Senegal's Post-Independence Development: A Systematic Review of the Struggle for Land, Identity, and Autonomy in Casamance

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Abstract

Scholarship in peace and conflict studies has long supported a state-centered approach to addressing the causes and consequences of internal conflict worldwide. Rejecting previous state-bias analyses, this paper aims to understand the impact of African geography's colonial legacies on local communities' daily conditions and political stability. Through a systematic review of Casamance as a critical rural geography—known for enduring one of Africa's longest-running conflicts, this study examines why, despite ongoing state efforts, uncertainty about the conflict's resolution persists. Identifying the major factors that cause political instability, this paper aims to provide insight into how historical injustices left unaddressed has caused a cycle of civil conflict in Southern Senegal. To resolve internal contestations, this review asserts the vitality of addressing ongoing inequalities rooted in land rights, political representation, infrastructure development, and economic disparities between urban centers and rural geographies in African nation-states. To achieve peace amidst internal conflict, this study recommends that the international community take an innovative approach to the development of localized and community-based solutions to problems hindering conflict resolution.

Introduction

How do colonial legacies impact nation-states' efforts toward lasting conflict resolution? Scholars and policymakers alike have long overlooked the historical and culturally significant events that weaken governing institutions, stifle economic development, restrain political equality, and fragment shared national identity—fueling civil acts of violence.[1] By adopting a state-centered approach to studying peace and conflict, international institutions often respond with ill-advised peace operations, which have failed to support post-colonial states in managing and mitigating political instability.[2] Combined

with the enforcement of colonial-era policies, these operations have bolstered the power of oppressive governments to perpetuate the injustices of the past under a new facade of international solidarity, resulting in further destabilization. As scholars argue, the arbitrary borders and governing structures imposed during colonial rule have led to ongoing ethnic divisions and political exclusion, impeding efforts at nation-building and conflict resolution. This historical context continues to influence political behavior and stability in postcolonial states, where ethnic rivalries and tensions remain pervasive.[3] This systematic review will employ an in-depth case study analysis to understand how colonial legacies shape the capacity of African nation-states to maintain peace and stability.

To accomplish this, this paper examines the critical rural geography of Casamance to address contemporary state behaviors of marginalization that prevent long-term conflict resolution in postcolonial Senegal. Characterized by its unique geography, culture, and a 42-year conflict, Casamance serves as a valuable case study to demonstrate the impact of economic exploitation, ethnic divisions, political exclusion, and the erosion of local governance and autonomy on a nation-state's stability. Through the lens of southern Senegal's struggle for self-determination since the formation of the Mouvement des forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) in 1947, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of what challenges prohibit lasting peace in Casamance and similar rural geographies across Africa.

After employing a literature review to identify the key variables in conflict resolution efforts, this paper specifically focuses on understanding Senegal's political geography, the primary obstacles preventing communities from engaging in non-violent collective action, and the social and economic pressures fueling the separatist movement carried forth by the MFDC. In conducting a literature review, this paper identifies a significant gap in current research. Although secondary literature highlights a series of negative impacts that sustain state building efforts, scholars have yet to provide a focused community-based analysis to understand the leading challenges in the post-independence context.

Literature Review

Who inherits the state in the post-colonial context? Scholars have long explored this question by analyzing the similarities and differences of colonial empires' governing strategies. Using ethnic groups' geographical locations and the identity of imperial rulers as primary variables for ethnic inclusion in nations, scholars have rejected ethnic grievances, historical events that have disrupted ethnic social structures and therefore identities. Consequently, claiming that they should be treated as an exogenous factor in answering such an encompassing question.[4] For example, the British and French empires, two of the largest colonial powers during peak European colonial rule in Africa, were systematically different in their ethno-political power constellations.

Although both colonial empires upheld common principles to accomplish their objectives in exploiting resource-rich geographies for economic gain through divide and rule tactics, the degree to which this took form was inherently unequal.[5] In the African context, British colonial empires often adhered to "indirect rule." This governing approach permitted ethnic leaders to control political power on the periphery, making it more likely for these nations to be represented and gain independence. In contrast, the French often relied on "direct rule" which was characterized by rigid administrative policies, centralized assimilation, minimizing indigenous representation in local decision-making, and ignoring governing institutions that pre-existed.

Despite the many shared tactics between the British and French colonial governments, such as the collection of taxes, the regulation of trade, and the maintenance of restrictive administrative policy, their differing philosophies in local rule created different realities across territories. According to the British colonial empires, maintaining African traditional systems of government was the most effective colonial governance model. In this way, state leaders were able to hide behind indirect rule while manipulating chiefs and using military force against opposition.[6] Alternatively, the French colonial empire wanted Africans to gain citizenship, believing their language and culture to be superior.

What this caused was a direct rejection of traditional knowledge and practices, including that of governance, districting, language, and culture by abolishing such structures. And in its place, municipalities (*communes),* cantons, and prefectures were developed which allowed the French colonial empire to better enforce administrative policies aimed to assimilate forced laborers through direct means across a vast and ethnically rich territory. Ethnic groups, through the enactment of centralized administrative policy, had their cultural identity stripped to act solely as sources of production throughout arbitrary districts. Definitively, French direct rule was by nature designed to exclude such territories' representation in their colonies' geographical agglomerates. Indigenous chieftaincies were replaced by oppressive, violent elites who had no intent on advocating for their needs. As a result, administrative policies were enacted to eliminate the ancestral claims of forced laborers to their land, and to restrict their right to practice ethnic traditions. This was done to assert soft power in colonies through means of French culture and language. Unfortunately, much of the governing structure enacted by French colonial rule has survived unchanged today, despite respective territories gaining independence.

A study on colonial administrative policies' impact on post-colonial conditions by Wucherpfennig and supporting authors found that despite common assumptions, a state's political stability is unrelated to population size, per-capita GDP, center-periphery gradients, and conflict likelihood. Rather, the primary determinant of a post-independent state's political stability was the degree to which ethnic groups could influence colonial administration's policy development. As ethnic groups were excluded from politics during colonial rule, this negatively impacted citizens' representation in state-building after

independence to varying degrees due to differing administrative approaches. Analyzing British and French colonial rule, their distinct implementation of divide and rule strategy have continued to affect the political stability of states in the contemporary.

Scholars have also studied colonialism's distortion of African nation-states' political and economic systems, focusing on the divide-and-rule strategy. By separating people and power into smaller groups, the likelihood of organized opposition was minimized, fostering ethnic conflict. As Wu explains, colonial rulers deconstructed shared national identities and limited the authority of chiefs and customary governing systems. These challenges have hindered nation-building in Africa. Wu blends quantitative and qualitative methods, contrasting with the previous studies reviewed. She identifies a range of factors contributing to Africa's political instability and economic underdevelopment, including conflicts, election violence, insurgencies, and cross-border crimes.[7] The argument that prevails in the literature is that the colonial hierarchical structure sustains political instability in the post-colonial context. Scholars have further examined how colonialism integrated Africa into the global economy, but for colonial benefit rather than for Africa's regional economies and communities. Scholars have attributed ongoing ethnic rivalry to the divide and rule strategy, which hindered African cooperation and national identity development.[8] However, this interethnic cooperation should be a sustained goal for the international community. Wu emphasizes three aspects of contemporary African institutions: political instability, economic underdevelopment, and local authorization. Findings outline that Africa can reshape its institutions through systemic dismantlement of colonial legacies and the adoption of democratic principles and decentralized governance.

In light of these secondary sources findings, it is evident that colonial legacies, as well as their development and administrative policies, bear a strong correlation with political instability in contemporary African nation-states. In the contemporary world, many centralized colonial policies and administrative structures have remained virtually unchanged since independence, thus limiting sustainable development and representational governing bodies. In the absence of addressing unequal appropriations of rights across geographies proceeding under direct colonial rule, exploited populations remain marginalized and are unable to participate in both regional and national decision-making.

By retaining colonial-era political institutions and development strategies, state elites have worsened political instability and internal conflicts. This systematic review aims to explore how colonial injustices have impacted rural communities' sense of identity and their ability to address conflict, evaluating the following variables: economic exploitation, ethnic divisions, political exclusion, and the erosion of local governance.

The Fight for Self-Hood in Southern Senegal Ruralities

The Casamance is a rural region located in southern Senegal with small urban localities that are increasing as western development spreads through the area. Ruralities across African political geographies are of increasing importance as these regions are becoming spaces of political upheaval and insurgency. Being isolated both in representation and physical geography, the communities of Casamance face several economic, political, and social challenges that give insight into the root-causes of conflict in the region with specific regard to MFDC's movement and damage.

As a result of national development policies, the region's current local resources and livelihoods continue to be stressed by internal conflict and environmental pressures perpetuated by upheavals. This section provides an in-depth case study to understand how post-independence economic development, land-use rights, governance patterns, and domestic power dynamics have been a driving force behind the Casamance conflict. This study identifies the region as a critical rural geography to analyze perpetuated injustices imposed on the region's residents.

Post-Independence Power Dynamics in Rural Land Ownership and Development

In the early 1960s, Leopold Senghor, the first Senegalese president, was inspired by the vision of African socialism manifested in the Negritude movement who synthesized African culture with politics.[9] Consequently, President Senghor embraced the implementation of a state-led development strategy, asserting that economic resources would be shared with the public. However, his goal to integrate a nascent "African" identity into an inherited Francophone cultural context was by nature frayed.[10] Despite rhetoric and promises to move beyond the oppressive European footprint on the African communities that composed Senegal, the newly appointed political leaders maintained the state's borders and policies that the colonial empire previously enforced.

To develop the new mixed presidential-parliamentary system in both economic and political terms, a center-periphery approach was employed. Under the umbrella of African socialism, newly appointed political elites in the developed urban-center—recently vacated by the colonial empire, controlled development models and land-use.[11] For many decades after independence, Senghor and French state leaders based in the north of the country dominated national development under geopolitical pressure.[12] By continuing the urban-focused infrastructure of the Western colonial development model, rural communities continued to be used for agricultural production. Despite the ideals of unity and self-hood that inspired his movements and supporters, President Senghor's primary objective was to achieve the status of a Western industrial powerhouse. Since 1960, he has explained that "Francophone states (such as Canada and France) can play a significant role in the development of Africa."[13] However, by reinforcing such development policies, the forests, rice

fields, and rivers of Casamance have become contested areas. Having lacked a clear definition of land rights since the formation of the state, local peoples have been forced to continue to search for clarity in a system based on colonial abstractions. Such policy ambiguity has often caused disputes between communities all while political elites maintained colonial governing and districting systems after independence.[14]

Using this framing to development efforts, farmer cooperatives—originally formed during the independence movement to amplify rural communities' voices and seek representation—became a mechanism for socioeconomic oppression against rural communities in the post-independence era. With the formation of the *Office National de Coopération et d'Assistance au Développement* (ONCAD) in 1966, the national government was able to directly control farmer's cooperatives to regulate the land they cultivated and crops they harvested. At the time of the office's formation, 80% of jobs in the nation-states were from groundnut farming in the peripheries, with textile production and government sectors in urban centers.[15] Through this office's power to dictate both agriculture inputs and outputs through controlling cooperatives, state elites maintain centralized decision making and economic power between urban and rural geographies.

By applying the previous colonial powers' divide and rule framework, it allowed local representatives to intervene in the rural context. Leaving untampered the role of *marabouts* (muslim religious leaders) in maintaining centralized political power as they had under French colonial rule. Consequently, these religious leaders acted as pawns for the state in upholding the validity of the colonial economy and avoiding political contestation from laborers. Building from pre-established agrarian sectors in the region, the state intended to maintain jurisdiction over the rural areas and control development policies that aimed to promote national strength through modernization.[16] Specifically, with the state's intentions to explore production maximization and agro-industrialization methods, the cooperative tended to function much as a mechanism for divide and rule.

State leaders preserved control over rural areas by exploiting land for their own economic and socio-political gains. Just four years after independence in 1960, the government declared a nationalization of approximately 95% of rural lands.[17] Although rural communities were already counterpoised by the state, elites used this model to stimulate production while administering the most basic aspects of rural life, like health care and education.[18] The *Loi sur le Domaine National* (LDN; National Domain Law) passed in 1964 and declared that land is not owned by the state, territorial communities, or individual users but instead belongs to the nation as a whole.[19] This policy is still in place today, as land is accessed and governed through the same districting methods and the leveraging of local rural authorities. Due to French direct colonial policy, local authorities were elites who endorsed western development methods influenced by newly appointed state leaders. As a result, post-independence land ownership policies further suppressed indigenous governance and

institutions. Therefore, these communities have never been given the capacity to lift themselves out of the shadow of their colonial oppressors.

Senegal's Urban-Rural Divide in Development Policy and Political Representation

Land-use policies were but one aspect of a series of neoliberal and extractive legislation that weakened the capacity of rural communities to influence decision making and feel a sense of belonging to national ideals. Decision makers located in Dakar, the state's urban center, incompetence in equitable resources and wealth distribution caused tension with the peripheral communities. National policies imposed on regions like Ziguinchor, Kolda, and Sedhiou located in Casamance, made certain that rural communities remained under top-down order to promote the state's engagement in international trade. Adopting the western development model, decision makers adopted intensive farming, a method of industrial agriculture that required large quantities of inputs, such as labor and capital (machinery, water, synthetic chemical, etc.), to produce maximum crop yields from a geography[20]. Through a rural diversification effort and the development of the mining industry, decision makers concentrated in Dakar often sought out the least developed, most resource-rich villages as best suited for supporting these production initiatives. Through commercializing the land and its fruit, Senegalese urban dwellers at the time of independence concentrated wealth in the urban center. This of course created a significant difference in economic and political freedom across the country's urban and rural populations, due to the state's uneven development approach.[21]

Indeed, the benefits and burdens of Senegalese independence and the rapid movement to regional development that proceeded were not equally shared. Development policies paved the way for significant regional disparities, with urban cities such as Dakar, Thiès, and Diourbel dominating nearly half of Senegal's economic activities which exacerbated the rural-urban divide.[22] Mandated policies under the Senghor's state building efforts, today known as the Senegalization, upheld the principle pillars of the colonial economy, retaining the groundnut model, commercializing indigenous crops of cotton, millet, and rice for agriculture production in the south, and engaging foreign French firms. These development mechanisms were both damaging to the environment and rural communities' autonomy in terms of development and identity as it maintained colonial infrastructures on the peripheries for agriculture production. As a result, ruralities became sources of extraction of resources, not of national identity. Consequently, this left a notable disparity between citizens' quality of life who live in urban centers and those that live in peripheries of their communes throughout the country. By retaining the same marginalizing development and land-use policies, these regions have then and now face uneven challenges in terms of land rights and resource scarcity. Since independence these ongoing efforts have created a cyclical drought. This is to say that even while resources such as water and grazing

paths were depleted, production was forced to continue by the ONCAD to fulfill the national trade commitments bureau made to external actors. This thereby created a dependence on industrial agricultural inputs, like fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides that continue to characterize the state's development and economic stability.

As droughts became more and more frequent in the 1970s, western development institutions, such as the IMF assisted the funding of these agriculture inputs.[23] Regardless of the population's geographical location as the side effects of Senghor's African socialism began to unfold, people became unsettled. The period between 1962 and 1980 known as the *malaise paysan* was characterized by severe lows of groundnut production due to drought causing a deterioration of conditions and terms promised to farmers cooperatives.[24] Farmers in the peripheries could no longer maintain previous levels of production due to groundnuts, especially peanuts (the primary source of national income at the time) as the ecology was too fragile and the soil too degraded. In response to the decline in production, urban dwellers, often those who work in factories or the government's bureaucracy, became frustrated seeing stagnation of their purchasing power when groundnut prices became unstable.[25] Therefore many urban workers protested for higher wages during this long period of drought, development decline, and external economic intervention. Under the control of farmer cooperatives and marabouts, peripheral communities far from Dakar, had limited capacity to protest as there were neither the funds nor transportation mechanisms to fight against Seghor's oppressive development approaches in the name of African socialism.[26] Approaching economic collapse as the economy relied on groundnut production, this period of drought and political upheaval highlighted a serious challenge between fulfilling promises of improved quality of life and maintaining colonial development pathways, affecting communities across geographies differently.

This regional socioeconomic disparity signaled to both western and regional international financial institutions that Senegal would need support to achieve economic and political stability. Born from this national crisis was a series of plans and policy recommendations that aimed at decentralized governance, rural diversification, and efforts of socio-economic reconstruction. Despite such efforts to give rural communities more political representation and economic autonomy, these policies have failed to address the regional development gap. Maintaining a centralized economic policy approach from 1960 to 1985, the foundation of Senegal's governing system was to support political elites' agendas and promote the status of "urban-based national bourgeoisie" that concentrated wealth and resources.[27] A primary example of this is the ongoing acceptance of World Bank's and IMF's unsubsidized loans since independence in 1960, which created an dependence on external funding for economic stability.

From 1960 to 1987, the World Bank alone loaned Senegal 812 million dollars in which was largely allocated to agriculture, education and health, and Structural Adjustment Loans (SAL) which made up one-third of cumulative

funds.[28] SALs acted as open loans to support projects in accordance with western institutional financial institutions (IFIs) plans that asserted if implemented, they would stabilize the country.[29] Tied to these funds were recommendations that were required to receive financial support, known as Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). In Senegal, SAPs established permanent committees for planning at national and regional levels. This administrative approach exacerbated the damages of the centralized planning, putting the state of Senegalese citizens' future in the hands of external economic and political forces. Under these policies, loans increased the domestic production of the agricultural sector through diversifying crops and increasing the national transportation system.[30] However, the volume of export crops and their earnings did not produce enough revenue to afford such foreign investments. For the newly independent state, these policies had caused an enduring dependency on external sources of funding to maintain agriculture production as manufactured synthetics and trade relations were necessary after facing intense land degradation from western agriculture systems.

With elites primarily located in urban centers and farmers in the peripheries, engaging foreign investors and their western development agendas have further limited rural communities' rights in terms of identity and land. After years of limited representation, stability, and autonomy, politically exclusive and oppressive conditions have provoked rural communities to incite violence and protest. Even today, such political upheaval remains a means of bridging the regional gap between rural and urban communities' capacity and shaping decision-making processes. Local communities across the state, despite governmental elites' promises to revitalize African ideals and culture, were not fulfilled in the post-independence movement. In fact, communities have become means to an economic end that they can't reap the benefits of. It is why rural communities controlled under neocolonial development policies have become disconnected from the national pride that fueled the independence movement. Despite their commitment to peace, communities like Casamance resort to violence for representational power in a colonial system, which otherwise would leave them socially and politically isolated and their identity mangled. Due to this, there is no national or regional identity, and the region continues to be unstable, creating a cycle of conflict and instability.

Outlining the Colonial Footprint on Life in Casamance

In post-independence Senegal, the native Jolas and Bainuks ethnic groups who, primarily inhabited the region's coastline in the west, were spread throughout Casamance. As a result, after French colonial direct rule ended, it became unclear which ethnic groups owned which parts of the Casamance landscape. The mixing and partitioning of ethnic groups challenged the restoration of shared identity, local institutions, and land-use and ownership approaches. Thus, there have been ethnic tensions in Casamance since Senegal gained independence.

Between urban and rural communities, there is a notable difference in the wealth, and demographic concentration of ethnic groups across territories. As migration patterns have evolved with that of the geography's context, the region supports many minority cultures throughout Casamance, such as the Buluf, Mandinka, Mankanya, Pulaar, Manjak, Balanta, Papel, Serer, and Wolof.[31] In the years since independence, the Wolof and Serer have dominated the national urban centers, such as Dakar, Louga, and Mbour—located in the west of the state. While in Casamance, domestic ethnic diversity is more concentrated in rural areas, where several minority cultures are found[32]. In state-building, Wolof played a significant role in the process, sealing the fate of inter-ethnic relations when it was designated as the national language. By consequence, the Jola people that were farmers and traders traditionally have faced many challenges. With former President Macky Sall and those before him maintaining many of Senghor's ideals, national economic and social development remains uneven[33]. This has caused an urban-rural divide across geographies to increasingly widen. In terms of representation and resources, rural communities like Casamance do not enjoy the same rights as metropolitan regions. Due to the wealth gap between Casamance, a Jola majority, and Dakar, a French and Wolof majority, rebel violence by Jola groups in the region has generally targeted Wolof soldiers and peoples.

Regardless of destructive colonial labor practices, after independence, land continues to be the foundation of Jola culture and their animist religion. The Jolas maintained an interconnected legal system in the region prior to colonialism to maintain the intimate connection between land fertility and their religion. By the 1940s, it became much more challenging to practice *Huyaye* (a day of rest) or enforce the *Kumachala* (local police who supported justice and fairness in rural communities). Jola's religious observance of the land supported long-term fertility through influencing farmers' respect and practicing gratitude for the land.[34] By respecting ecological capacities and taking time to appreciate the fruits of the land, Jola were able to maintain principles of sustainability. The absence of such practices during colonial monocropping and amalgamation for cash crop production has resulted in degradation and land disputes. As the prophet Alinesitoué Diatta claimed, *Emitai* (the supreme being), saw the violation of *Huyaye* as "a primary cause of the droughts and crop failures."[35]

Today, in the post-colonial context, the oppressive state often marginalizes southern Senegal's ruralities from national political and economic systems. For Jola-majority rebel groups in the region, their efforts have been a means of retaliation against state leaders that have ostracized southern Senegal in decision-making processes since independence. In 1978, the Muslim northerners who relied on an interpreter for Jola-Fonyi because they only spoke Wolof and French, entered Mlomp, a rural community in Casamance.[36] The northern migrants announced that the Jola no longer owned the land they farmed and built their homes on but were restricted to usufruct.[37] Rural communities had no title to the groves of palm trees, silk cotton trees, or orchards

they or their ancestors had planted.[38] Moreover, the profiteers planted Asian varieties of rice, cut down trees for groundnut cultivation, created state-led agriculture market boards, and converted the Jola to Islam and Christianity. This behavior by the state-urban elites from northern Senegal and foreigners in the 1970s was not just a premeditated "act of confiscation, but an imposition" by those who had no tie to the land and were not respecting the Jola's religious traditions.[39] This limited the indigenous villages' capacity to maintain the land of their people and their complex systems of lineage and spiritual ties. As Ousseynou Faye, Senegal's Minister of Education noted, many felt "invaded" by Northern migrants as these wealthy elites revoked land ownership and extracted natural resources for the northern urban centers profiteering tactics.[40] This caused many to lose their local riches and cultural identity in relation to land.

In 1978, the Jola law was abrogated due to the lack of land rights, struggle for autonomy, and a common language between northern and southern Senegalese. Such circumstances, supported by national law, have caused built-up resentment. It is the political exclusion of centralized governing mechanisms and borders developed by colonial partitioning that continues to fuel social and economic inequality between Casamance and the state. French and Wolof are the national languages of the country, thus reflecting the fact that ethnic divisions restricted political action and community development using different languages and extractivism as an instrument of the state.

The presence of new ethnic groups like the land-hungry Buluf created additional unforeseen impacts on the local communities.[41] In the face of changing landscapes and ecologies from the presence of French direct rule, it caused migration to the Casamance wetlands by communities hoping to capitalize off the natural resources. Migration patterns to the region are also linked to those in surrounding states who are facing severe drought.[42] Applying the same colonial policies in post-independence, the 1964 National Domain Law permitted the alienation of land to *nordistes* and to French tourist operations. This allowed a continued monopoly of ancestral lands, allowing for a resurgence in rebel violence.

Understanding the Enduring Conflict in the Casamance Region

One of the most enduring and well-known rebel groups formed in the Senegambia region is the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance* (MFDC). Formed in 1947 as a peaceful regionalist party (functioning similarly to farmer cooperatives), the MFDC was motivated by the Casamance people's demand for independence from oppressive colonial rule.[43] In the French colonial context, the country was split into four districts: Dakar, Rufisque, Gorée and Saint-Louis. The three other districts bordered the primary port city, Dakar, severely limiting the capacity for the Jola majority of Ziguinchor to be represented.[44] Despite colonial claims that this institutional infrastructure granted rural populations the same rights as metropolitan residents, this infrastructure instead stigmatized the residents of these territories. This caused

the Ziguinchor villages, especially those which directly bordered the ocean, to bear severe exploitative and abusive conditions.[45] This ethnic amalgamation by the French colonial empire without knowledge of the unique and distinct groupings of the region, resulted in identity-based representative parties, like the MFDC, to emerge in the 1940s.

After almost a decade of advocacy on behalf of the Casamance people, the MFDC dissolved into the Senghorian party in 1954, believing in the vision and ideals of Léopold Sédar Senghor. However, after the 20-year reign of Senghor's oppressive land ownership policy and governance systems, the MFDC was reborn as an armed rebellion by the Casamance people in 1982. The first march was non-violent, but those after it resulted in intense bloodshed.[46] The group demanded, as the Casamance peoples did in 1947, independence from the Senegalese state,[47] and continued to fight against economic disenfranchisement from productive (rice and vegetable) agriculture and mining practices under the *Loi de Nationale Domain*.

Even though the Casamance people have made numerous efforts to end top-down decision making and the ecological destruction and development patterns they perpetuate, the state behavior that sparked the conflict remains in place. Despite peace agreements made by the MFDC that claim to advance autonomous land governance, the state continues to permit the operation of national mining practices that render 80% of the region's farmable land unusable.[48] It is these power dynamics that limit rural ownership and access to land that have threatened Senegal's rural communities.[49] Violent regimes have gone to great lengths to assert autonomy for "greater land ownership by larger-scale private investors," developed through centralized decision making that erodes connections to land and identity.[50]

Today, more than 60,000 people have been displaced due to the ongoing conflict in Casamance concentrated in the regions, Kolda, Sedhiou, and Ziguinchor.[51] The movement growing into Bussuan and Jola guerilla groups through external support from neighboring countries has created a war economy, allowing the Casamance peoples who join the MFDC to have more social and economic security than ever before. There is no incentive for the people to end the conflict, because the movement creates a mechanism for economic independence for the Senegalese state. This independence is possible only through Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia supporting the MFDC efforts to address unfulfilled agreements made by the state elites of Senegal located far from Casamance in urban centers.

It should be noted that the conditional limbo of the MFDC's existence highlights that neither peace nor conflict is best suited to serve the interests of the regime.[52] The MFDC's primary motivations are rooted in the Casamance sentiment of economic exploitation and political marginalization. Consequently, this is fueling an influx of drug trafficking, illegal logging, and heavy weaponry in southern Senegal. These activities create further negative public externalities, aside from violence, for the region from the insurgency's profiteering tactics. They perpetuate extreme uncertainty for rural communities,

as investment in urbanization grows and young people are uninterested in agriculture. Consequently, they commonly turn to violence or migrate from the region.[53]

Rural regions continue to suffer power imbalances and marginalization due to ill-representative development practices and geographical divisions sustained by French direct rule in the post-colonial state. This continues to limit transparent and accountable development practices, as well as sustainable agricultural productivity and equitable development throughout Senegalese ruralities.[54] This reality has fueled political upheaval and therefore, MFDC's existence. During the colonial era, arbitrary borders were drawn between different ethnic groups.[55] The result was a limited definition of shared identity between indigenous peoples like the Jolas and Bainuks and other surrounding communities that came to the region to maximize cash crop production for settlers' social and economic benefit. African socialist ideals of unity and shared identity unkindled by state leaders in the post-colonial state were traded off. To achieve Western industrial status state leaders' primary goal was not the ideals of the independence movement but instead how to maximize national GDP and production.[56] Today, the inability to transfer power to the Casamance peoples and incorporate them into the nation has led to the Southern limb of Senegal inevitably turning to violence to gain political legitimacy for over 40 years.

A Changing Political Geography of Southern Senegal in Conflict

The French colonial empire is historically known to have been one of the most severe and oppressive colonizers. Through direct colonial rule, the French had developed entire districts and with them local authorities.[57] These authorities were not picked by the local people, but by the centralized administration in Dakar. Local authorities, many of them there before, were chosen to serve the colonial power with utmost loyalty. This localized governing system was specifically to ensure that colonized communities would not develop a revolution as seen about 75 years prior through the Haitian Revolution. In addition to this, the French colonial power in the region mixed villages who spoke different languages attempted to break down communication methods that could be used to cause political upheaval against local authorities.

French colonial rule assimilated populations and caused prior local governance practices to be extremely weakened in southern Senegal, undermining the identity of villages that once operated under a shared code of honor, upheld by elders. By enacting similar local governance strategies in regions impacted by maintaining colonial policies and the system that they perpetuate, community members' autonomy in influencing economic activities of their localities remains largely restricted. Consequently, it has caused resentment and upheaval by young and ambitious people looking for freedom from the extractive mining industry and productive agriculture in the region. Therefore, this increased the level of internal violence in the region since the 1980s, affecting the entire country. In their pursuit of political inclusion and

systemic change, these citizens turned to violence, as a last resort, to demand that the local communities of Casamance be heard.

Through independence, the newly established Senegalese state centralized power in the national government system. As they had during colonial rule, the state leaders concentrated in Dakar, limiting their rural peripheries by creating dependency on the state. Since land ownership was nationalized, land use was primarily in the hands of political elites. By using the *quatre commune* (Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, and Rufisque) as a basis for identifying and analyzing territories, Senegal's French colonial districting has greatly contributed to generating Casamance people's contemporary sentiments of frustration and political precarity. State leaders by inheriting the district system have limited southern Senegal's community members autonomy over the region's development, even in more densely populated urban centers such as Ziguinchor.

Beginning in the 1970s, the commune of Ziguinchor has undergone rapid developmental evolution under state efforts to industrialize and address economic and political instability in times of droughts. Despite policy actions that aimed to decentralize governance, such as the enactment of Law 72-75 of 1972, Law No. 96-07 of 1996, or the Law No. 10 of 2013, due to national government adopting a districting and economic model that resembles that under colonial rule, communities autonomy over development remain restricted.[58] With vital funding coming from external actors, the commune's development has been largely in the hands of the central government, influenced by IFIs and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) recommendations, that then cooperate with local authorities that they appointed.

Undergoing four phases of urbanization, Ziguinchor and its respective districts' development have remained under top-down planning, deciding what economic activity would be concentrated in each district working directly with local authorities.[59] The first development period began under French colonial rule, the second during intense droughts after independence, the third following the re-formation of the MFDC as an armed political force in the 1980s, and the fourth in the 2000s as urban infrastructure matured.[60] Regardless of which development phase we review, this municipality is characterised by controlled planning that created uneven distribution to resources and land-use policy. Thus, even urban centers that were demographically diverse and dense, land legislation limits collaboration in development as local authorities greatly controlled by the central government remain the primary decision-maker. Community members who would like to become involved in regional development have limited capacity to influence funding streams that trickle down from external IFIs and IGOs.

In the post-colonial state, communities in Casamance still feel that they lack political representation due to feeling unheard by state leaders in comparison to farmers or urban dwellers who bordered Dakar and have the means to protest and acquire political legitimacy. Although state leaders implemented the World Bank's recommendation to decentralize local governing approaches in 1996, localities still lack autonomy. And unfortunately, due to

years of centralized governing systems, elders' capacity to govern the youth as they had for centuries today is limited. Without local institutions having the resource capacity to support communities' needs, the lack of nationally allocated resources from the state means that traditional governing institutions have significantly lost their validity and functionality. Consequently, the absence of support from the state to resolve the conflict caused further political contestation.

In southern Senegal, communities in the early 2000s, under President Abdoulaye Wade, continued to be plagued with violence from the MFDC factions. The most bloodshed was from 1992 to 2001 with battles that killed thousands of civilians.[61] In 2004, a two-page peace agreement was then signed by both the Senegalese government and the MFDC that *urged* the Agence Nationale pour la Relance des Activités économiques et sociales (ANRAC) to support mining clearance and rebuild Casamance socially, ecologically, and economically. With this in place, the MFDC agreed to put down its arms. However, until recently ANRAC had taken limited action to support either the MFDC or broader regional demands. This in-part has caused the continuation of the conflict between the state and the Casamance region. Recently, ANRAC determined that the region would need over $21 million to demine southern Senegal, spurring much local skepticism.[62]

Although there are fragments of local and traditional governing systems in place today in southern Senegal—the Jola people having a king that is chosen by a *Dëmm* (witch doctor or sorcerer)—the authority must work directly with state officials to take actions to support local people.[63] However, there are minimal actions these institutions can take without the state because they do not have the resource capacity independently. That said, it is easy for local institutions to befoul the representation of local people because of sustained state dependency. Therefore, it is apparent the weakening of local governing institutions has been a major contributor to the MFDC subsisting today. It is evident that the impact of colonial policies' violent enforcement and centralized power in the state has revoked local institutions of their legitimacy. More importantly, by concentrating power, Dakar has fueled political constellations in the region. To avoid contributing to extractive industries that are ill-representative of the region's identity, citizens form rebel groups in hopes of having their demands considered legitimate by elites that have for many years been contrary to the region.

Results and Analysis

Evaluating Identified Variables

This investigation into the impact of colonial legacies on a nation's capacity to maintain political stability, and economic and community resilience has yielded significant findings. Based on the literature review, four key variables were identified: economic exploitation, political exclusion, the weakening of local

governance and autonomy, and ethnic divisions. When applied to the region of Casamance, these variables highlight the persistence of colonial-era policies and governing systems, and their consequences for Senegalese citizens.

The variable of economic exploitation manifests from the early geopolitical pressures to develop within a Western framework, as political leaders in Senegal continue today to employ extractive economic policies in Casamance. Since the 1970s, there has been a constant flow of funding from the World Bank and IMF to support state development. However, these funds were not only unsubsidized but were also unevenly distributed across the country. Under the usufruct system, the state exploited Casamance's agricultural production to compete in the global market, while not providing local communities with equal access to resources. The extraction of natural resources, such as groundnuts and rice, benefited the *nordiste* at the expense of Casamance's local population which forced locals to work on agricultural farms. With external funding supporting these inequities, political leaders distributed development unevenly, further limiting the regional economy. The resulting economic stagnation, coupled with restricted access to social resources and land rights, has exacerbated unrest in the region, contributing to the rise of the MFDC.

With respect to the political exclusion variable, state leaders also perpetuated oppressive systems of political representation to control natural resources. Under geopolitical pressures that urged the state to contribute to the global economy, political leaders' nationalization of land not only served to support national and private profits, but it also served to restrict political representation. Since the 1960s, Senegal has encountered many political leaders motivated to maintain centralized planning upholding the Loi Domaine Nationale, ONCAD (until 1980), and socio-ecologically damaging agricultural production systems. By applying western development models while maintaining colonial systems of production, land-use, and governance, the peripheral communities political representation across geographies to this day has been largely suppressed. Relying solely on groundnut production into the 1970s for economic stability, while enforcing the same arbitrary districting and local authorities such as marabouts, little has changed in terms of citizens freedom since independence. The centralized government in obeying external development models for financial support and having maintained economic infrastructure left behind the French colonial administration, has been a primary factor challenging political inclusion.

To this day, the ability for districts to engage in regional planning continues to be inhibited by the ongoing financial and political commitment made to external actors, such as the IMF and the World Bank. With the nation-state enormous public-to-GDP debt ratio, from years of corruption under centralized government and maintaining colonial administrative policy, even in a decentralized political context, is extremely restricted. For Casamance, the physical geographies isolated nature from the north where the majority of economic activity is concentrated provides an extra layer hindering

their representation. Isolated by the Gambia River and lacking transportation infrastructure, rural communities in Casamance under appointed local authorities, continue to have few spaces where their voiced concerns may be addressed and represented in legislative action. It is this reality that neoliberal policies, such as the depressed prices of ground nuts or the SAPs rapid advancement of the agriculture sectors through the rural diversification and the balance of payment to address the national debt, most affected rural communities, like those of Casmance. Therefore, in terms of land, political action, and development, Casamance highlights the effects of political exclusion and political stability.

Pertaining to the local autonomy variable, by maintaining mercantile development models and colonial governing structures, state leaders weakened local governance institutions, which left communities with limited autonomy and self-determination. Local institutions, which had been under centralized rule until the 1980s, were left fragile and ineffective. Today, local leaders lack the resources necessary to meet their citizens' needs in education, health, and economic development. Instead, these resources remain centralized in the national government, primarily controlled by political elites in Dakar. It is no surprise that when the MFDC reemerged in 1982 and began resorting to violence, it followed the failure of decentralization efforts that were unable to effectively support Casamance. The attempt to reintroduce traditional local governance structures after decades of centralization failed to resonate with younger generations, leading many to support rebel groups.

Regarding the ethnic division variable, the rich natural resources of Casamance have long attracted migration to the region, as people aimed to benefit from its fertile land and agricultural wealth. Since colonialism introduced different ethnic groups into the area, local governments have had a limited capacity to diffuse land tensions and conflicts. Land ownership remains contentious today, primarily due to the *Loi Domaine Nationale*, which has made land rights unclear and a source of ongoing tension. Consequently, the resurgence of the MFDC, created ethnic and land factions which have resorted to using landmines to prevent agricultural activities, making large areas of land unusable. This has deepened community divisions, not just along ethnic lines, but also along socioeconomic lines, as many local communities relied on income from working the land.

Addressing the Conditions for Conflict Resolution in Southern Senegal

The Senegalese state has made a whole host of efforts to address the conflict with the MFDC in the Casamance region. Beginning in 1982, the Gambia and Senegal have taken some steps to overcome colonial partition, which in the past has limited the Casamance's economic, social, and political autonomy. Yet, few measures have been taken to address the regional factors that drive Casamance's struggle for self-determination and MFDC's violent reestablishment. After the Senegambia Confederation collapse, a formal effort that allowed Senegal and the Gambia to become a unified state in 1989, there was

limited hope for conflict resolution. Both states ultimately defected while negotiating the functionality of the proposed confederation. Neither of the state's leaders were willing to give up their control over the region and its natural resources. This thereby caused MFDC's violent political tactics to continue in hopes of receiving autonomy over their land and identity.

After the first formal peace agreement in 1991, the military wing split into two factions: the *MFDC-Front-Nord* and the *MFDC-Front-Sud*, organizationally stunting the MFDC and therefore weakened its political power. The MFDC-Front-Sud is divided into two separate groups which were characterised by their loyalty between two military commanders, Sanga and Sadio. The division between the two groups was hostile, resulting in Sadio executing Sanga in 2001. Consequently Sanga was replaced by Cesar Atoute Biadade, who since has been accused of corruption due to his relationship with the Senegalese government.[64] The succeeding faction, MFDC-Front-Nord, now primarily located in Bignona, where it retains its weapon and de facto control over the northwestern region of the state. It is not a surprise that after 42 years of conflict, there have been many dissensions that have created a multitude of distinct factions and enemies.[65] Understanding that there is a presence of nuanced relations between factions, it's necessary to note despite many misconceptions by political leaders and the media, Cesar Atoute Badiate's, one of the current leaders of MFDC-Front-Sud, signing of the most recent peace agreement in 2022, does not necessarily signify "definitive peace."[66]

Given the rebel groups inherent structural complexities, there is no guarantee that the movement will remain dormant. Regardless of the Senegalese state of one of the three rebel groups, this is unlikely to end the control, and rather may create intertension between the factions.[67] In the past, political factions of the MFDC distanced themselves from their militants in the maquis (high-ranking leaders), who, in turn, felt no constraints from their political leadership. Many MFDC elites paid mediators off to agree to such ceasefires without fully uniting their movement.[68] As this accord remains confidential, it limits the capacity for community members and the public to hold all parties involved accountable as its terms are unknown. From the information released, the agreement promotes actions that will support long-lasting solutions to regional challenges that perpetuate the existence of MFDC and similar groups throughout West Africa. However, without the incorporation of all MFDC factions of interest, the conflict is likely to relapse.

In a time of extreme political and economic turmoil as neoliberal austerity faces all time highs and conflict grows due to ongoing tension on the western border, Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, announced a 25-year plan for supporting political stability. Known as *Sénégal 2050: Agenda National de Transformation*, this plan asserts western development models as a primary obstacle hindering Senegal's sovereignty, economic growth and planning.[69] Acknowledge the damage of ongoing economic systems that have degraded the state's stability and autonomy, the plan aims to seek sovereignty by rejecting weak financial structures and programs that cause dependency.

Focused on promoting food security, reliable energy, national security, and economic, cultural, and social autonomy, Senegal 2050 aims to create a development model for Senegal, for Africa's success rather than that of external actors. To improve the quality of life, this plan aims to focus on urban and rural disparities in terms of development, access to resources, and gender equality. The plan asserts that to transform the future of Senegal, a new economic map must be created, finding the value in every territory.

Despite the plans acknowledgement of leading challenges limiting the state's economic security and political stability, the avenues in which this will be achieved given the debt-to-GDP ratio as of 2024 is 72.5% percent is unclear.[70] Reviewing the agenda explains that economic self-hood will be achieved through developing a circular economy and creating markets to benefit from agroecological, mining, geography, and history assets unique to each territory. As this plan will promote natural resource extraction through industrial agriculture alongside a commitment to protecting biodiversity, the plan leaves many holes in how it will achieve these development ambitions and how rural communities in the long-term will respond to continued top-down development efforts that exploit the land and its fruit for commercial gain.

This plan, despite discussing many themes found in this systematic review, has largely created uncertainty in achieving goals as communities remain involved in the development process. When comparing it to the *Plan Sénégal Emergent* under President Macky Sall political regime, there is not much variation between the two plans in terms of priorities[71]. However, the condensed and targeted nature of Sénégal 2050 and President Faye's use of the plan to frame a public dialogue around neocolonial threats to the nation is unique. It is true that since his political campaign, President Faye used anti-western rhetoric to rekindle pride in ordinary Senegalese people who have felt ill-represented by previous administrations. By applying populist political strategies, President Faye won the election by a landslide with over 54% of the votes.[72] Surpassing about a year of President Faye in office, government actions remain fairly in alignment with the ideals highlighted during his campaign, as they have cancelled natural resource contracts with Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) that would be harmful to citizens' long-term quality of life and formed institutional infrastructure to limit corruption.[73]

Despite this, very little has been done to improve Senegalese citizen's daily life as the nation-states face unprecedented economic insecurity from the inherited state of public finances and the devaluation of the franc CFA, making it extremely challenging to manage Senegal's balance of payment without external financial support. Although President Fate's ideals invoke some optimism for the future, many of the necessary actions to gain political influence are not feasible as neoliberal austerity from the enduring colonial imprint on the nation limits this. As this study finds, international conflicts, like that of Casamance, cannot be solved without decolonizing systems and mechanisms of decision making.

Therefore, given the current state of affairs in Senegal, this paper recommends that by developing regional organizations focused on international conflict resolution which are designed and sustained by the state's local stakeholders directly facing the conflict's consequences, mistrust between countries can be mitigated. Future efforts could include enforcing taxes on the wealthy to alleviate the widespread effects of sustained economic exploitation, and promoting autonomy over land use in Senegalese rural areas. This requires state leaders to limit corruption in the government and to prioritize the inclusion of all their constituents, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Without accepting the legitimacy of local stakeholders and taking sustained actions to engage with communities directly affected by internal conflict, long term conflict resolution is unlikely to be achieved. By taking steps to support the collective well-being of citizens under the most unstable economic, cultural, and political conditions, communities like those in the Casamance, can begin to build a shared understanding. Through this recognition of commonality, they'll be able to begin addressing the injustices between the nation-state's urban and rural geographies to allow healing and genuine national cooperation. This will cheapen the cost of sustainable development and make the process more inclusive by taking a more integrated approach to addressing the leading domestic challenges shared across borders. Identifying historical injustices and committing to address them will create new opportunities to empower local communities, heal internal relationships, and ensure a more sustainable future for *all* citizens that have limited autonomy over their region's development practices.

Conclusion

Southern Senegal and its long-sustained fight for self-hood underscores the enduring impact of colonial legacies that limit nation-states' capacity for conflict resolution and peace. Due to Senegal's oppressive colonial regime, there are four significant factors that have sustained the Casamance conflict for over 40 years. These include: economic exploitation, weakened local governance, ethnic division, and political exclusion. This systematic review highlights that southern Senegal's colonial practices of resource extraction and centralized governance have persisted in the post-colonial context, leading to continued instability and marginalization. The expansion of extractive industries has left many local communities, like the Casamance people, economically disenfranchised, driving them to seek autonomy through violent means.

Centralized power during and after the colonial period hindered the development of effective, representational local governance structures following independence. Such governance frameworks have caused communities to feel ostracized from decision-making, disempowered, and angered by exclusionary political processes. The root of the post-colonial state's neglect of local needs lies in land rights and economic opportunities by enlarging the wealth gap. These actions inherently exacerbate smaller inter-ethnic tensions

and the Casamance conflict. Consequently, the path toward lasting peace in southern Senegal hinges on addressing these structural inequalities—prioritizing political inclusion, respecting local autonomy, and investing in sustainable development that benefits the entire region. Development must take a localized approach, focusing on deconstructing the colonial infrastructure that has been upheld by state-led political agendas since independence.

Although the recent transfer of power to a new political regime offers some hope for long-term conflict resolution in Casamance, without decolonizing governing bodies, socio-ecological relations, financing pathways, and development models through intentional efforts to rectify historical injustices, the conflict is likely to continue. As such, national policies in Senegal must innovate in collaboration with local communities to address the challenges that permeate the conflict. Recommendations for further research would include conducting discussions with current and past MFDC members, not only to understand how a peace agreement might appease the group's elite but to address the core of the issue. Further research efforts should accept the temporality of rural-urban margins in Casamance and the defining impact of authoritarian populism on post-development. Additional scholarship should be from the perspective of local communities and will help foster understanding on the historical roots of the conflict as well as guide future mitigation efforts. Thus, local communities explicitly and implicitly impacted by globalization and geopolitical pressure can support sustained peace in regions plagued by conflict.

By including a more realistic compilation of stakeholders—citizens from states facing internal and external conflict—we can foster collaborative problem-solving between different communities. This approach can help create sustainable and peaceful solutions, while also enabling a sense of ownership and responsibility among all stakeholders. These actions will therefore alleviate the divisive conditions in the Casamance that are sustained by post-independence colonial development policies and property laws. By working with other nation-states who have a colonial legacy and internal conflict, Senegal can create peaceful mechanisms that are unique to the needs of their citizens and states' well-being. By facilitating a collaborative approach that includes diverse stakeholders, especially those from conflict-ridden regions, the nation can develop sustainable solutions that address the unique needs of each community. This not only promotes peace but also strengthens intercommunity relationships, paving the way for a more stable and secure global environment.

It is evident that the future state of Senegal lies in its capacity to develop participatory mechanisms that permit the community to directly influence national, regional, and local development. It is by finding value in the diverse knowledge and perspectives of citizens across geographical contexts that Senegal may understand how to eponymize national challenges prohibiting stability. By reimagining decision-making collectively, the nation-state can begin to dismantle the direct and implicit systematic methods linked to its

colonial legacy for a better tomorrow. In this way, Casamance and other contested geographies may heal from colonial cuts and redefine national identity, ecological connectivity, and economic development.

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