as a narrative with their methods contained in a separate appendix, supporting two of my other methodological choices. I took notes on anything I deemed important from those occasions and analyzed those notes using open and then axial coding as well.

In order to learn important information on health, government, and women in Senegal I took a class called “Public Health and Development in Senegal and Africa.” The class was taught by a Senegalese professor with many years of experience in the health sector, including working with rural populations in both grassroots and leadership positions. We learned about communicable and non-communicable diseases in Senegal, the structure of healthcare, major health threats, and the position of women
and children in particular. Through this class I visited a Catholic health clinic and a research nonprofit focusing on the exploitation of women in the Senegambia region; the group was currently working on a project about female genital modification. Through this class I was able to gather key sources, connect with interview subjects, and get a first-hand look at health structures in Senegal. I also got to see how Senegalese health issues were taught and represented to American students. I compiled notes and source lists for all the information I gained through the class and took extensive ethnographic fieldnotes on my site visits.

_Ethnographic and Content Data: Museums and Cultural Sites_

In order to investigate public representations of women, their bodies, and Senegalese history, I visited many museums and sites relevant to my thesis. At each museum, I considered the information presented as well as _how_ it was presented; what message the museum seemed to want to share with visitors. First, I visited the Maison des Esclaves [House of Slaves] museum and the Gorée Island Historical Museum, both on Gorée Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and famous Senegalese landmark. Gorée was a key departure point for tens of thousands of enslaved Africans. The museums bear witness not only to the slave trade, but to the treatment of female slaves on the island, in transit, and in the colonies. I visited these landmarks in order to understand the root of international exploitation of Senegalese women and to trace this unequal power structure beginning during enslavement.

I next visited the Musée de la Femme [Museum of the Woman] in Dakar. On the first floor, this museum features paintings, drawings, sculpture, and other jewelry dedicated to the Senegalese woman, all available for purchase. These artistic yet simultaneously commercial representations of women allowed me to expand my
observations and image archives on tropes and representations of Senegalese femininity. On the second floor, the museum contains different sections on aspects of the lived experience of the Senegalese woman, positive and negative alike. For example, one section honors famous Senegalese women and their accomplishments, while other sections focus on social issues such as child marriage and female genital modification. One nook shaped like a bedroom discusses courtship, relationships, and sexuality. Other sections are more historical or anthropological, capturing women’s participation in the hunting, fishing, and agriculture industries or describing cultural practices from different Senegalese villages and ethnic groups. This museum was extremely useful for understanding Senegalese culture and women’s place in it, as well as various salient issues in the country. I took pictures and documented virtually everything in the museum—from paintings to special belts used for seduction to mats on which women have to sleep during menstruation—to have reference points throughout my thesis work. These photos, materials, and objects became additional data sources in my analysis. In a sociological sense, this museum was also useful in understanding how the curators sought to represent Senegalese women for visitors to the museum. I then coded and analyzed the photographs I took in this museum and connected them to themes in my interviews and fieldnotes, using the same axial coding method as before.

During my time in France I also visited numerous museums looking for further information on Senegal and seeking to understanding the international power dynamic and history between the two countries. I first visited the Musée du quai Branly—Jacques Chirac [Quai Branly Museum], which exhibits the indigenous arts and cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. This museum was opened in 2006 and features tens of thousands of objects from all over the world, including some of the earliest human
artifacts. There, in the “Africa” section, I was able to see how the museum curators represented African heritage. I could also see important ritual objects from Senegal, such as fertility dolls, masks used during puberty rites, and an ancient monolith. The museum also had a groundbreaking temporary exhibit called *Peintures des lointains* [Paintings From Afar] focusing on the colonial gaze and its representation through art. Many European artists traveled to the colonies to capture the indigenous peoples and their ways of life, as well as scenes of colonial rule. This art was then presented at salons and exhibitions in Europe. As might be guessed, this art was far from objective, and *Peintures des lointains* discusses how artists denigrated, racialized, or exoticized their colonized subjects to whet European appetites or play to stereotypes about colonized peoples. This exhibit included a good number of pieces depicting Senegalese subjects, including women, as Dakar was the French colonial capital and seat of power. I took extensive pictures as documentation and noted how the exhibit portrayed colonial history and how French artists portrayed Senegalese women in accordance with the power differential between them.

I next visited the Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration [the National Museum of the History of Immigration] hoping to learn about the 20th century relationship between Senegal and France and see if there was any law or policy that impacted Senegalese women in particular. The museum contained some useful information on immigration from Dakar to Paris in particular, and featured narratives of men and women who left everything behind because of economic hardship. I also learned about Senegalese communities in France. While not quite as relevant as some of the other museums for my work on the oppression of Senegalese women in their own country, this museum provided some crucial economic and social context to the
relationship between Senegal and France over the course of the 20th century. The museum building itself was a former government department and still featured colonialist murals on the walls, even though it was ostensibly a welcoming museum for immigrants from former colonies; I documented and coded these images.

Finally, I visited the Musée de l’Homme [Museum of the Man] in Paris. Despite the name, it is not just about men; rather, it is a very old and famous anthropological museum which now attempts to atone for a racist and sexist past. In the 1800s it exhibited human “specimens” from other regions of the globe, including African women and their genitalia, and used dubious phrenological methods to “classify” these people as different species from the French. The museum held widely publicized events and exhibits, contributing a great deal to people’s perceptions of other races and of African women. I visited to understand this history and the institution’s role in constructing a racial hierarchy between master and slave, between colonizer and colonized. Nowadays the museum contains various exhibits on the origins of man, the role of language, the role of gender, diet and nutrition, emerging technologies, and the field of medicine over time, among other topics. It uses cross-cultural comparisons in a sociological and anthropological fashion to explore various features of the human experience. To this end, I found many artifacts and pieces from Senegal, such as gendered ritual objects and an entire car rapide bus. I also found information about Senegal, including a comparative analysis of the Senegalese diet and cooking style as well as 19th-century sculpted heads of Senegalese immigrants to Paris, which had been produced for the Musée de l’Homme of old. I collected all this information to learn more about Senegal, but also how Senegal was portrayed in a Paris museum with such a troubled history.
At each of these locations, I took pictures and noted important works that spoke to my thesis topic. I took some ethnographic notes to describe my experiences as well. I analyzed all my materials by category and code to prepare for analysis. Through these museums I was able to learn important information on cultural practices in Senegal and the oppression of women, but I could also see how Senegalese women were represented to the outside world. The French museums allowed me to see how the former colonizing nation recorded its history of slavery and brutality when it came to African people.

**Cultural Texts**

I also engaged with a variety of material objects and documents, called “cultural texts” in Cultural Studies, to provide more context for Senegalese women’s experiences and learn more information about hegemonic representations of women in Senegal and in the wider world. These materials included movies, books, art, and advertisements. I incorporate qualitative analyses of cultural texts that share or comment on issues faced by Senegalese women in society. I chose works that were well-known or had relatively wide viewership; for example, I included a movie or book if critics and scholars generally considered it to be important or at the forefront of Senegalese works of that type. Since I was choosing cultural texts, it was difficult to come up with a clear quantitative line for which ones to sample and analyze, but I attempted to choose texts which were important and would have an impact on people’s views of Senegalese women. For example, I read and analyzed *Une si longue lettre* [So Long a Letter] by Mariama Bâ (1979). This book, about a widow who attempts to deal with her husband’s death and the new second wife he abruptly wed many years into their marriage, discusses themes of love, arranged marriage, polygamy, motherhood, pregnancy, sex, sexuality, divorce, and generational change. Though set in Senegal and written by a
Senegalese author, it is widely considered to be a seminal African text about the female experience. It is known and taught worldwide. I also drew on Léopold Sédar Senghor’s (1945) world-famous poem “Femme noire” and a text written in response, Calixthe Beyala’s (2003) *Femme nue femme noire*, both focusing on the sexuality of African women. I analyzed all of these texts using open and axial coding.

In this same vein I watched Ousmane Sembène’s (2004) film *Moolaadé*, the story of a woman in a rural village who tries to protect a group of young girls refusing to undergo female genital modification (FGM). Sembène is a well-known Senegalese filmmaker, the first sub-Saharan African director to release a feature-length film and often considered the father of African cinema. I analyzed and coded the film for its depiction of female characters, as well as the representation of key social issues such as polygamy and FGM. Through this I learned more about patriarchal control of Senegalese women and their bodies, women’s resistance, and the portrayal of women through creative fiction.

I also engaged with several works about African women more generally, especially ones that provided key historical background or context for the relationship between Europe and colonial Africa. I watched *Black Venus* (2010), by Tunisian director Abdellatif Kechiche (recently well-known for directing the 2013 Palme d’Or winner *Blue is the Warmest Color*). This film follows the true story of Saartjie Baartman, an indigenous South African woman who goes to Europe seeking fame but finds herself instead exhibited in freakshows because of her large buttocks. After her death the Musée de l’Homme in Paris displayed her body, brain, and genitalia to the public for over 150 years. Baartman was just one of many African women exhibited this way in life and in death, just one of many whose image was exploited to match European stereotypes.
about African women. I watched and analyzed this film to see Baartman’s experiences, the perceptions of the European public about Baartman’s appearance, and Kechiche’s representational and artistic choices about Baartman’s story. Overall this film helped me understand 19th-century European viewpoints and imagery of African women, who were racialized, exoticized, and sexualized in popular media. This film also presents a key resource for understanding the history of the colonizer/colonized relationship, as the Musée de l’Homme profits from Baartman’s body for over a century but is eventually forced to return her remains to South Africa in the early 2000s.

When it comes to artwork and advertising, I sample from images I saw while traveling around Senegal. The Senegalese public views these images and they provide much insight into local ideas and attitudes about Senegalese women. My collection of images is a convenience sample, as I draw from imagery I encountered, and within my collection of pictures I choose particularly salient examples to discuss and analyze. However, I had general sampling criteria for choosing images: they needed to 1) be displayed in a public place, such as a street, museum, store, hospital, or website; and 2) depict or discuss Senegalese women in some fashion. Through these criteria I chose a selection of photos and works that pertained to my larger thesis topic.

Content Data: Newspaper Articles

Similarly, I sampled newspaper articles from a variety of papers to construct my arguments. I defined a population of publications that met the following set of criteria: 1) the article must be from a major, internationally-distributed or internationally-accessible newspaper, and 2) the author must have interviewed Senegalese subjects. I then sampled articles by conducting online searches for each topic, using simple, direct language like “polygamy in Senegal” or “pregnancy in Senegal.” I sought to find well-
researched articles grounded in interviews with Senegalese people who could actually comment on the phenomena described in the articles. In some articles by “Western” authors in the United States or Europe, I noticed tinges of xenophobia or exoticism, which became themes. I then tied this perspective into my analysis of colonizer/colonized power structures and how they still exist today. Other articles presented the issues fairly and grounded their reporting in the interviews with Senegalese men and women. I relied on those ones to grow my collection of perspectives; though I was only able to conduct five interviews, through these articles I gained many more comments by Senegalese people. I was also able to analyze and code how Senegalese practices are portrayed in the “Western” media. For opinion articles, which often don’t contain interviews, I used a purposive sampling method to select articles which commented directly on the topic I was searching for. The total population of these articles was much smaller and for some topics my sample contained all the articles I could find on that topic. For example, there were fewer opinion articles on African “overpopulation” or the restitution of museum holdings than there were news articles about those topics. I also made sure to sample some opinion articles in African newspapers without large readership, but which conveyed the perspectives of African authors. These I used to supplement other African perspectives I had gathered through my research about topics like pregnancy, birth control, and marriage.

*Content Data: Law and Policy*

Finally, in order to examine the legal and policy-driven factors behind the control of Senegalese women and their bodies, I analyzed several legal codes and policy reports. I selected the legal documents based on the following criteria: 1) must directly apply to Senegal and affect the lives and abilities of Senegalese people, and 2) must directly affect
and/or reference Senegalese women. I analyzed and open-coded every portion of the *Code Noir*, a 1685 decree by French King Louis XIV laying out precise rules for slavery in the French colonies, that pertains to female slaves. I analyzed portions of the Senegalese Family Code, created in 1982 by the country’s first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, that refer to women. I also analyzed sections of the Senegalese Penal Code that refer specifically to women. As for policy and reports, I analyzed international laws that apply to Senegalese women, such as the Mexico City Policy enacted by President Trump (2017), which restricts funding to international healthcare non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide any sort of abortion services or counseling to women. This means that NGOs are severely limited in their ability to provide care and services to women in developing countries like Senegal. I also analyzed reports on Senegal by bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). These organizations have compiled myriad reports on issues like child marriage, FGM, domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, and female sex trafficking which pertain to or directly focus on Senegal. I selected reports that had at least one section specifically devoted to Senegal and which required the authors to travel to Senegal and conduct research. I assess all of the above materials both for the content they offer and the lens through which they offer it. I used open-coding and axial coding with all materials.

Across all the materials I reviewed, four main themes emerged: historical roots of current oppression, marriage, pregnancy/fertility, and sexuality. Within each of these themes I had a number of specific codes. For example, within the marriage section one code was “fetishization of polygamy” while another was “threat of polygamy used against wife.” For pregnancy/fertility, codes included “breeder image” (after the theory
developed by Collins) and “threat of African overpopulation.” These sorts of codes allowed me to collect diverse sets of data into different thematic and code-based groups, and these groups later became the basis for the outlines of my chapters. I discuss my process of creating the groups in more detail below.

Methodology: Design

For the design of my project, I used a mostly inductive approach. I had a general idea that I would find women were being oppressed and exploited in social, legal, and economic spheres based on my preliminary research, but I wanted to engage many different data sources to see more specific patterns and trends. This allowed me flexibility in guiding the research. I quickly noticed a historical component to much of the literature I was reading and the data I was using; scholars and artists alike traced current barriers for women back to slavery, colonialism, and traditional Senegalese practices. I decided to organize my own study chronologically as well, beginning with the historical roots of the control. Additionally, though my initial plan involved a focus on health as it pertained to reproduction and fertility, I noticed that health outcomes for women were deeply intertwined with social and economic status as well as overall cultural attitudes towards women. I therefore shifted my focus to study female oppression more generally, rooted in control of the body and its reproductive capacities.

Drawing from this inductive approach, that included open and focused coding of data, I arrived at three thematic categories in which Senegalese women experienced oppression based on gender, where control over women’s bodies and reproductive capacities was exercised. These categories were marriage, sexuality, and pregnancy/fertility. Though there are considerable overlaps and connections between
the categories, these were the clearest lines I felt I could draw between the different issues at play. Since I also found a good deal of evidence about the roots of international oppression in slavery and colonialism, I decided to add that as a category as well and begin with that section as a historical introduction to set up the other four categories.

For each section, I reviewed the totality of the evidence I’d gathered in interviews, ethnographic observations, literature, laws, policy, and artistic work that pertained to that subject. I then analyzed those findings for patterns and considered them through the theoretical lenses of intersectionality, racial capitalism, and neocolonialism. I ultimately found that the oppression in each thematic category derived from both domestic and international patriarchal control, and that the tradeoff between the two forces varied based on the topic. For example, international influence is not as prevalent in how issues arising in marriage restrict Senegalese women, as many of these issues are connected to polygamy, a traditional Senegalese practice. However, international law, policy, and historical practices exert a great deal of control over Senegalese women’s options for pregnancy and childbirth. Through all my findings, and by unifying previous research across several fields, I constructed an extended theoretical interpretation of this two-pronged control.

When it came to ethical issues, I had to contend with my positionality as a white American woman studying African women. I belong to a privileged racial group, and I must be constantly aware of that privilege and how it might influence my work and conclusions. Furthermore, I am attempting to understand ways of life and women’s experiences in a country in which I only lived for a month. As such I recognize that my ethnographic observations in particular are inherently limited. However, I believe there is value in both insiders and outsiders studying a group. Insiders can explore
perspectives and offer insight about people and behaviors they understand very deeply, but sometimes miss patterns or significant practices they are accustomed to seeing as commonplace. Their findings are also sometimes open to criticism based on bias towards a group that is very important to them. Conversely, outsiders can offer a new perspective on the behaviors of a group but may be vulnerable to criticism based on misinterpretations or limited understandings of group practices and characteristics. Some scholars have argued that while insiders have a deepened understanding of their communities and easier access to informants, “knowing ‘too much’ about a community or an individual’s circumstances creates bias in the data one collects, and how one interprets it” (Davis and Craven 2016:60). In that situation “being an outsider is advantageous because the researcher is presumed to have more distance and is therefore capable of being more objective” (Davis and Craven 2016:60). This is not necessarily a true dichotomy; people can occupy various degrees of both the insider/outsider identity. I might understand Senegalese women based on our shared womanhood while a Senegalese man would not, and a white Muslim man might understand a Muslim Senegalese woman in ways that I as a white Jewish woman do not. Regardless, it is evident that when it comes to qualitative research, both insider and outsider work are useful in understanding a phenomenon.

There are also inherent drawbacks to conducting qualitative research in sociology and cultural studies, just as there are drawbacks to quantitative research. Qualitative research allows for rich detail and depth but not necessarily breadth or generalizability. I tried to gather a wide variety of data sources and synthesize them to draw conclusions, rather than just speaking from one piece of data per point. However, these conclusions will be limited in their application because I used qualitative methods. Qualitative
research, like all social research, is subjective. To minimize subjectivity, I tried to ground my conclusions in clear implications of the data as much as possible. I also tried to incorporate as many perspectives as possible—for example, gathering newspaper articles with quotes from Senegalese women to supplement my interview data—in order to support each conclusion several times over. This method is commonly known as “triangulation” and is considered stronger than using just one perspective alone.

Interview Guides

I used two interview guides, one for Senegalese women and one for Senegalese health professionals, regardless of their gender. I created English and French translations of both interview guides. I obtained verbal consent to conduct and record the interviews. While conducting the interviews, I used a loose long-form structure where I would ask new questions if the subject brought up an interesting and unexpected topic. I would also eliminate certain pockets of questions if they didn’t apply to the subject. Both guides provided me with a good backbone to get information from the subjects about Senegalese women and the barriers they face.

Interview Guide: Senegalese Health Professionals

English Version:

Background Information
Name:
Age:
Gender:
Nationality/Personal History:
Education:
Work Experience:
Current Employment:
Class Status [ask to explain Senegalese social hierarchy]:
Work in Public Health
In your opinion, what are the main public health challenges facing Senegal?
What is your role in the healthcare system in Senegal?
What are your job responsibilities?
What are some of the projects you’ve worked on?
What population do you generally work with?
What are their biggest needs?
Are there any stories or anecdotes about patients that stick out to you? [do not use names]
What are some difficulties you face working in this job?
What are some difficulties health workers face in Senegal?
What do you feel must be done to make progress?
How did you get interested in this job?
Why do you think it is important?

Colonial Era Influence
As far as you know, how did France’s colonization of Senegal affect health in Senegal?
How did it impact the healthcare system?
How did it impact the government?
Did it affect any specific public health problems in Senegal?
Do you notice any aspects of your current work in public health that you believe can be traced back to French colonialism?
How has public health in Senegal changed since the country gained independence?
What are general attitudes in Senegal about France?

Women in Senegal
Do you work with women in Senegal?
How often?
In what capacity?
What are the ages, socioeconomic statuses, education and living situations of these women?
What are some of your responsibilities when working with them?
In your opinion, what are the main public health challenges regarding women in Senegal?
How are different groups, people, or institutions in Senegal addressing these challenges? (ask for specifics)
What laws or policies do you know of that apply to women and women’s health in Senegal?
What are the main problems women face in Senegal?
Are these different based on the social class of the woman?
- On the area the woman lives?
- On the religion of the woman?
Can you describe some general attitudes or cultural norms about how women should behave?
- Are there any marriage or courting rituals women participate in?
- What is the role of the mother?
- What is the role of the wife?
What is the role of the daughter?

What are some general attitudes about women’s sexual behavior?
- Before marriage?
- During marriage?
- After divorce?
  - How common is divorce?

What are some general attitudes about contraception?
- How prevalent is it?
- Who has access to it?
- What types exist?
- How affordable is it?
- Whose job is it to take care of contraception?
- Are there any traditional methods or rituals women use to prevent pregnancy?
- What is the view of health workers like yourself regarding these rituals?
- How do women learn about their bodies, sex, and contraception?

What are some general attitudes about abortion?
- How prevalent is it?
- Who has access to it?
- Who uses it?
- Are there any laws or policies regarding abortion?

What are some general attitudes about sexually transmitted infections?
- How prevalent are they, as far as you know?

Are there ways of punishing women who are perceived to be too sexually promiscuous?

Are there ways of restricting female sexuality?
- What is the role of female genital cutting?
- How prevalent is it? Where does it take place?
- Do public health workers address it? How so?

How do you think these attitudes about contraception, abortion, and sexual behavior affect women and their status in society?

Have these norms and attitudes changed over time?

Have the laws and policies about women’s health changed over time?

Can you think of any stories or anecdotes about women you’ve worked with that come to mind? [do not use names of women]

What role do you think religion plays in attitudes about women, women’s health, and female sexuality?

How many gynecologists or obstetricians practice in Senegal? Who visits them?

How many doctors are female in Senegal, as far as you’ve observed?

How many healthcare workers are female in Senegal, as far as you’ve observed?

**Pregnancy and Fertility**

Now I want to talk a bit about pregnant women specifically. Do you work with pregnant women?

What are some of the main problems facing pregnant women in Senegal?

How do these problems change based on demographic factors? (class, religion, region)

How accessible is prenatal care for women?

How accessible is a safe birthing environment for women?
Describe a typical pregnancy and birth in a city in Senegal compared to a typical pregnancy and birth in a rural village.

Who assists with births?
What is their training?
Are there any special traditions or rituals women use when they are attempting to get pregnant?
  - During pregnancy?
  - During birth?
  - As they are raising a child?
  - Are there any special objects associated with these rituals?
  - Are there any people with special roles who assist with them?

How is a pregnant woman viewed and treated in Senegal?
Are there any religious beliefs (monotheistic or animistic) that people hold about pregnancy?
Are there any specific stories or anecdotes that come to mind about pregnant women you have worked with? [no names]

Views of Western Medicine and Culture
How much do people in Senegal access Western, American, or French media (movies, TV shows, music, etc.)?
  - Who gets access?
How do Western portrayals of women compare with Senegalese beliefs about women?
Is there any impact Western media has had on how people in Senegal view women?
Does it reinforce or contradict cultural norms?
What role do “Western” medicine and Western health aid organizations play in healthcare in Senegal?
  - How involved are they?
  - Do they give any funds?
  - Which organizations contribute?
  - Do any Western health workers come to Senegal for specific projects?
In your opinion, what do these groups do well?
What do they do poorly?
How do Western workers and groups treat Senegalese people?
  - In the cities?
  - In the villages?
How do people in Senegal react to this aid in both places? Does it differ?
What are the views of Senegalese people towards Americans?
  - Towards the French?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or your work?
Is there anything I should ask about that I have not asked about?
Are there any resources (books, articles, videos, laws, policies) you recommend I use for this project?
What was it like doing this interview?

Interview Guide: Senegalese Women
English Version:

What is your name?
How old are you?
Where are you from?
Can you tell me about the places you’ve lived?
  • How long in each place?
  • What were they like? Did you like them?
What education do you have?
  • Where were you educated?
  • If you have a degree, what was it in?
Do you work? If so, what do you do for work?
  • How long have you been doing that?
  • Do you enjoy it? Is there something else you want to do?
  • How much money do you make?
  • [if they don’t want to answer] Do you make as much money as you want to make?
What is your religious background?
Are you married?
  • If so, how long have you been married?
  • What is your spouse like?
  • What is his job?
  • What is your marriage like?
  • If no, do you want to be married?
Do you have any children?
  • Names, ages, etc.
  • What are your children like?
  • Is your family close?
  • What do you like to do together?
Where do you live now?
  • Describe your home.
  • Describe your neighborhood.
  • Describe your community.
Are you religious? What are your religious beliefs?
  • Do you identify with any group or church?
  • Do you go to any religious services?
  • How long have you been religious?
Now I want to ask you a bit more about your children. What was it like to be pregnant with them?
  • Was the experience easy? Difficult?
  • Did you have any health complications during any of the pregnancies?
  • Did you have doctor’s appointments? What were those like?
  • Did you take any medicines or supplements?
  • What was it like to interact with the doctors, nurses, and other health employees while you were pregnant?
  • Do you think you were treated differently from other pregnant women for any reason?
I also want to ask about any special rituals or activities you do while pregnant. Do you have any rituals that you do while you are pregnant?

- Are there any rituals that women you know do while they are pregnant?
- Are there any rituals that you do before, during, or after birth?
- Is there anything special you do when you're trying to get pregnant? Does that make it more likely that you will get pregnant?
- What about when you're raising children? Do you have any special rituals or ceremonies?
- How did you learn about these rituals? Is there anyone you do them with? Do you know if your mother or family did them when you were younger?
- Do your doctors know about any of these rituals? If they do, how do they react?
- Do your doctors help you with any rituals during birth?
- Are your doctors Senegalese, or do they come from other places?
- Do you generally have male or female doctors?

Do you use any contraception?

- What do you use?
- Is it easy to access contraception?
- How did you learn about it?
- Do women in Senegal generally get access to contraception?
- Are there any special rituals or activities you (or others) do to prevent pregnancy?
- Are there any cultural attitudes about menstruation here in Senegal?

What do you use when you are menstruating?

- Do you have access to menstrual hygiene products? Where?
- How did you learn about menstruation?
- Does menstruation ever prevent you from working or doing any activities?
- Do you think women in Senegal generally have access to menstrual hygiene products?
- Are there any special rituals, activities, or remedies you do during menstruation?
- Are there any cultural attitudes about menstruation here in Senegal?

Now I want to ask you a bit about being a woman in Senegal. Do you feel you are treated differently because you are a woman?

- Are there any rules or expectations that are different for you?
- How do you think you are supposed to act around men?
- Do you act differently around men and women?
- How do you feel about that?
- Did your parents or teachers teach you anything about how a woman should act?
- Did they teach you anything about your body?
- How did you learn about your body?
- How do you feel about your body?

Is there anything else you want to share about any of these experiences?
Is there anything else I should ask about that I didn’t cover?
What was it like to be interviewed about this topic?
References


Bop, Codou. 2010. “Ch. 9: ‘I killed her because she disobeyed me in wearing this new hairstyle...’: Gender-Based Violence, Laws, and Impunity in Senegal.” In Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa (ed. by Emily S. Burrill et al.).


American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.


Guilbert, Kieran. 2017. “Senegal’s youth tackle sex taboos in bid to boost contraceptive
use.” *Reuters.* Web.


Heing, Bridey. 2018. “Behind the scenes, Mike Pence’s quiet push to end abortion and limit women’s rights is succeeding.” *Mic.* Web.


Hogenboom, Melissa. 2016. “Polyamorous relationships may be the future of love.” *BBC.* Web.


Kane, Coumba. 2018. « Au Sénégal, la polygamie ne rebute plus les femmes instruites. »


Mackintosh, Eliza. 2018. “The Me Too movement was silent in Senegal. These women are trying to change that.” CNN. Web.
Moudileno, Lydie. 2006. « Femme nue, femme noire : tribulations d’une Vénus. »


The Economist. 2018. “‘Babies are lovely, but…’: Africa’s high birth rate is keeping the continent poor.” The Economist. Web.


Web.