

## Politics, gender and youth citizenship in Senegal: youth policing of dissent and diversity

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### Abstract

This paper reports on empirical research on Youth as Active Citizens in Senegal with specific reference to their education and sexual and reproductive health rights. In a context of postcoloniality which claims to have privileged secular, republican understandings of the constitution, we draw upon case study data to illuminate how youth activists sustained patriarchal, metropolitan views of citizenship and reinforced ethnic and locational (urban/rural) hierarchies.

Our analysis is based on a case study of youth's active citizenship, as reflected in youth engagement in the recent presidential elections in Senegal. This included involvement in youth protests against pre-election constitutional abuse and in a project monitoring the subsequent elections using digital technologies. We compare how youth activists enacted different notions of citizenship, in some instances involving a vigorous defence of Senegal's democratic constitution, while in others dismissing this as being irrelevant to youth concerns. Here we make an analytic distinction between youth's engagement in *politics*, seen as the public sphere of constitutional democracy, and the *political*, which we relate to the inherently conflictual and agonistic processes through which (youth) identities are policed, in ways that may legitimate or marginalize. Despite the frequent construction of youth as being agents of change, this analysis shows how potentially productive and open spaces for active citizenship were drawn towards conformity and the reproduction of existing hegemonies, in particular through patriarchal gender relations and sexual norms within which female youth remained particularly vulnerable.

Key Words: Citizenship; Youth; Politics; Gender; Sexuality; Human rights

### Introduction

This paper draws upon on empirical research conducted in 2012 on Youth as Active Citizens in Senegal with reference to their education and sexual and reproductive health rights. The

research was commissioned by an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) whose interest in citizenship was linked to their adoption of a ‘rights-based approach’ to their work. The research included three case studies of INGO activities in Senegal, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Pakistan. The first author conducted the Senegal case study; the second author was the principal investigator. Focusing on the Senegal case, we explore the ways that potentially productive and open spaces for active citizenship were configured in ways that encouraged conformity and the reproduction of existing hegemonies, rather than opening up more diverse possibilities for citizenship.

The paper begins with a brief exploration of the intersection of the concepts of youth, citizenship and gender, as framed by a post-colonial context that has historically privileged republican understandings of the constitution. This section also addresses the feminist theoretical frameworks through which politics and identity production are understood. This includes feminist critiques of the ideal of the universal citizen, in particular for its misrecognition of its gendered, masculine norms. After an overview of the Senegalese socio-political context, we then describe the research methodology and methods, before turning to our case study analysis. Here we compare how different youth activists enacted different notions of citizenship, which reflected contrasting understandings of politics and the political, following the distinction made by Mouffe (2005). In particular, we explore how these different understandings of citizenship tended to police, silence and de-legitimate other diverse citizen voices.

### **Intersections of gender, youth and citizenship**

Firstly, who are ‘youth’? The category typically revolves around age relations, although definitions vary. The African Youth Charter (2006) defines youth as aged between 15 and 35 years, while the United Nations confines the group to young people between 15 and 24 (UN 1995). This latter definition was used by the commissioning INGO and was therefore taken up within this research. Intertwined with the contingencies of age relations, youth as a category sits somewhat ambiguously in opposition to alternative concepts, such as the ‘child’, or the ‘adult’. Like those concepts, and the concept of the universal citizen, it *seems* gender-neutral. It does not enjoy the aura of innocence of childhood, nor does it necessarily bring assumptions of maturity which might be associated with adulthood. Instead, youth can potentially be associated with risk-taking, irresponsibility and resistance to authority. Overall, the category resonates with hybridity and liminality - youth have an indeterminable ‘in-between’ status.

While youth numbers as a percentage of the world population have been falling, this masks their increasing concentration in the Global South. UNESCO (2012) also demonstrates the continuing severity of youth equity and inequality issues – e.g. with respect to education and to employment, one in five youth have not completed primary education, and one in six are unemployed. Critiquing development agency responses to these inequities, Herrera and Bayat (2010:356) highlight youth's positioning as objects of programmes and how these instrumentalise youth engagement to serve purposes of 'political containment, ideological monitoring and economic reform'.

Turning to citizenship, North-South relations are also integral to the intersecting boundaries of belonging which discourses of citizenship invoke in post-colonial contexts, particularly as these are often framed now within rights-based approaches to development. However, quite outside of development contexts, many feminist writers (e.g. Mouffe 1992; Pateman 1988; Yuval-Davies 1997) have questioned the masculinist ontologies and epistemologies embedded in the universalistic assumptions of the citizen within modern democracies. Their critique includes how these privilege the strong individualism of the autonomous subject, assumed to be male, with women confined to private sphere, although still the symbolic carriers of the values of the nation. The relevance of the nation state may have changed in our contemporary globalised world, with some 'unbundling' of the relationship of the citizen to nationhood generating discussions around the possibilities of 'postnational' forms of citizenship. However Sassen still points out that 'in most of the world, human rights are enforced through national law or not at all' (2006:309).

Sassen (2006) also helpfully calls for more attention to the complexities of these dynamics within Third World contexts, including how they might intersect with the dominant discourses of development. As mentioned above, these now include what has come to be known as a 'rights-based approach' to development. In critiquing this, Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2005) stress that rights issues were always central to the struggles of colonised peoples, although they acknowledge that this reframing may support a re-politicisation of development and a 'more genuinely inclusive and democratic process of popular involvement in decision making' (p.14). Given their supranational origins, these discourses must nevertheless be scrutinised for their alignment with neo-colonial imperatives, for example, in the ways they might project late modern understandings of the self. These construct individuals as sole authors of their biographies, in ways that deflect responsibilities for life choices to the individual, but effectively strip out attention to structures such as class,

ethnicity and gender through which life trajectories are shaped. Writing from a feminist perspective from the Global South, Grewal (1999) finds human rights discourses to retain 'linear notions of progress' within which the South is constructed as the 'Other', waiting to benefit from the human rights that are supposedly the preserve of the North. Along with others (e.g. Kabeer 2002; Charrad 2007; Mamdani 1996), she questions how discourses of individual rights might work in contexts where state law jostles with a multiplicity of family or customary laws, in 'multi-scalar' legal systems in which gender again works as a critical differentiating structure (Nash 2012).

In developing such systems, colonial powers played a critical role. Having excluded the great majority of indigenous populations from citizenship rights, Mamdani (1996) describes how colonial powers fostered dual legal codes which reserved the civil code for the minority, and ruled colonized peoples as subjects, through 'customary law'. Favoured ethnic groups were drawn upon to implement this, so that they sat in jurisdiction over other indigenous groups. Rather than fulfilling any 'civilising mission', these practices reified and consolidated the reach of customary law, while at the same time producing hierarchical relations and differences between communities, ethnic groups, and religious belief systems.

This clearly differs substantially from the separation of public and private spheres which has been predicated as a characteristic of Western democracies. Focusing on women's citizenship in the Middle East, where customary and personal law is also prevalent, Joseph (1996) highlights how many constitutional regimes bind together civil society, state, market and family, completely subverting this supposed separation, and ensuring that women's rights as citizens are mediated through their roles as mothers and wives, as dependents of men and wider kinship systems. Joseph (1996) further highlights the ways that customary and personal law can be devolved to religious laws of different kinds, often compounding restrictions on women's rights. Her critique of patriarchy (and matriarchy) and their entanglement with religious laws is also important for youth citizenship, as age relations subordinate them to their seniors, both male and female.

In conclusion, the putative separation of the public and the private spheres in the construction of citizenship, as well as the separation of religion and government, become doubly problematic in post-colonial contexts where kinship relations remain significant. Their intricate intersections clearly demand close attention to the particularities of each context. By drawing upon case study data analysed from a poststructural feminist theoretical position, we

seek to attend to the multiple axes of identification that are relevant for youth's citizenship, and the ways these intersect with gendered structures of differentiation and stratification, of which the public/private binary is a product. This involves a decentred rather than stable understanding of the subject, as well as a performative understanding of gender – in Butler's words, 'gender is always doing, although not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed' (Butler 1990:34).

However, given that this 'doing' is constituted within socially-instituted norms of practice and intelligibility, issues of identity and what identities can be read as legitimate in any particular context become inherently political. This is all the more so given that their construction is read as a naturalised 'facticity', rather than '*effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple points of origin' (p.xxxi). In other words:

(t)he deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated.

(Butler 1990:203)

This understanding of the political resists the separation of private and public spheres of modern democracy and sees both spheres as spaces of active citizenship. It stands in strong contrast to republican traditions of citizenship, which uphold an abstract ideal of the citizen, refusing recognition to all 'particularisms', such as ethnic, religious, regional, or sexual identities. As shown below, sharp distinctions emerged between different youth's understandings of how one should engage in the public sphere of representational democracy, and also over what might be legitimate spaces of active citizenship. The distinctions themselves demonstrated the inherently political nature of youth citizenship, irrespective of whether this was conceptualised within or outside of the formal spheres of democratic politics.

To take our analysis of these citizenship practices forward, we draw on Mouffe (2005), who distinguishes between 'politics' and 'the political' in the following way:

by 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human co-existence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political. (Mouffe 2005:9)

In other words, 'the political' relates to the conflictual discursive processes through which our identity constructions are produced, regulated and policed, in the ways described above by Butler (1990). Rather than being in a mutually exclusive relationship, this understands the doing of politics as always infused by 'the political' – so that for example a youth denial that sexual and reproductive health rights might be relevant to 'politics', is nevertheless deeply political, in Mouffe's sense that it involves the policing of boundaries, in inherently conflictual and agonistic ways.

Mouffe (2005) highlights how such understandings challenge the dominant constructions of the individual and the ordering of society that are assumed within (western) liberal and neo-liberal thought. In other words, liberalism takes for granted an understanding of the self as a rational, autonomous being. Rationality is also central in the ordering of society; liberalism assumes the possibility and desirability of universal consensus through rational, public deliberation. Mouffe highlights how these individualist and rationalist propensities can 'foreclose' acknowledgement of alternative collective identities – rather than acknowledging the plurality of our social worlds, it is supposed that these can (and should) be subsumed through rational consensus in a 'harmonious and non-conflicting ensemble' (p.10). Her conclusion is therefore that liberalism has an inherent tendency to deny the antagonistic dimensions of the political. She also suggests how this inherent inability to deal with conflictual political relations can mean that adversaries are seen in terms of 'friend/enemy' relations (for example in the 'war on terror'), leading to the negation of the possibility of dialogue with groups who become constructed in such a way.

Turning to contemporary theories of reflexive modernity, she critiques these for not addressing power relations or inequalities. She also finds they do not address the agonistic elements of the political, despite the emergence of individual 'life-style politics', which is accompanied by a diminution in the relevance of collective identities (e.g. state or class-based identifications), and of the sphere of politics itself. Mouffe's analysis needs to be recognised as focusing largely on politics in the Global North. In the analysis of youth's active citizenship in Senegal presented below, the denial of the political as well as the relevance of politics was nevertheless central, although also rather problematically conjoined with strong national identifications.

## **The Senegal context**

Senegal is categorised as a lower middle income country, despite its fragile economy. World Bank (2013) reports that 46.7% of its population live below the national poverty line (57.1% in rural contexts). Like many African countries, its population is young – the average age is 22 and 65% are below the age of 25.

Senegal gained its independence from French West Africa in 1960. Although spoken by only around 20% of the population as a first or second language, French was retained as the official language of education and government (Diallo 2010). Wolof is the first language of around two thirds of the population, and the second language for a further quarter. Diallo (2010) links its spread to the success in commerce of Islamic brotherhoods during colonial times – 95% of the population are of Islamic faith, the arrival of Islam in West Africa having preceded the colonial époque, but also becoming more powerful as a result of it. From the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the spread of Islam was associated with Sufist brotherhoods such as the Qadiriyya, the Tijaniyya, and the Mourides, an order founded in Senegal in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. When France realised the advantages of a dual legal system involving customary rule in the 1920s, the Mourides became important local intermediaries. They reportedly commanded great popular respect, instilling the values of authority, discipline and hard work through the *dara*. Initially involving a farming community of young men working for the sheikh, this came to include Koranic education (Mamdani 1986). Thus Islam, kinship, and customary law became intricately bound together. Although after independence Senegal developed a single national code from a host of customary laws, the resultant Family Law, passed in 1972, is reported to have neither displaced these nor improved the situation for women. Having required the support of prominent Muslim leaders of the time, it instead stands critiqued for having installed a patriarchal code which disadvantaged women further in comparison to indigenous (pre-Islamic) customs (Camara 2007).

Despite these inequities, Senegal is seen as having a more mature democracy than many African countries – almost uniquely in Africa, since gaining independence from France in 1960, transfer of power has taken place without military coups. Under Senghor's leadership, Senegal proclaimed a commitment to secular republican government. Despite the influence of Islamic leaders (see above), political parties were constitutionally barred from appealing to racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender or regional identities. From a recent interview study, Hartman (2010) still suggests that ethnic/linguistic identifications are unimportant in Senegalese politics. However others have pointed to political party fragmentation and



proliferation during Wade's presidencies (2000-2012), producing a 'hyper-personalisation' of power (Mbow 2008). Hartman (2010) also recognises the overt politicisation of Wade's relations with different Sufist brotherhoods.

The political context in Senegal had nevertheless been turbulent. In June 2011, its then President (Abdoulaye Wade) sought constitutional change to ensure his re-election for a third term. Discontent was rife, related to concerns about transparency of public finances, high taxes, higher education and schooling systems, electricity shortages, youth under-employment and constitutional irregularities (e.g. Wade made his son a government minister and attempted to make him vice-president). As when Wade had come to power (Dioff 1996), youth were prominent in resisting abuses, notably through the critique emanating from Senegal's hip-hop culture, in particular from the rapper group '*Y'en a Marre*'. Although principally representing the voices of disenfranchised young men (rather than women), Fredericks (2013:7) describes them as disrupting Senegal's 'strongly hierarchical age-power system' and usurping 'gerontocratic traditions of public discourse'. The rappers also joined forces with *Mouvement 23 (M23)*, a broad protest group which coalesced against constitutional abuse, as suggested by its slogan '*Touche Pas à Ma Constitution*' (*Hands Off my Constitution*). Although street protests and constitutional abuses both seemed to threaten Senegal's democracy, Wade accepted defeat by Macky Sall in the presidential elections in March 2012. Sall's coalition then won a large majority in legislative elections in July 2012. Thus, the case study took place when democratic election processes had narrowly prevailed against the previous president's 'monarchical' ambitions, and many were looking to the new government to introduce reforms.

### **Research Methodology and Research Methods**

The research adopted a case study approach, involving a two week visit to Senegal in October 2012. Case study was particularly appropriate given the ways it favours in-depth attention to the singularities of the research context which in turn provide fertile opportunities for theoretical explorations of rich data sets (Flybjerg 2001; Ragin and Becker 1992). This approach also aligns with the post-structural theoretical position outlined above (Butler 1990; Mouffe 1992), which demand close attention to the intricacies and particularities of the conflictual discursive formations within which different identity positions are rendered intelligible, and which frame the liminal becomings of youth as citizens. It also aligns with the understandings of politics and the political described above (Mouffe 2005).

Research methods included documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews with INGO managers, directors of projects which had enjoyed the INGO's support, and local leaders, and focus groups with youth who had been involved in these projects, in many cases as peer educators. In total, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with adult respondents (involving 10 male and 3 female participants), and eight youth focus groups (involving 40 male and 29 female respondents).

Prior to the field visits the researchers developed interview schedules for use across the different research contexts. Questions addressed participants' experiences of the projects and activities they had been involved in, why and how they had become involved, how they had been supported in their involvement, challenges and obstacles they had faced, including obstacles that might have been experienced by particular groups of youth (e.g. by gender, ethnicity, religious identification). They also addressed youth rights, probing youth's awareness of their different rights and whether these were important to them.

The INGO identified the partners whom they had supported in developing different projects that had some relationship to the different strands of the research. In this context, the key partner was an alternative education provider (AEP) who had received funding for over ten years for its programme for alternative education for school drop-outs. The INGO had also supported the AEP's delivery of a youth HIV/AIDS education project and their contribution to a recent election monitoring project (see also below). Although they were not INGO partners, focus groups were also held with M23 members in Dakar, Tambacounda and Kédougou. It is clarified here that although the INGO had a strong interest in youth citizenship as part of their development of a rights-based approach, the different projects which they had funded spanned different timeframes, rather than being designed from the outset as a single programme cohering around youth citizenship, within which youth rights to education and to sexual and reproductive health were necessarily central (in particular the latter).

The research visits were planned to explore youth perspectives in both metropolitan and rural areas. In addition to investigating projects supported by the INGO in Dakar and its periphery, fieldwork was conducted in Tambacounda and Kédougou, two sparsely-populated regions in the south of Senegal which were rich in mineral resources, although with minimal returns to the regions in terms of evident development of resources and infrastructure. As in Dakar,

demonstrations had broken out there before the elections, but earlier eruptions of civil unrest had also occurred.

Youth participation was built into the conduct of the research at the INGO's behest. They recruited two youth researchers (YRs), one male and one female. Both were completing their first year of university in Dakar. They had completed their schooling through the AEP and had participated in its HIV/AIDS education project and its election monitoring project. Like the majority of Senegalese, both were Muslim. Both accompanied the first author throughout fieldwork and shared in the conduct of focus groups. They spoke Wolof and French, so were able to interpret for non-French speaking respondents (the researcher spoke French but not Wolof). The YRs were highly interactive in the research, and indeed often contributed as if research respondents. So their involvement made the research processes particularly productive in illuminating the performance of citizenship, rather than only producing data about youth citizenship. When interacting with the focus group participants, the directions they took their questions, their provocations and challenges, with their associated gender dynamics and power relations also illuminated youth's doing of citizenship. Throughout the fieldwork, the informal interactions between the two YRs and with the researcher gave valuable further insights into the focus group and interview encounters. Finally, both YRs were asked to write a 'research diary'; although a relatively summarised account, this added a further layer of data. The researcher also kept a detailed field diary throughout the research visit.

With the permission of respondents, interviews were recorded and partially translated/transcribed. The analysis processes were iterative, involving re-reading of field notes and revisiting of the recordings, interrogating these thematically in relation to the research questions and interview schedule questions. As a result of initial re-readings, partial although copious transcripts of key sections were developed by the researcher, to support further re-reading and analysis. Fieldnotes and the transcripts were then used to identify critical incidents which were particularly intriguing, and demanded further interrogation and theorisation (MacLure 2010). Extracts from the transcripts and the fieldnotes are used to illustrate the analysis. Excerpts are given in English, except where metaphoric relations were involved, when the French transcription is given alongside the first author's translation. In taking forward the data analysis and selection of key moments presented below, the intensity of the focus group and wider interactions during fieldwork was important, as were the

differentiations made by participants, which are considered as described above through the lens of politics and the political, following Mouffe (2005).

### **Politics and youth citizenship: the policing of diversity and dissent**

The sections below draw on focus group and observation data to illuminate the contradictory ways in which youth citizenship and its relation to politics was understood and enacted, and the ways this worked to police youth diversity. It begins with AEP youth's participation in the electronic election monitoring project and the ways this encouraged conformity with existing hegemonies. It then considers youth's construction of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) with respect to politics, while simultaneously illuminating youth's agency in being political in the face of powerful patriarchal gender regimes. Finally, the paper turns to the policing and silencing of difference, focusing on ethnic and urban/rural hierarchies.

### **Youth Engagement in Politics: suppression of the political?**

The focus group with AEP youth showed that their participation in the electronic monitoring project was an important dimension of their recent citizenship activities. The project been supported by many different civil society organisations, including the AEP. It involved the development of a country-wide network of election observers who sent SMS messages about voting processes to a control room in Dakar, where an electronic map visualized this data, allowing rapid identification of any procedural irregularities. Youth educated by the AEP, including both YRs, had participated in this control centre. The project was widely praised for having demonstrated the proper conduct of Senegal's election processes and giving legitimacy to the result. Within this same project, AEP youth had also worked as peer educators to develop youth's awareness of voting practices.

Youth's enthusiastic discourses about this project refuted stereotypical constructions of youth as irresponsible, immature or lacking in values, as well as showing the continuing importance of collective, national (rather than post-national) citizenship, contradictory constructions of age relations, and elements of neo-liberal individuation and responsabilisation. For example, during the focus group, AEP youth were asked why they had taken part in the election monitoring project, this was explained as follows:

*Quite simply because we are Senegalese. And particularly as our elders (supérieurs) had expressed concern that Senegal was sliding towards civil war, they wanted to avoid that. And to avoid that, they preferred that it was youth themselves who did conscience-raising with other youth. [...] We wanted to participate in this. We were*

*best placed to talk to our peers, including in the areas and suburbs where there had been violence. As well as defending Senegal, it was an advantage for us to participate in the development of the country - this also allowed us to gain a certificate as an observer. [...] So we talked to other youth [about the election processes], we wanted to make them feel responsible (les responsabiliser), because the development of the country depends on youth. [...] It was also about me being responsible (pour me responsabiliser), so that for me, everywhere that I go, I show that you can be young, but you can be responsible too. We participated as patriots, because [our educators/AEP] have always taught us to be responsible, [...] to participate in the development of our country. (AEP female focus group)*

As the quotation also shows, AEP youth were proud that the elections had been concluded without Senegal descending into civil war – they contrasted this with the situation in Mali, the Congo, and Nigeria. Their strong concern was for the peaceful conduct of the elections; there was no discussion of the outcomes (i.e. its politics). This reflected an important strand in the AEP’s citizenship education. In addition to respect for existing social and family values, this stressed ‘communication techniques’ aiming at the non-violent resolution of conflict, as reflected also in the election monitoring project’s emphasis on the peaceful mediation of the election processes. While laudable at many levels, this nevertheless acted to constrain youth’s engagement in party political activities (i.e. in politics). Indeed, an AEP management figure described the election monitoring project’s conception as an alternative to this (*instead of saying I will join a political party, our youth said no, we create a citizenship programme*). Similarly, when asked about any association with a political party, youth were categorical in repudiating this (*we knew that if we had any political affiliation, we would invalidate the project –AEP focus group*). These youth were clearly proud of having maintained a politically-neutral, independent stance, and of having kept any views they might have held to themselves. Returning to Mouffe (2005), we can see in this how the privileging of consensus led to a denial of the antagonistic aspects of the political (understood by Mouffe as a constitutive dimension of human relations), to the extent that these youth saw open deliberation to be foreclosed from their ‘active’ citizenship, and their involvement in politics. Thus, while the project contributed usefully to youth’s understanding of election procedures, this did not support youth in being political in their approach to politics. Indeed at one point the male YR (who had participated in the AEP project as a peer educator), *‘one cannot fight against the state, they are all-powerful (on peut pas lutter contre l’état, ils détiennent tous les*

*pouvoirs*). The YR's confrontation with the youth of M23 in the focus group in Dakar further illuminated different understandings of politics, as well as the construction of important concerns as lying outside of this. Many of the M23 focus group had been involved in demonstrations against constitutional abuse. Demonstrations required state permission and only recognised organisations could apply for this. In this way, the state could create a situation where the exercise of the right of free assembly and free speech was rendered illegal within its jurisdiction. M23 persisted, but demonstrators were confronted by police in riot gear, resulting in several deaths. AEP youth held strong views about those who had, from their perspective, provoked violence by encouraging young people to continue street protests. Thus, when M23 focus group participants (all of them university students, mostly in later years of study than the YRs) were explaining their role in organising demonstrations against Wade, voicing open criticism of his constitutional abuse, both YRs abandoned the interview schedule and began to address participants using language such as '*what I deplore is..*' (focus group transcript). In our post-interview debrief immediately afterwards, the male YR expressed anger at one female respondent, saying '*elle me faisait de la politique, elle essayait de me convaincre, elle n'a pas le droit de faire ça*' (*she was arguing politics with me, trying to win me over - she has no right to do that*) (researcher field notes). Alongside issues in the conduct of a research interview, from a citizenship perspective, this seems to contradict rights to free speech (which M23 respondents invoked in response to YRs' criticisms). However, rather than seeing it legitimate to contest the state and its refusal to allow peaceful assembly, the YRs both clearly felt that M23 were in the wrong. While clearly passionate about their country, the AEP YRs over-riding concern was for consensus and the peaceful conduct of the elections, which led to a denial of the antagonistic elements of politics; for them, youth involvement in politics was reduced to a procedural compliance with state jurisdictions, stripped of any notion of the political (Mouffe 2005).

### **Politics and the political: constructing absences around gender and sexuality**

A key differentiation made in this focus group also illuminated the positioning of gender and sexuality in relation to politics. During the heated discussions of the M23 focus group, the female YR made a strong distinction between the involvement in politics (*le volet politique*) and things that were of *real* concern to youth, a distinction that was also reflected in her YR diary. From the focus group transcript, these concerns were listed as youth unemployment, incest, youth indiscipline, irresponsibility, rape, sexual abuse – M23 were asked why their focus was only on politics, rather than these more important issues. M23 agreed these were

important, and that they were in discussion about their post-election priorities, *without* however challenging the opposition of politics and such concerns. Given the interest in sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) in the research, the articulation of issues such as incest, rape and sexual abuse as being outside of politics is remarkable, but may relate to a republican construction of citizenship which would abhor any ‘particularities’, coupled with youth disaffection from the machinations of politics (*la politique politicienne*) as ‘contaminated’ and ‘based on money’ (male YR exit interview).

We now turn to the consequences of the separation of these issues from politics, illuminated by the gendered politics of YRs’ daily practices and interview conduct. Although discourses of international rights (e.g. UDHR) were familiar to respondents and the YRs, when youth’s lived experiences were in play, disjunctures quickly emerged. These illuminated intense contradictions with respect to the rights of women to education and their role within the family, indicative of a powerfully hetero-normative gender regime which constructed (young) women in dependent, domestic roles. As an illustration of this, in an interview involving a male project director and two other project participants, one male and one female, the respondents were asked what the most important issues were confronting youth. The male project director (who identified himself and his project team as ‘youth’) raised having paid employment, rather than unpaid voluntary work. Although possibly provocatively, the male participant suggested to the female YR that she would marry and therefore this was not important to her (*c’est l’homme qui va gérer/it’s the man who’ll be in charge*). Although she responded furiously ‘*I have the right to a good education, at university and not just school, and to a good job afterwards, with a good salary*’, a male respondent then questioned her about the balance of power in her household and if this would be equal (*faire le 50/50*). Although not challenging the implicit assumption of the inevitability of marital relations, her affirmative response was met with a dismissive male rejoinder about her hopes of gender equality.

The research also showed that discussions of sexuality were highly sensitive and again constructed within patriarchal family relations, which intersected with religious and ethnic identities. Sexuality emerged consistently across the interviews as a taboo subject between parents/elders and children. As one example, in the AEP focus group, a female youth, who had been active in their HIV/AIDS programme and had participated in conferences on this topic, reported not daring to let her mother know about these activities. Another senior male respondent described his own complicity in this taboo, although realising this only when his

unmarried daughter had become pregnant and had told him (in tears) that he had never talked to her about these things.

Surrounded by such silences, the home was nevertheless identified as a potential site of sexual abuse - the power of family relations meant that victims had few sources of wider recourse (*c'est réglé à l'amiable, parce-que c'est la famille/it's sorted out amicably, because it's the family (female YR)*). Instead of support, girls could find themselves accused of having loose morals, or of having provoked the assault. Female youth also reported having been insulted and accused of being sexually active when giving workshops on contraception. Somewhat problematically therefore, although the difficulties of speaking to parents about sexuality was a key rationale for using peer educators within the HIV/AIDS programme, youth educators (especially girls) were vulnerable to vilification when doing such work.

While youth were constructed as agents of change, or gateways to influencing family or institutional behaviours, a range of respondents also described a wider wall of silence enveloping the topic of sexuality and sexual and reproductive health across commercial, political and religious spheres. A youth who had tackled SRH issues through video blogging pointed out how senior figures much better positioned than him would not engage in public with topics related to sexuality. A senior NGO administrator also bemoaned the lack of high level political engagement, seeing '*le poids de la religion/the weight of religion*' as influencing decision-makers. Although intensely political in the conflictual and agonistic ways that Mouffe (2005) describes, and also in the Butlerian sense (i.e. in the ways that all identity construction necessarily involves an entanglement and possible conflict with socially-instituted norms of intelligibility), youth's SRH work was therefore constructed in the margins of what was intelligible, leaving female youth particularly vulnerable.

### **Republican citizenship: silencing differences**

Despite the ways that republican traditions of citizenship disregard, and indeed revile, 'particularisms' as part of their elevation of the norm of the universalist citizen, the research was also concerned to explore the experiences of minority ethnic youth. Although Hartman (2010) did not find ethnicity important in Senegalese politics, ethnic hierarchies did emerge from the focus group conduct and data. An elite youth respondent signalled the existence of multiple terms of denigration in Wolof for other ethnic/linguistic groups (e.g. *niak/lakakat*) and at one point one of the YRs glossed an interview question about how experiences might differ for different ethnic groups, adding a particular example (*les Peulhs*), but also tellingly



accompanying this with a derogatory chuckle. However, even where the question was put more openly, most respondents did not (or would not) identify ethnic differences.

Differences between metropolitan and rural communities were identified however, sometimes by respondents in Dakar but repeatedly during the research visits to Tambacounda and Kédougou. In addition to being critical of the duration of our fieldwork in their regions (the research processes therefore contributed to centre/margin relations), respondents in both these locations expressed a strong sense of their marginalisation and distance from the metropolitan centre – they were aware that having courted their votes during the election, politicians now seemed to have disappeared. A feeling of being disregarded by the state resonated through the Tambacounda and Kédougou focus groups – although respondents still looked to national and local government to address their regional needs – e.g. to develop better education and health provision, transport and communications infrastructures, and to address security concerns. At the same time, part of their concerns was the state’s non-enforcement of its sovereignty in mining areas on Senegal’s borders, given that immigrants of many different nationalities had *‘invaded’* these areas, without any response from Senegalese authorities. Although we did not visit these mining areas, which one respondent described as *‘un monde à part/another world’* with social issues that *‘crèvent l’oeil/hit you in the face’*, contested national exclusions and belongings were clearly involved, which implicated further layers of marginalisation. Thus, within the prevailing universalist notion of the citizen, in these examples there were nevertheless clear social hierarchies marked by ethnicity and location.

### **Youth policing of diversity and dissent**

The participation of the YRs in the research processes therefore provided vivid illustrations of youth citizenship in action, and how this was fraught with tensions and contradictions, in which gender remains a principal structure of differentiation, as illuminated by many feminist researchers (Charrad 2007; Mouffe 1992; Yuval Davis 1997). Contrary to UNESCO’s (2013) optimistic construction of youth as agents of change, and in opposition to the transgressive youth voice emanating from Senegal’s hip-hop culture (Fredericks 2013), youth’s active citizenship in this context worked to police and regulate diversity and dissent. Conjoined with the desire to demonstrate their responsibility and maturity, countering stereotypical constructions of youth identities, youth’s active citizenship was readily channelled towards procedural rather than an overtly political engagement with politics. While suggesting the continuing relevance of national identity in youth’s citizenship, a depoliticised but dominant concern for non-violent resolution of conflict constrained the AEP youth respondents’

engagement in politics, encouraging them to consider this to be a private issue. Bizarrely, turning around the feminist rallying cry (the personal is political), the political was made personal. As Mouffe (2005) suggests, the privileging of consensus-building proved to be deeply inimical to the antagonistic dimensions of the political, although this was rather problematically conjoined with strong national identifications. In their active citizenship, youth could thus become the police of other youth, regulating diversity and dissent in multiple ways. Firstly, they regulated those who were contesting the abuse of state power. Secondly, youth's active citizenship could also construct gender and sexual and reproductive health as being outside the sphere of politics, in ways that rendered youth complicit in the wider public silence that enveloped these issues and compliant with a patriarchal gender regime. Thirdly, the research also illuminated youth's production of centre/margin relations with respect to ethnic and regional diversity.

In considering what counts as political, the confinement of 'politics' to participation in the formal arena of constitutional politics could have been shaped by traditional republican discourses associated with the history of the development of Senegal's constitution in the post-colonial period – which at its inception had attempted to debar attention to regional, ethnic and religious identities. Even if the abstract, universalist ideal of the citizen has been shown to be full of contradictions, this view of citizenship will perpetuate the marginalisation of regional and ethnic minority identities, as well as sustaining the exclusion of the 'particularisms' of gender and sexuality from the sphere of institutional politics.

Nevertheless, while apparently in tension with the republican, 'secular' ideal, it was clear that the political and religious spheres were closely bound together, reflecting the long-standing influence of Senegal's Sufist brotherhoods. Butler (2008) illuminates well the 'impurities' of secularism in different contexts of the Global North and how, despite claims to the contrary, dominant religious discourses are often in play, resulting in the exclusion of religious and other minorities. In this context, the paradoxical intersection of a secular republican ethos with the prevailing Islamic discourses was producing a deep silence around SRH issues, and contributing to the reproduction of patriarchal and hetero-normative gender and sexuality regimes. As Charrad (2007) shows, there is no one way that Islam is interpreted and incorporated within family codes; this demands close attention to particular social and historical contexts. However it seemed that the development of a national Family Code may have complicated the situation for Senegalese women (and girls), by overlaying customary laws with a more Islamicised and patriarchal code. There were numerous reports of sexual

and reproductive health practices which would seem to contravene international conventions (e.g. around the age of marriage, female consent to marriage, gender inequalities in divorce proceedings); it would be important to explore what is produced by the development of discourses of rights within such multi-scalar regimes in more depth. However, given their subordinate positions, it was clear that deploying youth as peer educators was not necessarily disrupting wider gender and kinship norms, and could sometimes create vulnerabilities for female youth in particular.

## **Conclusion**

Our conclusion returns to Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi's (2005) suggestion that 'rights-based' approaches might allow a re-politicisation of development. From the analysis presented above, we suggest that the opposite may also be possible. Although our feminist approach understands gender and identity construction to be inherently agonistic, as described by Mouffe (1992; 2005), we have identified a web of countervailing discourses which constrained the extent that gender and SRH might be recognised as political, or even to belong within the sphere of institutionalised politics. Thus, a key over-arching question would seem to be about the relationships of citizenship and politics, and whether these can recognise gender and sexuality as inherently political, as a legitimate part of citizenship, or whether a universalist, patriarchal understanding of citizenship continues to constrain the political and create absences and silences around gender and sexuality, rather than making dominant regimes available for contestation. In closing, we therefore call attention to the relevance of poststructural feminist theories of gender and identity construction for supporting an understanding of how dominant gender regimes can be sustained in ways that allow youth citizenship to work in ways that produce rather than disrupt the discursive regulation of diversity.

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