

# Life is Their Weapon Against Life: the economization of reproduction in Ghana

12/05/2019

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INTRO

Question  
&  
Methods

Theory  
&  
Concepts

Findings  
&  
Argument

## A Population Crisis in West Africa

By 2050, Africa's population will double from 1 billion to 2 billion. Nigeria will have the third largest population in the world -- Olesgun Obasanjo (former president of Nigeria)

"[Burkina] didn't reach the [MDGs] because today there is still maternal mortality. That means that we are not done with family planning. One woman, nine children, that's too much, right?" --health association worker in Tenkodogo, Burkina Faso

**Presentation  
Overview**

# Presentation Overview

**1** Question and Methods

**2** Theory and Concepts

**3** Findings and Argument

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# Questions

Does the population principle continue to inform family planning policies in West Africa?

If so, how has it adapted in the era of reproductive rights and neoliberalism?

What are the mechanisms through which it is enacted?

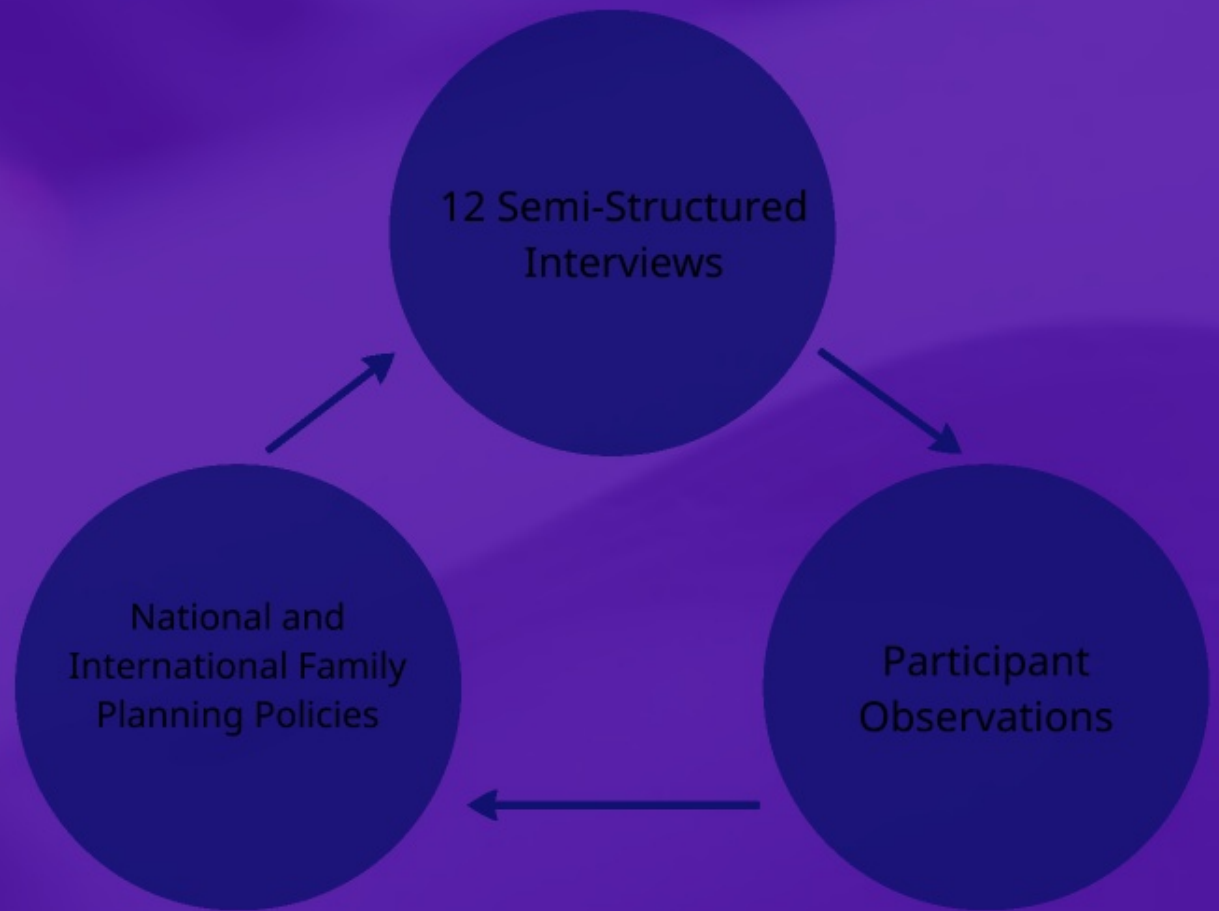
Method

Ghana

## Case Study: Ghana



# Methods



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# Theory & Concepts

Reproductive  
Rights

Bio-Politics  
and  
Governmentality

Economization  
of  
Life

# Reproductive rights

“all couples and individuals [have the right] to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and time of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents” pg 60.

“In the exercise of this right, they should take into account the needs of their living and future children and their responsibility towards the community” (60)

## Malthusian Bio-politic

Population as a problem space that requires human intervention to prevent irreparable drain of natural resource and poor quality of life (Repo 2017; Malthus 1960)

## Neoliberal Governmentality

Co-construction of subjectivities that make decisions with a market logic, keeping national economic development in mind (Rao and Sexton 2010; Gill and Scharff 2011)

# Economization of Life (Murphy 2017)

It was not a mode that generated surplus value through labor but instead designated and managed surplus aggregate life. In this mode, value could be generated by optimizing aggregate life chances--including the reduction of future life quantity--relative to the horizon of the economy. 006"

"a historically specific regime of valuation hinged to the macrological figure of national economy. It names the practices that differentially value and govern life in terms of their ability to foster the macroeconomy of the nation-state, such as life's ability to contribute to the gross domestic product (gdp) of the nation"006. ...

"The economization of life was performed through social science practices that continued the project of racializing life--that is, dividing life into categories of more and less worthy of living, reproducing, and being human--and reinscribed race as the problem of 'population' hinged to the fostering of the economy" 006

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# Argument

Through a network of actors and discourses that animate family planning in Ghana, the population principle alters state-societal relations around social service provisions so that women are tasked with assuaging the state's burden of providing for the lower class by embedding their own reproductive choices in a market logic.

Ghanaian women use a range of strategies from incessant questions to myth-making to exercise control over their reproductive decisions

# Mapping the Terrain: FP in Ghana



# Population Crisis in Ghana

"It's called population management because when you look at the population pyramid [the lower part of the pyramid] there's a lot of births. Because that's why we're starting with family planning so that trying to reduce, you know, the number of births women have, first of all for their own lives and also for the lives of offspring. So yeah, there's a population crisis"--Director of NGO in Accra

It's not just about the number of children you bring into this world, but the quality of life that you give to them. And so I think our crisis is beginning, if not it has begun" --UNFPA Rep in Accra



# Pliable Ghanaian Women

K: "Some of the women at home cannot just say no to sex. Immediately, the men come in and [women] have to give in. So what [the woman] has to do [is] just put on the family planning. You know, we the men, we will not have family planning on"

C: "The funny thing is, when [the woman] gets pregnant, we accuse [the woman]"

Y: "Exactly! Why would you get pregnant?!"

C: "So [men] expect the woman to protect themselves from getting pregnant"

Y: "So once [the woman] has done the family planning..."

C: "Once [the woman] has done the family planning, [the man does] not need to wear a condom."

# How many kids can the poor care for?

They get pregnant and then they start giving birth to people they can't even take care of. So, all these things are contributing to population crisis. And there are some teenagers too, especially in the remote areas who are getting pregnant, each and every day. They are giving birth to children they can't even take care of --Director of Family Planning Clinic in Kumasi

"The average or the poor Ghanaian has like 4,5,6 children, and they cannot feed them well. But for them, they don't want to take a family planning method." --Representative from Youth Program in Accra

# Reproductive Justice: resisting

“Do you know we do safe abortion care here as well? Some women will come with their partners, and for them, they are coming for safe abortion care. And the women themselves are not ready for family planning, and the men will insist that they do family planning because [the men] are not ready [for kids]. But the women will say, ‘I’ve heard about this thing. I’ve heard about the side effects, and I don’t want to do family planning’—MSI2

“You see, most of the women with these myths I just gave you, they’re actually not interested in the family planning methods that we offer like intra uterine device, like implanon, like the oral pill. But most of them are actually going with the natural methods, and those are not recorded.”

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