



university of
groningen

faculty of theology and
religious studies

Religious and secular dynamics in global responses to gender inequality

Analyzing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995
and its resonance among Kenyans today

Karin van der Velde – s2015897

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1. Introducing religion, secularism, and gender

‘Whenever one looks to find arguments about religion and secularism, one seems to find gender (...)’ (Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2013, 139). This quote endorses the irrevocable interdependence between these three categories. When studying gender, religion, and secularism, the expectation that with secularism, gender equality and sexual emancipation would arrive comes to the fore. Cady and Fessenden, following Talal Asad, call this a ‘myth of liberalism’ (2013, 6). One argument for gender equality to arrive as secularism as a political authority grew in popularity is that gender equality would follow the individualism accompanying secularism. In other words: a world not governed by the transcendent would autonomously free individuals from oppression (Scott, 2009, 1). However, secularism also brings a set of normative constraints and expectations of the individuals it governs. Autonomous agency of individuals is discarded in this argument, which as opposed to victimhood, is also an aspect of religious behavior, even if these individuals are operating within a set of normative constraints (Scott, 2009, 9; 229-230; Kim, 2013, 271; Casanova, 2009, 27).

Closely aligned with the expectation that with secularism, gender equality and sexual emancipation would arrive is the argument that religion oppresses women. Religion, and more specifically religious authority, has been viewed with suspicion, skepticism, and even hostility by feminist actors, as secular feminists researching in developing contexts often assume that religion equals subordination and oppression of women, and at times they assume this rightfully so (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 784; Cady & Fessenden, 2013, 15; Wilson, 2012, 58; Karam, 2013, 60).

When it is not negativity or suspicion that leads to religion’s relation to gender to be discussed, it is the non-discussion of religion. According to Ann Braude (2013, 72), who studied the relation between religion and women’s political mobilization, religion remains a blind spot in the course of women’s history even though religion is closely intertwined with the feminist movement. As secular feminists are trying to pull devout women away from their proclaimed oppressing religion, Azza Karam testifies based on her research in Egypt that one of the groups who try to take up the seemingly incompatible aims of advancing

women's rights and gender equality from a religious framework by 'traversing conceptual and practical bridges between apparently contradictory discourses, to break down dichotomies and build a middle ground based on social justice' are religious feminists (Karam, 2013, 66; see also Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 840, 845). The either negative association with or non-discussion of religion from secularist points of view calls for a new, more comprehensive view of gender from a perspective in which secularist, religious and all possibilities between those are taken into account when studying gender in developing contexts, much like religious feminists have been trying to do.

Before the 2000s religion has been mostly neglected in the academic field of development studies (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011, 45). In a comparable fashion, in the field of International Relations, similar to the non-discussion or negative discussion of religion in relation to gender, religion continuously has been perceived as a non-significant factor in global politics (Wilson, 2012; Hurd, 2008). Liberalism and a secularist way of thinking are dominant in this field of study, particularly from the hand of European and American scholars; leaving little space for religion and resulting even in a voluntary blindness for it. This silence on religion is not surprising according to Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, as she asserts religion is believed to be antithetical to realist and liberal theories (2008, 30). She (2008, 26) claims religion is mostly portrayed as the opponent of secular morality and international order. When religion does get mentioned in international relations and development studies it is often narrowly defined and perceived to be an obstacle, a cause for concern, inherent to violence, or even as the potential cause of collapse of the international order when brought into public life (Wilson, 2012, 45; Hurd, 2008, 1; Kim, 2013, 264; Gutkowski, 2012, 92).

When discussing religion it is crucial to discuss secularism. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (2013, 140) affirm this interrelation stating that one cannot exist without the other as they are mutually definitional and historically interrelated as they study the gendering of U.S. policy and how Christian secularism influences this. In a chapter about sexuality and secularism Saba Mahmood (2013, 47, 51) writes about the relation of religion with the state, asserting that not only has the scope of religion been determined by the modern state, but historically the state has also transformed religion's exercise and substance. Linell Cady and Tracy Fessenden (2013, 21) argue in the introduction

of their edited book titled *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference* that when religion is defined within the secular dispensation it is often the antithesis of the secular and viewed as otherworldly, supernatural, authoritarian and irrational, which is in line with Hurd's argument that religion is often believed to be antithetical to realist and liberalist theories (Hurd, 2008, 30). These arguments are also consistent with Erin Wilson's argument that only the individual, institutional, and irrational dimensions of religion are taken into account in international relations and secularist literature (Wilson, 2012, 2). Azza Karam (2013, 60), Joan Scott (2009, 3, 12) and Ann Braude (2013, 69) all call for the discursive interdependence between secularism and religion, discarding the claims for the eternal opposition between the two and rather seeing secularism as a different framework.

The incomplete definition of religion, the neglect of religion, the interrelation between secularism and religion, and the dominance of secularism among scholars ask for a thorough study of global responses to gender inequality. These perceptions of religion are likely to influence these responses, which in turn influences their implementation. This thesis will study the perception of religion as an obstacle in global responses to gender inequality, as a response to the work of Elizabeth Hurd and Stacey Gutkowski, who argue that secularism is embedded in and disseminated through international institutions and global governance mechanisms as the dominant framework (Hurd, 2008; Gutkowski, 2012). It will do so inspired by Hurd's argumentation that secularism is a form of political authority in its own right in international relations (Hurd, 2008), and by Gutkowski's argument that a secular *habitus* influences the global order post-Second World War¹ (2012, 87-91). The question guiding this thesis is the following: *How have secularist and religious dynamics manifested in global responses to gender inequality?* These global responses encompass responses at the international, national, and the grassroots level. As a case study this thesis will consider how religion is framed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 (hereafter: Beijing), what religiously framed reservations to

¹ In this cited article Gutkowski argues that (2012, 87): 'secularisation and the rise of non-religion in many Western contexts, mediated by the persistence of religious traditions there, have had global implications for the so-called 'wars on terror', specifically in the case of Britain.

Beijing argued at the time of the conference, and what the resonance of ‘Beijing’ in Kenya is today.

The main argument of this thesis is that religion is not the barrier to achieving gender equality (as it was promoted in Beijing) that it is often believed to be in secular development paradigms and international relations, and that the relation between religion and gender is a complex one. Often a simple account of ‘religion’ as the oppressor of women prevails, whereas in reality there are many factors influencing the relationship between religion and women. There are cases where women use religion as an emancipatory framework. And to add to that, religion is not the only factor influencing how people act and feel towards gender equality. If as a potential consequence of secular and liberal thought religious beliefs are privatized, as well as associated with radicalized and fundamentalist thought, and religion is perceived as the oppressor of women, the international community is denying all other facets of religion. This one-sided view makes the mission to achieve gender equality on a global scale more difficult.

Consensus was reached in Beijing and the Kenyan delegation did not place a reservation on behalf of Kenya. This means that in theory Kenya supports the agenda in its entirety. However upon return from Beijing, the delegates were told by the president not to bring Beijing to Kenya.² A surprising statement, considering that Kenya was the host of the Third World Conference on Women in 1985 -the predecessor of Beijing-. Hosting this conference gives the impression that Kenya has been an outspoken supporter of gender equality and women’s rights for the past decades. The track record of the government of Kenya when it concerns legislation, policies, and international responsibilities, also supports the assumption that Kenya is a champion of gender equality. This track record also insinuates that religion does not form a barrier to gender equality, as the majority of Kenyans are devout Christians and a large minority is Muslim.³ However there is a large discrepancy between the government’s appearance in the international realm and the perceptions of Kenyans regarding gender at the grassroots level.

² As stated by Esther Mwaura in a documentary about Beijing, which can be found here: <http://www.makers.com/blog/watch-makers-once-and-all>

³ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2009). Report of the 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume 2 Population and Household Distribution by Socio-Economic Characteristics (table 12). Retrieved from: <http://statistics.knbs.or.ke/nada/index.php/catalog/55> on February 23d, 2016.

Interviews conducted at the grassroots level (Bartelink & Wilson, 2014) suggest that nearly twenty years after Beijing, Kenyans feel excluded or threatened by the advocated gender equality as was promoted after and by Beijing. The face of opposition to gender issues in the international realm is often perceived to be religious; one of the factors contributing to this perception is the strong conservative and religious⁴ lobby at the United Nations against sexual and reproductive health and rights (Vik, Moe, & Stensvold, 2013). The Kenyan delegation placed no religiously framed reservation in Beijing, but this does not mean that at the grassroots level religious beliefs do not influence the discussions of gender. This thesis will explore how some Kenyans perceive gender as was promoted by Beijing.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 was signed during the Fourth World Conference on Women, and was a milestone in placing women's issues on the international agenda. It is still considered to be so today, because it contains strong advocacy language regarding the empowerment of women and women's rights, as well as strategies to achieve those rights. A total of 189 countries signed and adopted the agenda. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights already mentions equality between men and women,⁵ but in order for this equality to be stressed and implemented globally, more debate and regulations were needed than this mention alone. Another of the international successes for women was the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, as an agenda for family planning and sexual and reproductive health and rights was explicitly laid out. However a variety of topics was not addressed yet, and before governments and stakeholders could be held accountable for women's rights more actions and objectives needed

⁴ These religious voices are labeled conservative by Vik, Stensvold and Moe because they have labeled themselves as such (Vik, Stensvold & Moe, 2014, 1). As argued by Buss and Herman (2003, 112), religious conservative groups believe in the traditional family form, the theory of complementarity, and oppose to the use of the term gender. Casanova (2009, 26) adds to this conservative (which here means they oppose) positions in regard to contraception, abortion, homosexuality, and divorce.

⁵ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). In the preamble it states 'Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,'. Article 2 also stresses equality between men and women as it reads: 'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status'. In this article it is emphasized that sex should not be a ground for inequality. Retrieved from: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> on November 15th 2015.

to be explicated. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 is an important step and achievement towards this broader agenda for women's rights.

When studying religion and secularism in the international realm, inevitably religious opposition concerning gender and sexuality comes to the fore (Vik, Stensvold & Moe, 2013; Buss & Herman, 2003), which is why Beijing, being known as the global policy document on gender, which takes a progressive stance on women's rights, is the case study of this thesis.

Aside from sparking feminist activism and international networking among women's groups to get international recognition for women's rights as human rights (Okin, 1998, 44), Beijing also mobilized conservative religious voices, such as the Christian Right to international arenas (Buss & Herman, 2003, 107; Vik, Stensvold & Moe, 2013). Ingrid Vik, Anne Stensvold, and Christian Moe (2013) were commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to study religious non-governmental organizations at the United Nations and they found that despite making up a small number of NGOs at the UN, religious organizations⁶ have made sure they were seen and heard, finding their allies across religious divides in order to protect so-called traditional values, particularly opposing progressive⁷ language about sexual and reproductive health and rights. Doris Buss and Didi Herman (2003, 102, 117) wrote a book about the Christian Right in international politics, and they argue in a chapter about 'the Gender Agenda' that conservative religious groups have voiced their discontent with Beijing, and that they are led by the Vatican which is perceived as the 'moral standard bearer' as well as 'representing the faith at the international realm.'

Promotion of the concept 'family' has played a prominent role in the work of religious lobbyists and organizations (Buss & Herman, 2003, 102; Vik, Stensvold, & Moe, 2013). The family being defined as a: 'union of love and life between a man and woman from which life naturally springs,' which is sanctified by marriage (Buss & Herman, 2003, 118). Beijing has been perceived as an attack on the family by the Vatican and the Christian Right (Buss & Herman, 2003), and

⁶ A noteworthy, yet perhaps unsurprising finding of Vik, Stensvold, & Moe (2013) is that these organizations are mainly American.

⁷ Progressive language includes among others: feminist views of equality between the sexes and genders, acknowledging diverse forms of family, and promoting women's rights. All previous mentioned authors (who are from America and Norway) reason in favor of a feminist and progressive point of view, literature from conservative voices proved difficult to find, which makes the conservative versus progressive dichotomy arguably Western, and even secular.

by Muslim societies as well according to Lisa Hajjar (2004, 17) who researched domestic violence in Muslim societies. Cultural and religious norms in public life play an important role when it comes to implementing legislation, as they can determine whether positive legislation regarding gender equality is enforced (Spahić-Šiljak, 2013, 129). The strong lobby of conservative religious organizations influences international debates as well as national debates. If religious organizations and institutions are discouraging the feminist concept of gender equality, this can have consequences on the religious population of a country.

This introduction started with illustrating the interrelation between gender, religion, and secularism. It followed to introduce the underestimation of religion in the research of gender, international relations, and developing contexts. It continued with presenting the relation between religion and secularism, and then it introduced the main argument of this thesis as well as the research question. After this it introduced Beijing as the global policy document about gender, and briefly touched on Kenya's relationship with Beijing. It closed with an explanation that conservative religious voices have entered the international realm to voice their discontent about gender equality, explaining that particularly the ownership and meaning of the concept family is a battleground between conservative religious voices and progressive feminist voices.

To build the main argument of this thesis -that religion is not the barrier to achieving gender equality that it is often believed to be- the second chapter of this thesis will provide the theoretical framework for this argumentation, after which in the third chapter Beijing and the references to religion within the Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as religiously framed reservations at the time of the conference, will be analyzed as a case study. The fourth chapter will provide a context on gender in Kenya, and the fifth chapter will analyze interviews from an evaluation of a gender program as commissioned by a religious non-governmental organization operating in Kenya during which Beijing was mentioned when gender was the topic of study.

2. The perception of religion as an obstacle to gender equality in international politics

In development studies and among scholars of international relations religion is often viewed to be an obstacle to gender equality, emancipation, and development (Haynes, 2007; Cady & Fessenden, 2013). A secularist bias persists in the international community, and religion is commonly perceived to be ‘bad’ (Hurd, 2008). This chapter will explore the implications of secularism as a political authority, framework and cultural perspective when studying global responses to gender inequality as it studies the perception of religion as an obstacle to gender equality in international politics, aiming to understand what the impact of the accompanying dynamics are when considering the resonance of Beijing in Kenya, since the Kenyan population is predominantly religious. In order to do so this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of assumptions behind dominant approaches to religion in international politics, specifically of ‘Christian’ secularist thought in international politics and ‘bad’ religion. This first section also includes definitions of religion and secularism. The second section concerns a short account of gender inequality as inspired by Simone de Beauvoir. The third section will lay out women’s emancipation in developing contexts, and the fourth and last section provides an overview of religion as an obstacle to gender equality and women’s empowerment in developing contexts and international politics.

2.1 Assumptions behind dominant approaches to religion in international politics: secularist thought and ‘bad’ religion

A few dominant assumptions shape discussions of gender equality in development and international politics, and this section aims to clarify what these entail, focusing on the division between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religion and the often ‘Christian’ assumptions accompanying secularism when it is viewed as a political authority in international politics. This section will also provide definitions of religion and secularism, and how these feature in discussions about gender and sexuality.

As argued by Elizabeth Hurd (2012, 324) in a chapter titled *Religion and Secularism* one of the assumptions influencing scholars’ theoretical paradigms is

that there are two kinds of religion, namely 'good' and 'bad.' She states (Hurd, 2012, 324) that so-called good religion is associated with privatized beliefs that have been interiorized, and are 'largely irrelevant to politics.' Hurd (2012, 324) attests that 'good' religion is even thought to be able to contribute to global justice, peacebuilding and reconciliation after conflict, even being a 'countervailing force to terrorism.' In turn Hurd (2012, 324) explains the perception of 'bad' religion as containing violence and terrorism related to religion and being associated with division and intolerance. Others such as David Kyuman Kim (2013) have stated that in political theory and political liberalism, the 'predominant disciplinary habit' is to cast 'religion as a cause for concern-as a threat to peace, to political stability, or to the enactment of freedom and justice-rather than as a potential source for peace, freedom, and justice.' The relation between religion and conflict has been more on the international radar since 9/11. Hurd (2008, 1) claims in her book *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* that the underlying phenomenon causing religion to be viewed as problematic in International Relations is 'the unquestioned acceptance of the secularist division between religion and politics.' Hurd argues this separation is a social and historical construct (2008, 1). In other words: these two are and have been separated, no questions asked, whereas this separation does not fit with reality. In line with Hurd, William Cavanaugh (2004, 35, 37) argues that the construct of religion and violence is serving the interests of Western consumers, since religion supposedly is irrational and dangerous and needs to be replaced by a more rational and secular form of power, even though religion was only recently separated from political institutions in the West.

As was argued in the introductory chapter, scholars agree that religion and secularism are discursively interdependent: a definition of one requires defining the other (Hurd, 2008, 36; Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2013, 140; Karam 2013, 60; Scott, 2009, 3, 12; Braude, 2013, 69). Talal Asad argues secularism can be alleged to form a discursive-intellectual binary with 'Christianity, (...), reason, tolerance, free thought and speech,' opposing 'Islam, fundamentalism, submission, intolerance, restricted thought and speech' (Asad in Brown, 2009, 14). Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2013, 144) make a similar good-bad division in which the good is constituted of secularism and religion coexisting, being governed by reason and leaving freedom in relations of gender and sexuality. 'Bad' religion in turn

concerns fundamentalism, constrains gender and sexuality, and refuses a secularist framework where religion is privatized (Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2013, 144). Secularism and therefore Christianity influence the contemporary moral narrative of modernity that dominates international politics. This and the previous paragraph illustrate that the good-bad division of religion is largely influenced by secularist and Christian thought, which in turn will have consequences for the discussions surrounding the relation between religion and gender.

Defining religion is a near impossible task. A variety of scholars working on religion have started their work with an attempt to define religion, or they write that it is not possible to do so, often leaning on work of other scholars who did try. Deneulin and Rakodi (2011, 50) write that ‘Contestation and disagreement over the nature and content of religion are the hallmarks of both religious practice and religious studies, making it an even less well-defined social category.’ José Casanova (2009, 9) states that: ‘It is obvious that when people around the world use the category of religion they actually mean very different things.’ Jeffrey Haynes (2007, 13) argues that religion as a term is Eurocentric in nature. Similarly Casanova (2009, 9) argues that widespread usage of the category of religion is a consequence of the ‘global expansion of the modern secular-religious system of the modern-secular system of classification of reality which first emerged in the modern Christian West.’ Religion thus emerges as ‘a construction of Western secular modernity.’ (Casanova, 2009, 9). Religion is commonly framed as a Western concept that reflects historical developments, and it is not universally applicable (Hurd, 2008, 116). According to Elizabeth Hurd (2008, 44; 2015) any attempt to define religion as well as its relationship to politics is unstable because isolating religion from its social and political context is impossible, and that it should be understood to be an intersectional category that is ‘deeply enmeshed with legal forms of collective governance in complex and context-specific formations.’ Devine and Deneulin (2011, 61) too criticize the defining of religion because of the risk to isolate religion, in turn ignoring the historical, social, and political context in which religion is defined and reproduced. They assert that religious values are ‘inherently social and always embedded in wider contexts’ (Devine & Deneulin, 2011, 63). Religion thus cannot be divided between good and bad religion, as it entails a complexity of subjects that differ per context (Hurd, 2015). Similarly, Deneulin and Rakodi

(2011, 50) and Devine and Denulin (2011, 61), argue that religions are not homogeneous, universal, and static or abstract theories, but rather dynamic, contested, and that they can be ‘lived’ differently.

Definitions of religion thus are often argued to be Western as well as too narrow, whereas religion is an intersectional category that should be explored and studied as such. Existing definitions of religion can be categorized as substantive or functional. The first involves the belief that there is something about religion that makes it religion and the transcendent being greater than humans. It focuses on ‘what religion *is*’ (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011, 50). Functional refers to the function of religions for people and society, thus on ‘what religion *does*’ (Denulin & Rakodi, 2011, 50). These definitions look at religion as helping people to make sense of the world, answering why suffering and violence exists as well giving people standards on how to behave.⁸ Carlson states that religion sometimes is created to be what the scholar wants it to be when studying it, but still writes that a definition of religion could be (2011, 8-9):

Religion entails the practices, rituals, beliefs, discourses, myths, symbols, creeds, experiences, traditions, and institutions by which individuals and communities conceive, revere, assign meaning to, and order their lives around some account of ultimate reality generally understood in relation to God, gods, or a transcendent dimension deemed sacred or holy.

Carlson mentions experiences, and meaning-making of individuals and communities as being a part of religion, this is in accordance with Tamsin Bradley (2010, 362) who argues that religion entails an ‘experiential’ dimension. This experiential dimension becomes apparent as adherents ‘enter a relationship with aspects of the divine’ (Bradley, 2010, 362). This dimension thus also concerns what meaning people give to religion, as it is more than ‘a cultural system, or a set of beliefs or symbols’ (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011, 51) and is an experience that is lived.

The previous paragraphs have attempted to demonstrate that religion is an intersectional category that is defined and deployed differently by different people, even within scholars of religious studies. However, this does not mean

⁸ Next to the mentioned sources for these definitions I am also indebted to class notes I took on February 3rd 2015 in a class given for the course Fundamentalism and Religious Violence II by dr. Marjo Buitelaar.

that religion cannot be studied. It means that religion is made up of a variety of aspects, and that the term religion can refer to a multitude of these. It also means that within this thesis the concept religion will be broken down into concepts such as religious authorities or religious beliefs as much as possible to avoid giving too much agency to the concept religion, as well as to avoid ambiguity.

Since this thesis will also explore secularist dynamics within global responses to gender equality, the following paragraphs will introduce contemporary definitions of secularization and secularism as well as give a short account of the history of secularism.

Despite having the subjects of reference in common, secularization and secularism are different concepts; the first referring more to a process and the second more to a mode of thought, the upcoming paragraphs will clarify both concepts in the same order. First, according to Grace Davie, Karel Dobbelaere (1981) and José Casanova (1994) have put up important efforts in the definition of the varieties of ideas that secularization can entail (Davie, 2007, 49-51). She states (Davie 2007, 51) that both these scholars ‘affirm that the paradigm of secularization has been the main theoretical frame through which the social sciences have viewed the relationship of religion and modernity, and both acknowledge that the very real confusion about this relationship lies within the concept of secularization itself.’ She thus acknowledges the important role that the process of secularization has played in perceiving the relation between religion and modernity. Casanova views secularization in 1994 as being made up of three propositions: ‘secularization as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices, and secularization as marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere.’ (Casanova, 1994, 211 in Davie, 2007, 51). He links these three propositions to modernization and argues that the theory of privatization of religion is a ‘precondition of modern democratic politics’ (Casanova, 2009, 7). Later Casanova re-evaluated the central thesis of this 1994 book *Public Religions in the Modern World*, arguing that the process of secularization is exceptional to Europe (2009, 12). Elizabeth Hurd proposes a definition similar to Casanova’s when she describes some of the dimensions of laicism as ‘the exclusion of religion from the spheres of power and authority in modern societies (structural differentiation), the privatization of religion, and a decline in church membership and potential

disappearance of individual religious belief.’ (2008, 29). In line with these authors I argue that secularization consists of (1) determining what of religion does and does not belong to the public sphere, (2) a decline of (individual) religious belief and practices and (3) the privatization of religion. Consequentially secularization is understood to be the gradual decline of religion from the public realm as driven by secularism, and accordingly as a process.

Secondly, this paragraph will briefly cover common associations with, and definitions of, secularism. In an introductory chapter to a book about critique being potentially secular, Wendy Brown (2009, 10) writes that the term secular ‘can suggest a condition of being unreligious or antireligious, but also religiously tolerant, humanist, Christian, modern, or simply Western.’ This serves as a reminder that just as the term Christian can be associated with a set of social values and a political agenda, there are a variety of ideas, concepts and beliefs connected with secularism as well. Hurd (2008, 14) asserts that secularism has constructed narratives of modernity, development, and progress, and has come to be associated with ‘universalist pretensions and claims to superiority over nonsecular alternatives.’ Inspired by Hurd’s work (2008) this thesis will analyze secularism as a political authority in its own right, and as a mode of thought or cultural perspective meant to provide a framework without reference to the transcendent.

This thesis focuses on why religion has been perceived as an obstacle in global responses to achieving gender inequality, arguing that a secularist way of thinking influenced this perception. Despite secularism being notoriously difficult to measure or quantify (Hurd, 2008, 21), this thesis will attempt to point out secularist dynamics within and throughout the framing of religion within the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as analyze how interviewed -often Christian- Kenyans at the grassroots level perceived the arguable secularist gender equality as promoted in Beijing.

This section will continue with a brief account of the history of secularism. José Casanova (2009, 9-10) argues in favor of the importance of the history of secularism as follows:

The contextualization of the categories, religious and secular, should thus begin with the recognition of the particular Christian historicity of Western European developments, as well as of the multiple and diverse historical patterns of differentiation and fusion of the religious and the secular, and their mutual constitution, within European and Western societies.

One of the presumed reasons secularism emerged in Europe as stated by Saba Mahmood (2006, 323-324) in an article in which she explains ‘the particular understandings of secularism underlying contemporary American discourses on Islam’ was for secularism to act as a solution to times of war and sectarianism by ‘defining a political ethic altogether independent of religious doctrines,’ as it was expected to establish an ethic all doctrines could identify with. The Peace of Westphalia, taking place after the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) is often mentioned as the starting point of secularism as we know it today, which Stephen D. Krasner as quoted by Hurd agrees with as he states that Westphalia was the point where the Catholic Church’s influence transnationally waned and where the idea was validated that ‘international relations should be driven by balance-of-power considerations rather than the ideals of Christendom’ (Krasner, 2001, 21⁹ in Hurd, 2008, 31). In a lecture addressing the opposition between gender equality and secularism versus religion, Joan Wallach Scott (2009, 2) asserts that the French Revolution is a founding moment of modernity, as modernity is largely a product of the Enlightenment during which the rule of reason and secularism prevailed. Along with modernity the (liberal) nation-state materialized (Scott, 2009, 6) and society moved from a theological, to a metaphysical, to a scientific stage (Davie, 2007, 47). Both Asad (2009, 42) and Mahmood (2013, 47, 51) argue that after the foundation of the nation-state it was now the responsibility of these secular states to determine what practices, exercises and substance belong to religion and who qualifies as a believer or practitioner in order to ensure equal treatment of all members of religions. In turn Hurd (2008, 31) argues that this distinction between the natural and the supernatural order can be traced back to Christian thought. Secularism can thus be argued to be influenced by ‘Christian’ and European, or so-called Western, assumptions, right from its emergence.

After its foundation the secular state supposedly assured the practicing of religion out of individual choice and without coercion, and to keep religion out of politics (Mahmood, 2006, 324; Hurd, 2008, 32). Hurd (2008, 32) continues that

⁹ Krasner, S.D. (2001). Sovereignty, *Foreign Policy*, 20-29.

religious identity was perceived to be irrelevant to politics if the latter was to maintain its rational character while governing society. This boundary between religion and the state is complicated, because according to Mahmood (2006, 325) religious life in many states continues to be regulated by the state through legislation. Despite the argued interdependence of the state and religion, the state can make decisions that affect religious institutions and determine whether individuals can practice beliefs, but 'religion' cannot do so the other way around (Asad in Mahmood, 2006, 327). To sum up the last two paragraphs: one of the possible reasons secularism emerged was to prevent religious wars as well as to prevent one religion from becoming dominant in politics, and another reason potentially causing it to emerge was the need for a scientific principle to govern the state instead of religious authority, institutions, and influences.

José Casanova (2009, 12) asserts that common belief since the Enlightenment was that inevitably secularism would triumph globally following the European model. In line with Casanova, Scott (2009, 3) states that secularism was expected to start a linear evolution of modernity and that it was viewed to be equal to 'progress, emancipation, and freedom from the structures of religiously-based traditionalism.' These expectations are congruent with the so-called secularization thesis, which according to Grace Davie (2007, 54) is the belief that political power will gain its own legitimacy (over religious authority), scientific discovery is further developed and rationality is the guiding principle to live by. Secularization theorists believed that secularism would prevail over religion in the end, an idea which is now being reevaluated by a variety of scholars globally (Wilson, 2012, 34, 36-37; Hurd, 2008, 23). Scholars since have realized that modernity will not cause a reduction in religious belief and practice or the privatization of religion and have assured religion will continue to influence the public sphere in the modern world (Davie, 2007, 51, 64; Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 833; Haynes, 2007, 2; Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011, 49; Petersen & Jones, 2011, 1292).

Despite the wider agreement among scholars that the secularization thesis is incorrect, and that the process of secularization has not continued outside a few liberal states, a one-sided view of international politics with a secularist bias still persists. In fact Casanova (2009, 14) attests that one can question how 'secular' these secular European states are, as these democracies often do not live up to the

‘myth of secular neutrality,’ nor are they strictly secular according to Casanova. Secularist states thus are a minority, if they exist at all, and yet secularism being a largely Christian and European ideology is dominant in international relations and politics. According to Deneulin and Rakodi (2011, 49) mainstream development studies too have been governed by the assumption of secularization. They consider this problematic because it is often the only framework used to understand the relationship between religion and development (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011, 49). After explaining that the roots of secularism are Christian and European, the ruling idea that the secular West has a monopoly over the appropriate relationship between religion and politics is not surprising (Hurd, 2008, 43). This monopoly leaves little room for other countries to work out what works best for them. Of particular interest for this thesis is the continued persistence of a Christian-influenced secularism in international politics, despite having been proven not to be a universal and objective secularism. What are the consequences of the good-bad division of religion and the secularist bias governed by Christian assumptions for religion and gender in international politics? It seems that a one-sided view of religion and gender in international politics has emerged out of these assumptions. Governing expectations are that religion is detrimental for gender equality as it is associated with ‘bad’ religion (Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2013, 144). Religion is to be kept out of the public sphere for religion and gender to exist peacefully when argued in line with the history of secularism.

This thesis will reflect on the assumptions about religion embedded in secularism, and how these are manifested within the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Elizabeth Hurd’s work has inspired and influenced the course of this thesis significantly as she suggests secularism is not the solution to problems posed by sexual difference, but rather a framework through which these problems are addressed and managed. This thesis will thus look into the implications of secularism as a political authority, framework and cultural perspective (Hurd, 2013, 216, Hurd, 2008) for global responses to gender inequality as a consequence. The upcoming sections will cover gender inequality, women’s emancipation in developing contexts, and the perception of religion as an obstacle to gender equality.

2.2 Gender inequality

This section will start by giving a concise overview of gender inequality and will close with the role of legislation and social norms in the reinforcement of gender inequality. Gender is an intersectional category (Kabeer, 2015, 190) of which this thesis cannot give a comprehensive account. Naila Kabeer (2015, 190) explains this as she states that horizontal inequalities, which concern marginalized social identities, and vertical inequalities, which concern class-based inequalities, overlap and intersect. She stresses that gender inequality therefore is not ‘just another inequality,’ because it: (1) is ‘more pervasive across societies than any other form of inequality,’ (2) cuts ‘across class, race, caste, ethnicity, and other forms of inequality,’ even intensifying disadvantages as they intersect, and (3) is fundamentally structured into the organization of social relations in society (Kabeer, 2015, 202-203).

However, because this thesis studies the dynamics of religion as a potential barrier to gender equality, in particular related to global responses, the following paragraphs will give a short account of the inequality between men and women, focusing on Simone de Beauvoir’s account of women as the so-called second sex and on the tendency in countries to favor men in legislation and politics. I chose de Beauvoir (1949), because, as partially revealed by the title of her book, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, she claims that it is not biology that determines what it means to be a woman, but rather what is expected of, and told to women, mostly by men, that defines and creates them. This argumentation is detrimental when writing in favor of gender equality because it emphasizes that gender, or even sex, is not a fixed or static category, but rather an impressionable one.

Men and women have been portrayed as polar opposites for centuries. Simone de Beauvoir (1949, 13) argues in the introduction of her book that femininity and masculinity may seem symmetrical on paper, but that in reality they are more like electrical poles; the man represents the positive and neutral and concerns all human beings, whereas the woman represents the negative. Man can be significant without woman she asserts, but woman not without man: ‘She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute -she is the Other.’ (1949, 13). In other words, de Beauvoir argues man defines woman in relation to himself. Despite this ancient duality

between man and woman, de Beauvoir stresses that ‘Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought,’ and that it is ‘as primordial as human conscience itself,’ therefore not necessarily linked to dividing the sexes (1949, 13-14). What is unique about the polarized relationship between man and woman as argued by de Beauvoir (1949, 15-16) is that women do not make up a minority in society and that they are in a ‘fundamental unity’ with their oppressors; in other words: woman is man’s dependent.

The inequality between men and women, and women as second class citizens, manifests itself in many national and international laws. Historically legislation in countries as well as documents drafted by the international community have often been written by men for men, enabling the persistence of patriarchal notions and the oppression of women, arguably out of angst (de Beauvoir, 1949, 114; Okin, 1998, 34). According to Scott (2009, 5) it was in particular feminine religiosity which was feared to be a potentially disruptive force of rational pursuits in politics. Susan Okin (1998, 35) argues in an article about women’s rights being the same as human rights that when women’s life experiences would be taken into account equally, priorities in legislation would differ drastically, focusing more on issues such as: ‘rape (including marital rape and rape during war), domestic violence, reproductive freedom, the valuation of childcare and other domestic labor as work, and unequal opportunity for women and girls in education, employment, housing, credit, and health care.’

When there is legislation in place that grants equal rights to women in countries where women are facing structural oppression or having trouble being empowered, these laws are often overruled by family and customary law Okin asserts (1998, 38). Mahmood (2013, 52-53) affirms that in postcolonial societies religious guidelines are what influences family law, as opposed to civil law. Zilka Spahić-Šiljak (2013, 129) argues with the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina that legislation may promote gender equality and non-discrimination, but as long as cultural and religious norms influence public life these laws will not be implemented. Tensions thus emerge between progressive laws providing rights to women and the realities on the ground. Spahić-Šiljak (2013, 135) therefore argues to increase efforts to translate universal human rights norms into language that can be culturally and religiously understood and accepted by people of all faiths. What this call stresses is that international human rights language should take religious

and cultural arguments into account, and should not depend on a secular, universal rule of law framework. The reason for this is that despite national legislation being in place, which grants women equal rights in theory, in practice the implementation can fail because people do not associate with this language. At a local level international human rights language and documents can be viewed as Westernized, which in this sense is a negative connotation because it implies a certain dominance (Hurd, 2013, 220; Vik, Stensvold, & Moe, 2013; Hajjar, 2004).

Often the so-called West¹⁰ is portrayed as a champion and guardian of gender equality and is juxtaposed with the Muslim world where patriarchal cultures prevail and constrain women's empowerment (Cady & Fessenden, 2013, 6). Hurd (2013, 213-214) illustrates this using the Netherlands as a case study, stating that the displacing of problems posed by sexual difference onto a religious other is used by the Dutch to normalize a secular Dutch heterosexual female subject for which a secular-Islamic binary is mobilized, associating Islam with gender inequality, unattractiveness even, and sexual unavailability. Gene Burns (2013, 81, 92) upholds that 'improved gender equality is more likely in secular liberal states than in other states, not because it leads to gender equality per se, but because there are spaces in which it can be negotiated, leaving room for subcultures to grow.' However, secularist states also continue to put normative constraints on women. Despite the image of Western countries and states being champions of gender equality, there is not one country today that has reached equality between the sexes, let alone genders.¹¹ The next section will elaborate on women's emancipation in developing contexts.

2.3 Women's emancipation in developing contexts

This section attempts to contextualize gender equality and women's emancipation in developing countries because Kenya is the geographical focus of this thesis, and before the resonance of Beijing in Kenya can be studied, a general account of gender equality in developing contexts can provide useful information.

¹⁰ I understand the West to be North-America, Western-Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries who relate to these.

¹¹ I understand sex to be the biological status of a person, whereas gender refers to the culturally ascribed traits, behaviors, and attitudes to a sex which are thus not necessarily linked to the natural or embodied differences of sex. For a short overview of these I recommend looking at the American Psychological Association's Definition of Terms here: <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf>, a longer explanation can be found in Harperlin, D.L. (2014). Sex / Sexuality / Sexual Classification. In: *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender* (pp. 449-483), C.R. Stimpson, & Herdt, G. (eds), Chicago: the University of Chicago Press.

To call the amount of literature written about gender and development extensive is an understatement.¹² This thesis will not attempt to cover all books and journal articles that have taken part in these discussions, but it will concisely summarize what the discourse of gender and development is today. A variety of organizations have addressed the empowerment of women in the development field, from non-governmental organizations at the grassroots level up to the United Nations (Grabe, 2011, 233). Addressing Millennium Development Goal 3, which concerns women's empowerment and gender equality, is central in the work of these organizations (Grabe, 2011, 233). The incorporation of gender equality in the MDGs, as well as in the consecutive goals,¹³ the Sustainable Development Goals, or 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is a telltale sign of the intertwining of gender and development

The upcoming paragraphs will start by placing gender and development in perspective from a mainly problem oriented account because women in developing contexts are often studied because their current situation is perceived to be unsatisfactory by developing agencies and others. This section will close with a paragraph on the importance not to only see women as victims, but to see them as agent and makers of change as well. This section will carry on with explaining gender-based violence; continue with women's economic participation secondly and thirdly explain women's political participation.

Firstly, women face violence during their entire lifespan which is perpetuated exclusively or mostly to women. Violence that is perpetuated to only one sex or gender is called gender-based violence. In developing contexts this concerns among others sexual and physical violence, intimate partner violence, harmful traditional practices such as female genital cutting and mutilation, and child marriage. When studying gender in developing contexts, the prevalence and persistence of these practices come to the fore (Njenga, 2007, 27-28). All of these practices hamper the ability of women, and at times men, to be emancipated as both the physical and psychological consequences of gender-based violence can last a lifetime.

¹² One example: Coles, A., Gray, L., & Momsen, J. (eds.) (2015). *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Development*. New York: Routledge, 594 pp.

¹³ See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

Secondly, the economic participation of women differs largely in developing contexts. Amartya Sen (1999, 115) exemplifies in his book *Development as Freedom* that one of the freedoms that women often lack in developing countries is to seek for employment outside of their home, which in turn restrains their economic empowerment and ability to be equal to men. Women often traditionally take responsibility of the unpaid work such as household chores and childrearing, but in developing countries they also work jobs that are often physically restraining and low-waged, mainly in the agricultural sector (Kabeer, 2015, 195). According to Philomena Njeri Mwaura (2008, 43) who researched stigmatization and discrimination of HIV/AIDS in Kenya, the worth of a woman is even judged by her ability to bear children. Reasons women take low-waged, mainly agricultural jobs are because firstly they have to produce an income if their partner does not provide enough or when they run the household alone, and secondly, they have to stay close to their homes because of their other unpaid responsibilities which constrain their mobility. Women thus carry a double work-load. Another barrier Amartya Sen (1999, 201) specifies in regard to the economic participation of women, is their inability to own capital or economic resources, including property in many countries. Frank Njenga (2007, 27) studies the globalization and the effect of colonialization on trauma in women in children in Kenya and he emphasizes that disputes over resources are more prominent in countries where resources are scarce, such as Kenya where the majority of land is arid or semi-arid. The inability of women to own resources and property could be the consequence of national law, customary law, traditional practice, social barriers, or a combination of these (Wangila, 2007, 27). In line with the social barriers argument, Shelly Grabe (2011, 234-235) explains in a study of women's empowerment in the context of international development that reasons women have been lacking access to resources are power imbalances and gender-based norms, which 'create an environment that legitimizes and perpetuates women's subordinate status.'

Women's political participation also largely differs per country. This partially depends on countries' laws that promote participation, starting from the right to vote, to setting quota for women in decision-making positions, whereas other countries have no legislation in place regarding women's participation in politics. Positive legislation may not lead to an increase in political participation

because at the community level the participation of women in politics may not be promoted or even discouraged. The level of education plays a prominent role in the ability and capacity of women to participate politically. As there are numerous barriers towards the attainment of an education for girls and women, it is not uncommon for girls to drop-out of school once they are old enough to help their families at home (Jones, 2011, 387-388). Families often prefer investing in their sons when it concerns education, because their daughters will leave their homes when they get married, which often occurs at an early age because of financial reasons, as well as to protect the honor of the family (Wangila, 2007, 26).

Mary Nyangweso Wangila attests in a chapter titled *Religion and the Social Behavior of Kenyans* (2007, 22, 25) that Kenyan communities also believe women are responsible for managing the household and nurture the family, which is why an education for girls is at times discouraged as well (2007, 26). Drop-out rates are also influenced by high rates of teenage pregnancies. The latter are consequential of a large gap in contraceptive needs or knowledge about contraception for unmarried girls, who are not expected to be sexually active but in reality often are according to Dmaris Seeleina Parsitau (2009, 60-61) who researched sexual behavior of born-again youth in Kenya. Consequentially of teenage pregnancies, girls frequently only attain a primary education, which may leave them illiterate. Thus next to structural policy barriers and social barriers, at the individual level girls may not be educated enough to be politically active, which in turn hampers them from pursuing a political career, or even practice their individual political rights such as the right to vote.

When it concerns gender-based violence, women's economic participation, and women's political participation, women in developing contexts are facing structural inequalities of which attention needs to be put to forms of horizontal inequalities as well, stresses Naila Kabeer as she lists 'age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on', when she argues that gender inequality intersects with other inequalities (Kabeer, 2015, 202). All of these restrict girls and women from reaching their full potential.

As explained by using these three examples, women in developing contexts are facing difficulties to achieve empowerment and equality with men. This often used frame in studying development leaves little room for women as agents of change as opposed to victims that 'need saving,' even feeding into the

discourse to 'other' women. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) has questioned this need to save, by researching American political voices' ambition to save Afghan Muslim women, as she explores the 'issues of women, cultural relativism, and problems of "difference" from three angles' (2002, 787). First she asserts that feminist anthropologists need to be suspicious of strange political bedfellows that find themselves agreeing on issues whereas they are normally disagree (2002, 787). Secondly she calls on the 'acceptance of the possibility of difference,' explaining that Afghan women may want different things than what America's political voices are wanting for them (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 787). Thirdly Abu-Lughod (2002, 787) calls for vigilance 'about the rhetoric of saving people because of what it implies about our attitudes.' This third angle Abu-Lughod (2002, 789) mentions conveys a common development framework about the need of saving by Western actors, and even a 'sense of superiority by Westerners.' Instead of promoting cultural relativism in a sense that would allow for culture to be used as an argument to justify just about any behavior, Abu-Lughod (2002, 787-788) stresses that:

What I am advocating is the hard work involved in recognizing and respecting differences –precisely as products of different histories, as expressions of different circumstances, and as manifestations of differently structured desires. We may want justice for women, but can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or choose, different futures from what we envision as best?

She also contests that feminism is not necessarily Western, but that there are Third World feminisms and feminism in different parts of the World as well (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In a more recent article about Muslim women's rights in Egypt and Palestine, Abu-Lughod (2010, 7) asserts that in Egypt women's rights have been strongly internationalized in the NGO world and that elites speak on behalf of women and that human rights language in women's rights advocacy is increasingly dominating. The next section will explain more about using religion as an emancipatory framework for women.

What I hoped to convey in the last paragraph is that when studying gender and development it is easy to frame these from a problem oriented account, but that it is important to be aware of the possible bias of the Western framework. When studying the situation of women in a context it is important to keep in mind how these women think and feel about their situation, and that differences can

exist to finding the best approach to address it. Having stated this, in the following section this chapter will analyze the perception of religion as an obstacle to development and gender equality in international politics.

2.4 Religion as an obstacle to development, gender equality, and women's empowerment

This section aims to contextualize the perception of religion as an obstacle to the achievement of development, gender equality, and women's empowerment. It will highlight that neither secularism nor religion will directly lead to gender equality. Again, the term 'religion' covers a variety of concepts. The paragraphs of the first part of this section will cover the changing relation between religion and development, will introduce the influence of secularism and religion on the position of women, and explicate the assignment of sexuality, women, and religion to the private sphere. After the first part this section will focus on gender issues in international politics and the role of conservative and progressive religious voices within these. The section will close with examples of both Christian and Muslim women who use religion as emancipatory frameworks.

In 2000 Kurt Alan ver Beek proclaimed religion a development taboo, as he found the most prominent development studies journals barely mentioned religion or spirituality and he concluded major development agencies avoided religion or spirituality in the programmes and projects he studied (ver Beek, 2000 in Petersen & Jones, 2011, 1291-1292). Religion was viewed as irrelevant to development studies and work, and when it was studied it concerned 'bad' religion (Jones & Petersen, 1292). Over the past decades a paradigm shift, as well as a growing body of literature on the matter, can be argued to have taken place when it concerns the role of 'religion' in development; a shift that went from neglecting religion to centralizing and embedding it (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; Devine & Deneulin, 2011, 59). I say 'religion' because as was stated earlier, religion encompasses a variety of beliefs, practices, rituals, authorities and more, and because religion itself is not an agent. Jeffrey Haynes gives an overview of this paradigm shift in the introduction to his book *Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation?*, where he presents that religion is more increasingly seen as a means for development after the failure of modernization theories and secular attempts to achieve development such as structural adjustment programs

and neo-liberalist development strategies, which strongly focused on economic empowerment (Haynes, 2007, 1, 7-11). However as Séverine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi (2011, 46) state in an article devoted to studying the role of religion in development studies over the last three decades; as economic growth did not translate in a reduction to poverty, the causal relation between economic growth and development was contested. Haynes (2007, 5-6) as well as Deneulin and Rakodi (2011, 46) attest that older development models, often capitalist and communist, left no room for religion because the belief was that with development and modernity religion would disappear as it would decline in significance. Development models changed from the basic needs approach in the 1970s, to an emphasis on livelihoods in the 1980s and 1990s (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011, 48). Along with Deneulin and Rakodi (2011), Jones and Petersen (2011), who also studied recent work on religion and development, criticize existing models centered on the failure of Western state-led and market-led models to acknowledge local culture and grassroots movements. Jones and Peterson (2011, 1294) just as Haynes (2007, 3-4) argue that human development increasingly received attention, which acknowledges that development has political, social economic, moral, and psychological dimensions.

Haynes (2007, 12) asserts that from 2000 onwards, it became a more accepted idea that faith-based organizations and secular development agencies have similar concerns. Deneulin and Rakodi (2011, 45-46), as well as Petersen and Jones (2011, 1296) stress that more and more development funding agencies have cooperated with faith based organizations in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals because these organizations are viewed as closer to and more rooted in communities. In a similar fashion, secular organizations have cooperated with faith-based organizations as well (Devine & Deneulin, 2011, 59). The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and UNFPA have also stressed that building bridges between faith-based and secular organizations is key to development, they have argued for a more integrated vision of development, and have spoken of the transformation of dialogue into practice and action (Haynes, 2007, 12). Deneulin and Rakodi's overview study (2011) as well as Haynes book (2007) thus address that slowly but surely religion is not seen as incongruent with modernity and development anymore as there is increasingly more

acknowledgment of ‘non-state entities to augment the state’s development abilities.’

When studying gender equality and sexuality, ‘religion’ is more often than not perceived to be controlling these concepts and to pose a barrier to achieving gender equality (Cady & Fessenden, 2013, 8). Casanova (2009, 18) too asserts that Western feminists commonly view religious fundamentalism and religion itself to be ‘the main obstacle to the global advance of women’s rights and the progressive emancipation of women, and therefore tend to advocate the secularization of state, politics, law and morality.’ This thesis argues that this perception of religion as an obstacle to gender equality is incorrect because as Shahra Razavi and Anne Jenichen (2010, 845) assert in an article titled *The Unhappy marriage of Religion and Politics: problems and pitfalls for gender equality*, religious beliefs, barriers, actors or influences never are the sole cause of gender inequality, as gender inequality is also perpetuated by social, cultural and economic factors. Just as do secular beliefs, religious beliefs, through lobbyists and decision-makers’ personal beliefs, influence state action, legislation, and political parties, but also guide civil society (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 836). When it concerns religious beliefs all of these in turn influence the public and popular opinion among religious adherents or listeners on the matter of gender and women’s emancipation (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 836). An important nuance is in place here regarding the influence of religious beliefs in the daily lives of women. In reality, both women and men may negotiate religious norms and values in a way that can be viewed as feminist, the last part of this section will extend on the ability of women to use religion as an emancipatory framework.

The upcoming paragraphs will introduce women’s emancipation in relation to religion and secularism. If secular and religious actors are viewed as polar opposites, they are becoming increasingly polarized when it concerns the debate over gender and sexuality (Cady & Fessenden, 2013, 8). The belief that gender equality and sexual emancipation would arrive with secularism turned out to be false (Cady & Fessenden, 2013, 6; Hurd, 2013, 219). As Joan Wallach Scott (2009, 1) sets out in a lecture about ‘sexularism,’ governing expectations were that as transcendence would lose its ability to influence social norms, autonomous individuals would be sexually freed and in turn would be free from oppression. However she explains these expectations were not congruent with reality because

people in Europe and elsewhere continued to affiliate with religions, despite the normative constraints these religions were argued to pose on women (Scott, 2009, 1).

It seems that in liberal states governed by secularism, sexuality¹⁴ has been assigned to the same sphere as religion: the private sphere. As Cady and Fessenden (2013, 8-12) argue in the introduction of the book they edited, titled *Religion, the Secular and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, the assigning of sexuality to the private sphere is a result of the privatization of religion promoted by secularism, as well as the securing of the natural; which refers to laws of nature made plain in gendered and sexualized bodies. The upcoming paragraphs will explicate both these reasons, starting with the privatization of religion.

When religious beliefs and authorities are privatized in liberalist states, secular notions can govern and take political authority. Hurd (2008, 37) explains that fear exists of religion when it is allowed to move freely in the public space to lead to violence and intolerance, which is why ‘the secular public sphere is constructed as the domain of reason, objectivity, deliberation, and justice.’ In turn ‘the religious private sphere is construed as the domain of subjectivity, transcendence, effeminacy, and affect’ (Hurd, 2008, 37). In a similar way as religion, women have been assigned to the private sphere. In turn men got to govern the public sphere and ‘maintain rationality’ in politics. As Scott (2009, 4) reasons, where the female is associated with domestic harmony as well as public disorder, masculinity opposes both of these as men are the public face of the family as well as guided by reason in the political realm. Similarly Ann Braude (2013, 69) states that the ‘link between women and religion may become more burdened and pronounced’ when ‘polarizations of sacred and secular demarcate the space of rationality as a masculine reserve.’ It seems patriarchy has thrived on either side of the public/private divide, as this divide ‘rests on a vision of sexual difference that legitimizes the political and social inequality of women and men’ (Scott cited by Cady & Fessenden, 2013, 9). Mahmood (2013, 49) states that ‘The public and the private division enshrines sexual difference at the core of modern secular political order (...).’ Scott (2009, 3-4) carries this argument further by

¹⁴ Sexuality referring to sexual character or identity of persons, thus being a feature of the human personality as it is established in early life and shapes human behavior, borrowed from p.455, Harperlin, D.L. (2014). *Sex / Sexuality / Sexual Classification*. In: C.R. Stimpson, & Herdt, G. (eds) (2014). *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender* (pp. 449-483), Chicago: the University of Chicago Press.

writing that in a similar manner, the familial and sexual have also been privatized by secularization in the (Christian) West, which in turn has linked religion to sex, reason to man and passion to the ‘sexualized body of the woman,’ as the sexuality of men is displaced onto women and secured in their relationship to them. This links strongly to de Beauvoir’s (1949, 15-16) argument that woman is defined in her relationship to man. To summarize this paragraph: secularist influences seem to have both privatized ‘religion,’ women, and sexuality. The consequences of this for women’s emancipation are grave because as long as women are ‘privatized’ they are unable to voice their needs, practice their rights, as well as participate in politics.

The second reason given by Cady and Fessenden (2013, 11) as to why religion and sexuality have become intertwined is the securing of the natural. This is the promotion that women’s nature is her destiny, which comes down to being a mother and rearing children, as is arguably ordained by a sacred natural order (Casanova, 2009, 18). As Zilka Spahić-Šiljak (2013, 128) discusses in her study of the public resurgence of patriarchal religious cultural traditions despite further democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, local clergymen argue that women are not inferior to men, but that they are complementary to them: in other words, women are equal, but different. These clergymen also encourage women to choose motherhood over Western emancipation (Spahić-Šiljak, 2013, 128). Complementarianism and advocates pleading for women being ‘equal but different’ continue to promote so-called biblical relationships between men and women today.¹⁵ On a larger scale the Catholic Church is committed to regulating sexuality based on nature as an authoritative ground as Razavi and Jenichen (2010, 836) write that ‘Religious authorities commonly insist on regulating relationships of the private domain, including sexuality, biological and social reproduction, marriage, gender roles and definitions of what constitutes a ‘proper’ family.’ Cady and Fessenden (2013, 12) too argue that churches can use nature as an authoritative ground to promote these so-called traditional views on reproduction, marriages, and gender roles. Gene Burns (2013, 88) confirms that the Catholic hierarchy is even frustrated by the recent ‘liberalization of sexual morality’ and that they insist ‘that all states and all peoples are bound by natural

¹⁵ An example of this lobby can be found here: <http://equalbutdifferent.org/>

law, which the hierarchy insists comprises God-given morality that is objective and universal.’ And that the Catholic hierarchy thus rejects the authority of liberal state to decide upon sexual matters (Burns, 2013, 89). Casanova (2009, 18) stresses that traditional religious establishments view feminist agendas as a threat to ‘religious traditions and moral authoritative claims’ and to ‘the very idea of a sacred or divinely ordained natural order, inscribed either in natural law, sharia, or some “right way” universally valid for all times.’ These regulations are often influenced by patriarchal and heteronormative assumptions that oppress women (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 836; Cady & Fessenden, 2013, 12; Burns, 2013, 88; Spahić-Šiljak, 2013, 128). This variety of claims of religious establishments to regulate and control reproduction and sexuality feeds into the discourse of religion being viewed an obstacle to gender equality in the realm of international politics and development.

Sex itself has played a prominent role in the history of secularist discourse too, being viewed as a legitimate ground for inequality (Scott, 2009, 5; Hurd, 2013, 212). Scott says in her speech (2009, 4) that in order for humans to fulfill their inherent capacities, secularists believed sex to be a determinant; making women dependent on ‘their physical and social embodiment’ and tied to their sex as a consequence of the dedication of their bodies to reproduction. Secularists thus also stressed the securing of the natural as a determinant of women’s function in society. De Beauvoir (1949, 13) also stresses that the nature of woman is limiting but she also states that the body of man is not any more objective than the body of woman, as it too is guided by hormones. She emphasizes that man ‘regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it’ (de Beauvoir, 1949, 13). Yet it is women that are by default constrained by their bodies and hierarchically placed underneath men. Both secularism as a political authority and religious authority thus have reinforced the inequality between the sexes because it supposedly is determined by nature.

The privatization of religion, women, and sexuality as well as the securing of the natural has influenced the relationship between women and religion, but maybe more so have influenced how people perceive the influence of religious authorities and beliefs on the status of women. What also feeds into the discourse of religion as an obstacle to gender equality are the conservative religious lobbyists in international politics, as well as religiously framed reservations to

certain declarations and resolutions by member states. In a research as commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ingrid Vik, Anne Stensvold, and Christian Moe (2013, 1) have studied these dynamics and they assert that conservative religious voices have entered United Nations' negotiations forming alliances across religious divides as these voices argue particularly around the concept of 'traditional family values' and lobby against sexual and reproductive health and rights. Casanova (2009, 19) too mentions that Catholicism and Islam have supported similar versions of fundamentalist patriarchy 'in tandem' at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, which covered a broad population agenda with progressive language about sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is also related to Abu-Lughod's (2002, 787) argument that at times strange political bedfellows join forces when agreeing on a certain issue. Conservative religious arguments can thus come from the Holy See representative, Muslim countries' representatives, or religious organizations' lobbyists (Vik, Stensvold & Moe, 2013, 4; Buss & Herman, 2003; Hajjar, 2004). At the international level, religious organizations and country representatives are therefore more visible in the deliberations countering gender equality than they are in the deliberations promoting it, leaving others to associate 'religion' as an obstacle to gender equality.

The influence of religious beliefs as well as lobbyists are more visible in the international realm when discussing gender issues, because gender has become a contested site in the discourse between universal human rights norms, and arguments from the so-called Global South¹⁶ to resist 'cultural imperialism and Western-style individualism' (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 845; Vik, Stensvold & Moe, 2013; Hajjar, 2004, 15). The increasingly politicized issues from the private sphere 'have become sites of intense contestation between conservative religious actors who see religious moral principles as 'natural, absolute and non-negotiable . . . , and feminist and other human rights advocates who argue for democratic, pluralist and rights-based alternatives.' (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 836). Gender equality may not even be incompatible with religious traditions or practices, but authoritarian states frame it in a way that makes it seem that way

¹⁶ This refers to developing countries primarily located in the Southern hemisphere according to UNDP, retrieved on January 31st 2016 from http://ssc.undp.org/content/dam/ssc/documents/exhibition_triangular/SSCExPoster1.pdf

(Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 840). Ann Braude (2013, 74) uses the examples of American Mormon women defeating the Equal Rights Amendment and Lara Deeb's study of public piety of Shi'i women in Lebanon to argue that progress for women does not necessarily have to mean Western-style modernization associated with secularism; it could also mean increased piety. This links closely to Lila Abu-Lughod's (2002, 787) argumentation that 'we' Westerners must accept the possibility of difference, which can mean that 'our' view of what is best for someone does not have to match their view of what is best for them.

Progressive religious opinions and voices within the international realm that concern religion and gender are less visible.¹⁷ There are religiously framed discourses that feed into the belief that gender equality and religion are compatible. Gender and sexuality could be viewed as resources for agency and possibility according to David Kyuman Kim (2013, 271-272) among others, who argues within a chapter on secular feminists' issues with authority that feminist religious reformers do not wish to exit from their traditions, but are trying to synthesize claims of gender equality with discourses from within religious traditions. Azza Karam (2013, 65-66), who is currently a senior adviser at UNFPA and prior to that worked as the senior research policy adviser at the UNDP in the Arab states, argues based on her research in Egypt about women's rights activists that one of the groups that are using religion as an emancipatory framework for women's empowerment, as opposed to viewing it as an obstacle, are religious feminists operating in countries with patriarchal cultures as they are rereading religious texts for a broader interpretation. José Casanova (2009, 25) in a chapter about the religious politics of gender, similarly argues that both in Catholicism and Islam women are changing religious discourses from within:

Women reading the sacred texts of their traditions with female eyes and with female sensibilities without the mediation, interpretation and control of male clerical authorities is the first hermeneutic step, simple yet radical, on the road to female religious subjectivity and agency.

It is exactly this internal religious feminist critique which Casanova (2009, 19) argues to be essential when it comes to the religious politics of gender, because

¹⁷ One example of a progressive religious organization is the American Catholics for Choice, who are vocally opposed to the Vatican's dictates on 'matters related to sex, marriage, family life and motherhood.' They have partners all over South-America and they partake in national and international debates on reproduction and sexuality. Retrieved on March 7th, 2016 from: <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/about/ourwork/default.asp>

according to him internal critiques are more likely to succeed than ‘frontal attacks against any religious tradition,’ particularly under conditions of religious hegemony.

One example of women using religion as an emancipatory framework for women’s empowerment is the largest network of theologians in Africa: the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Frederiks, 2007, 179, 181). This network was officially founded in 1989 in Accra, Ghana, and its members are from diverse denominational and ethnic backgrounds, though they are mostly Christian (Frederiks, 2007, 179, 183). The Circle’s work, totaling over 150 published books (Mwaura, 2015, 15) focuses on an inclusive and African approach to issues of women, religion and gender, rejecting to be labeled as feminist because they argue feminism is too commonly annotated as aggressive and Western (Frederiks, 2007, 180, 194). They rather refer to themselves as “concerned African women theologians” to reassert their African-ness as they attempt to ‘solve gender issues in an African way’ (Frederiks, 2007, 180) and do ‘theology from the perspective of African women’s experience’ (Mwaura, 2014, 14). Or how Kenyan theologian Philomena Njera Mwaura (2015, 13) phrases it ‘The founding of the Circle was therefore aimed at creating space for African women theologians to reflect on their experience and articulate their concerns themselves.’ While they also analyze patriarchy and oppressive and harmful rites and structures in African cultures, these theologians search for myths and symbols in African culture and tradition that can serve as sources of empowerment and liberation to women (Frederiks, 2007, 184, 186). Many of the publications of the Circle address the interpretation of religious texts (Frederiks, 2007, 187). The Circle is also using their somewhat special status as an opportunity to combat stigma and HIV/AIDS by initiating ‘straight talk about sex and the stigmas associated with the disease’ (Kanyoro, 2006, 36).

Muslim feminists too, try to make a change from within their tradition as they are creating a Muslim vision of modernity, as they attempt to ‘redefine and make the practice relevant for the modern age’ (Casanova, 2009, 27). Amina Wadud has written extensively on the rereading and interpreting of the Qur’an from a female inclusive perspective. One chapter she published was in a book published by Musawah (2009). Musawah is ‘global movement for equality and

justice in the Muslim family'¹⁸ which was founded in Malaysia in 2009 and which advocates for women's human rights in Muslim contexts from a holistic framework. In the chapter Wadud (2009, 99-100) stresses that the Qur'an makes no distinction between male and female when it comes to them being created as moral agents, as well as that the Qur'an emphasizes that both man and woman will be punished or rewarded 'based upon their faith, actions and intentions, whether they act alone, in the family, in the community, or in the wider world.' She also asserts that change from within an Islamic framework is possible when it comes to challenging patriarchy and the status of women as she states (100-101):

Today we face a dual mandate. From within, we must address the persistent sub-standard status of women under Muslim laws and in Muslim cultures, countries and communities. At the same time, we must also challenge notions from outside Muslim cultures that Islam is not competent to participate fully in global pluralism and universalism and to meet the demands for democracy and human rights. We are more than competent, and we are addressing these issues from within an Islamic framework.

Wadud (2009, 109) argues that the Qur'an provides plenty references that stress the equality between men and women, and that this should be central to Muslim family law and relationships. She concludes: 'In Islam, both women's and men's agencies are central—women cannot be relegated to a subordinate status.' (Wadud, 2009, 109).

It is not only Muslim feminists who are questioning the believed incompatibility between Islam and women's human rights, there is a discourse among the 'general population' of Muslim societies that does so too according to Lisa Hajjar (2004, 18) who studies domestic violence in Muslim societies in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. She asserts that these advocates struggle to get legitimacy because people and organizations that advocate women's rights are often repressed by governments (Hajjar, 2004, 19).

This section focused on the perception of religion as an obstacle to development before continuing to the same perception in relation to the topics of gender equality, sexuality and women's empowerment. It covered the role of the privatization of religion, women, and sexuality as well as the securing of the natural as reasons leading up to the perception of religion as an obstacle. Then towards the end of the section the role of conservative religious lobbyists in

¹⁸ Retrieved on March 7th, 2016 from: <http://www.musawah.org/about-musawah>

international politics was stressed, and the role of gender as a contested site between human rights language and resistance to cultural imperialism. It also covered that progressive religious voices are less heard, but that there are definitely examples of women who are using religion as an emancipatory framework, thus proving that religion and women's rights and gender equality are not incompatible. What this entire section attempted to highlight is that neither secularism nor religion can be said to provide the most comprehensive approach for the empowerment of women and the achievement of gender equality. Both can form part of structures that oppress and emancipate women.

3. 'Religion' and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995

'This global conference is unique: It brings a new universality, and therefore a new legitimacy, to the deliberations of the international community. (...) This is a historic gathering: not only because of its membership and participation, but also because of the subject of our discussions. (...) One of the themes of our Conference is equality. Equality before the law is being achieved in many countries. But equality in fact remains an elusive goal in all countries.'

Statement made on behalf of Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General, by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (183, 184, 186).

Beijing is not the first defining moment in the acknowledgement of women's rights in the history of the United Nations after its foundation in 1945. In 1948 the importance of equality between women and men was already mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁹ Then in 1967 came the adoption of the Declaration of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In 1979, during the United Nations' Decade for Women (1976-1985), the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At the end of the Decade for Women in 1985 the Third World Conference on Women took place in Nairobi, during this conference the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000²⁰ were adopted. Following these events the last two significant events in the acknowledgement of women's rights before Beijing were the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1990 and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994.

Despite it not being the only key moment in the acknowledgement of women's rights by a United Nations convention, Beijing is the case study of this thesis because it is arguably the most comprehensive and complete one. In a special issue of the *IDS* (Institute of Development Studies) *Bulletin* about Beijing+20, Abigail Hunt (2015, 108) states that women's rights organizations continue to view the conference as the 'global benchmark of women's rights and gender justice.' Each year at the Commission on the Status of Women negotiations take place that

¹⁹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> on November 15th 2015.

²⁰ The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 can be found here: see <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/nfls/nfls.en>

refer back to the original 1995 document. Up until today, special reviews of its implementations have taken place every five years,²¹ however because all refer back to the original document as the key global policy document on gender this is what this thesis will focus on. In order to analyze secularist and religious dynamics in Beijing the reviews will be equally interesting. A follow-up to this study could include analyzing the reviews to see if changes can be found over time in the negotiated outcomes when studying religious and secularist influences.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the relationship between religion, secularism, and gender in the context of development and in order to do so global responses to gender inequality will be studied. The drafting of and to an extent the implementation of Beijing is the main case study of this thesis. In the following chapters, national and grassroots responses to Beijing in Kenya will be analyzed in order to illustrate the relationship between religion, secularism, and gender not only on an international level, but on different scales as well. This chapter will specifically analyze how ‘religion’ is framed in the Declaration and Platform for Action, starting with a section that provides an explanation of the content of the Declaration and Platform for Action, the second section analyzes the mentioning of religion through discourse analysis, and the third section provides an overview of the member states that placed religiously framed reservations at the time of the conference.

3.1 The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995

From four to fifteen September in 1995 the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, China (United Nations, 1996, 135). Representatives of 189 states and a number of regional commissions, specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations, UN bodies, and a number of non-governmental organizations attended the conference.²² Nearly five thousand official delegates, over four thousand NGO’s and another thirty thousand people were present at the NGO forum in Huairou, making the conference in Beijing the largest United Nations gathering ever at the time (Chinkin, 1996, 119). In Beijing not the entire Platform for Action was discussed, only the bracketed text areas that were deemed

²¹ The latest review, Beijing+20 has a website dedicated to this purpose, to be found here: <http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en>

²² For a full attendance list see page 135-138 of the report (United Nations Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1996).

controversial in the Draft Platform for Action²³ were discussed (Chinkin, 1996, 120-121).

It goes without saying that there were many different needs, opinions and wishes from a global scale to be accommodated within the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as the final version was drafted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. In the years building up to the conference this mobilized complex networks of advocates, delegates, feminists, bureaucrats, and all others who were lobbying for certain phrases and subjects to be incorporated (Eyben, 2015, 9; Chinkin, 1996, 120).

The adopted Declaration and Platform for Action as agreed upon at the end of this conference after informal and formal negotiations is not legally binding for governments, but it is recommended and encouraged to be pursued, as stated in the Declaration in paragraph 38, in which the commitment and contribution of multiple actors is stressed (Declaration, ch.1, para.38). It reads:

We hereby adopt and commit ourselves as Governments to implement the following Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programmes. We urge the United Nations system, regional and international financial institutions, other relevant regional and international institutions and all women and men, as well as non-governmental organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, and all sectors of civil society, in cooperation with Governments, to fully commit themselves and contribute to the implementation of this Platform for Action.

This paragraph emphasizes that all institutions and organizations are urged and called upon to take action in order to implement the Platform for Action which is more so than the Declaration a framework for change, but it does not require of actors to take action through enforcing guidelines which identify actors and outcomes. Nevertheless the primary responsibility of the implementation of Beijing lies with governments, as both national and international commitment and action are needed for it to succeed (Platform for Action, ch.5, para.293, para.306; ch.6, para.346). Without political commitment ‘to make available human and financial resources for the empowerment of women,’ the Platform for Action will thus not be implemented (Platform for Action, ch.6, para.345). In countries in economic transition this will require continued international cooperation and

²³ The Draft Platform for Action was agreed upon at the March 1995 session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York (Chinkin, 1996, 120).

assistance (Platform for Action, ch.6, para.356). An extensive word search for ‘organization’ through the Platform for Action has provided that a variety of partners²⁴ is mentioned, which differ per objective, that aid governments with the implementation of the Platform for Action. Specifically paragraph 295 (Platform for Action, ch.6, para.295) highlights the need for cooperation between a diversity of actors in order for the platform to succeed, emphasizing that governments do not hold sole responsibility. This particular paragraph mentions religious groups, but religious groups or organizations as a partner in cooperation are not mentioned in the declaration elsewhere when it concerns the implementation. Though a variety of the organizations that are mentioned throughout the Platform could be faith-based or religious organizations, the failure to explicitly mention this, whereas ‘religious groups,’ as well as ‘cultural groups’ are mentioned in paragraph 295, makes this ambiguous. An entire paragraph in the Global Framework of the Platform for Action concerns the increasing importance of the non-governmental sector as ‘a driving force for change,’ praising NGOs for their ‘advocacy role in advancing legislation or mechanisms to ensure the promotion of women,’ as well as praising them for promoting new forms of development (Platform for Action, ch.2, para.26). Women’s organizations and feminist groups are explicitly mentioned in this paragraph, but religious groups or organizations are not.

To give a brief picture of the contents of both the Declaration and the Platform the two upcoming paragraphs will go over the length of both, as well as over the content of the latter. The Declaration is four pages long. The Platform for Action counts 122 pages, and consists of six chapters, which are: I. the Mission Statement, II. the Global Framework, III. the Critical Areas of Concern, IV. the Strategic Objectives and Actions, V. the Institutional Arrangements on the national, (sub)regional and international level and VI. Financial Arrangements. Chapter three counts twelve critical areas of concern which are: (1) *women and poverty*, (2) *education and training of women*, (3) *women and health*, (4) *violence*

²⁴ These include but are not limited to: non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, women’s organizations, youth organizations, employers, trade unions, financial intermediaries, national training institutes, credit unions, community organizations, regional organizations, the United Nations, other international organizations, regional and international bodies, enterprises, local governments, bilateral and multilateral donors, private and public institutions, private sector, foundations, social partners, producers, and industrial and professional organizations, mass media, media professional associations, subregional and regional bodies, educational institutions, health professions, donors, pharmaceutical industries, and research institutions.

against women, (5) women and armed conflict, (6) women and the economy, (7) women in power and decision-making, (8) institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, (9) human rights of women, (10) women and the media, (11) women and the environment and (12) the girl child.

Because this thesis aims to analyze the relationship between religion, secularism and gender in the context of development with Beijing as a case study, this paragraph will give a short account of what some of the topics, some of which could be labeled progressive, are that are covered within Beijing when studying gender inequality, particularly keeping the developing context in mind. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 contextualize the situation of women in comparison to men, specifying this to entail lesser educational, health, political and economic opportunities and worse physical security for women. They state that among other things women face difficulties to get property rights and access to resources, roles are unequally distributed within the family, unpaid work remains unacknowledged, and girls continue to lack access to education (e.g. Declaration, para.15, para.35; Platform for Action, ch.4, para.47, ch.4, para 49, ch.2, para.14). The latter ‘can be attributed to such factors as customary attitudes, child labor, early marriages, lack of funds and lack of adequate schooling facilities, teenage pregnancies and gender inequalities at large as well as in the family as defined in paragraph 29 above,’ as stated in paragraph 263 of the Platform for Action (ch.4, para.263). In paragraph 29 the Platform for Action states among others that ‘The upbringing of children requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole.’ (Platform for Action, ch.2, para.29). The Declaration and Platform for Action thus both entail descriptions of how women are facing inequalities and barriers to their advancement and empowerment on a family level as well as on an institutional level.

In the report of the conference asides from the Declaration and the Platform for Action, ‘Reservations and interpretative statements on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action’ are included as well (United Nations, 1996, 154). These are the product of the opportunities of states to voice their discontent with, or different interpretations of, certain parts of the texts. There was not a representative of Kenya making such a statement, which technically means that Kenya supports the whole agenda.

During the plenary sessions states were given the opportunity to give a statement. On behalf of Kenya Nyiva Mwenda, the Kenyan Minister for Culture and Social Services at the time, did so.²⁵ In this statement she lays out successes and challenges that Kenya has faced when it concerns the empowerment of women over the past decades. She reminds her audience of the previous Third World Conference on Women as held in Nairobi in 1985, during which the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the advancement of women were adopted. She states that the constitution of Kenya guarantees equality between women and men. Mwenda addresses a high drop-out rate in schools for girls, which she attributes to, among others, poverty, early marriage and teenage pregnancies. The next chapter of this thesis will articulate more of the current situation for women in Kenya.

After briefly explaining about the Fourth World Conference on Women, the contents of the Declaration and Platform for Action, and the ability of the member states to place reservations or give a statement, this chapter will continue with a discourse analysis of the way religion is framed within the Declaration and Platform for Action.

3.2 'Religion' in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

This section will discuss when and how religion is brought up, first in the Declaration and after this in some of the chapters of the Platform for Action. Not all mentions will be discussed, and at times they will be grouped together. It will do so through discourse analysis, which Hardy, Harley, and Phillips (2004, 19) defined in an article comparing discourse analysis with content analysis to be: 'a methodology for analyzing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist' which attempts to uncover how a reality is produced. A discourse itself has no meaning, and as a methodology discourse analysis is socially constructed, plus it is based on the idea that meaning and social reality 'arise out of interrelated bodies of texts – called discourses – that bring new ideas, objects and practices into the world.' (Hardy, Harley & Phillips, 2004, 19-20). In order to find these discourses embedded in texts, discourse analysis means to study texts thoroughly to find evidence of the meaning of discourses and 'how this meaning

²⁵ Nyiva Mwenda's statement was retrieved from <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/conf/gov/950908205652.txt> on December 14th 2015.

translates into a social reality' (Hardy, Harley & Phillips, 2004, 20). This thesis uses discourse analysis because this allows for reflexivity, is a more qualitative method that allows for differences in interpretation and concerns a constructionist ontology that allows for reality to be socially constructed (Hardy, Harley & Phillips, 2004, 21).

After I read the Declaration and Platform for Action, the discourse analysis of the Declaration and Platform for Action started with a document search of the United Nations Report of the Fourth Conference of Women for the term 'religio' thereby including both references to 'religious' and 'religion' in order to pinpoint exactly where these are mentioned. This was to ensure all mentions were available for the analysis. The intention of this search was to find out where religion was mentioned, in what context, and what assumptions could underlie these mentions of religion. The expectations were to find little reference to religion, and where religion would be found that it would be posing religion as an obstacle to gender equality ('bad' religion) and that religion was posed to be kept in the private sphere. Later during the analysis the initial word search was extended by also searching for the word 'spiritual,' because it seemed to be that religion and the spiritual were mentioned together, leaving me to question whether spiritual was also mentioned without religion. The references to religion, and where available spiritual, that are relevant for this thesis' central research question will be discussed.

Again where the Declaration is mostly to contextualize the status quo and remind attendants of the urgency of the matters at hand, the Platform is more a framework for change. In the Declaration the participating governments reaffirm their commitment to a diversity of topics related to the empowerment and advancement of women. Religion came up twice in the word search in the Declaration. First in paragraph 12 in the sense that women should have the 'right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief' in order to realize 'their full potential in society' (Declaration, para.12). Secondly paragraph 32 of the Declaration mentions religion as one of the factors that could contribute to the barriers women face to their empowerment (Declaration, para.32). The Declaration seems to be frame religion thus far as an individualized, privatized belief that can be an obstacle towards the empowerment of women, both of these

framings of religion show signs of secularist thought as they privatize religion as well as frame religion as ‘bad.’

The upcoming paragraphs will highlight some references to religion from different chapters of the Platform, then it will go over types of references to religion in the areas of concern, and lastly this section will provide some thought about these references.

Paragraph 9 of the Mission Statement, the first chapter of the Platform for Action (Platform for Action, ch.1, para.9), reminds member states of their sovereign responsibility to implement the Platform, and that they are expected to do so with ‘full respect for various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of individuals and their communities,’ as these contribute to the ability of women to enjoy their human rights. This paragraph suggests that religious values should be respected in a manner that seems to define ‘religious values’ as beliefs existing in the private sphere of individuals and communities.

The Global Framework, which is the second chapter of the Platform, mentions religion in paragraph 24 which is dedicated exclusively to the central role religion plays in the lives of women (Platform for Action, ch.2, para.24). It reads as follows:

Religion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men, in the way they live and in the aspirations they have for the future. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is inalienable and must be universally enjoyed. This right includes the freedom to have or to adopt the religion or belief of their choice either individually or in community with others, in public or in private, and to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. In order to realize equality, development and peace, there is a need to respect these rights and freedoms fully. Religion, thought, conscience and belief may, and can, contribute to fulfilling women’s and men’s moral, ethical and spiritual needs and to realizing their full potential in society. However, it is acknowledged that any form of extremism may have a negative impact on women and can lead to violence and discrimination.

Altogether this paragraph reflects predominantly on people’s right to choose and practice religion, spirituality, belief, thought, and conscience as they wish, but it focuses on religion, thought, and conscience as contributors to the fulfillment of moral, ethical, and spiritual needs too, as well as on religion, thought, conscience, and belief as enablers of people to ‘realize their full potential in society.’ This

focus on the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion -as opposed to practice- is arguably a secular perspective, as earlier in this thesis it was mentioned that the ability to choose religion freely formed an important dimension of the foundation of secular states based on Christian thought, when states could determine who was or who was not a believer, and what was considered the natural and the supernatural. This same paragraph from the Platform mentions extremism as a possible factor contributing to violence and discrimination. Using these words in the paragraph that regards religion, spirituality, and belief, implies that there is an underlying assumption that extremism is religious, which feeds in to the discourse of good-bad religion. The rest of this paragraph is less dualistic, as the potential of religious beliefs for communities, and the ability to practice religion in public are stressed as well. However, most of the paragraph emphasizes the individual right to express religious or spiritual thought, and the paragraph seems to individualize religion.

The third mentioning of religion, in this case the spiritual, in the Global Framework is a reference to spiritual needs in paragraph 39 which emphasizes the need for the girl child's spiritual, intellectual and material needs to be met in order for her full potential to be developed (Platform for Action, ch.2, para.39). This reference closely relates to paragraph 24 in its emphasis on the need for spiritual needs to be met in order for girls' full potential to be realized. These references concern spiritual needs as crucial to the fulfillment of a girl's potential, what these needs may be are not specified. Neither is if this concerns the ability to believe, or to practice these needs as well.

The fourth chapter of the Platform for Action goes into detail about all critical areas of concern in strategic objectives and actions. The two introductory paragraphs already highlighted that(ch.4, para.46):

The Platform for Action recognizes that women face barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability, because they are indigenous women or because of other status.

Before anything else this again stresses the possibility of 'religion' to pose a barrier to the empowerment and advancement of women. To avoid listing the times religion is mentioned six 'types of reference' were created to group some of the references from the rest of the areas of concern.

The first type is, as was already stressed in the introductory paragraphs is that religion itself can be one of the factors amongst many that that can act as barriers women face to the enjoyment of their human rights (Platform for Action, ch.4, para.225).

The second type is the need to respect freedom of religion and protection of religious intolerance in order for women and men, and girls and boys, to achieve their full potential and enjoy their human rights (Platform for Action, ch.2, para.26, ch.4, para.131). Multiple times the areas stress that upon no ground discrimination should be tolerated, including religion when it concerns the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Platform for Action, ch.4, para.80(a), para.80(f), 232 (a), 259, 276(d)). Inspired by secularist thought, this is a way of keeping religion privatized, and respected, but still something to be practiced individually.

The third type of reference to religion within the areas of concern is to religious and anti-religious extremism and terrorism which can cause violence against women (Platform for Action, ch.4, para.118, para.224). These references presumably link extremism and terrorism to religion.

The fourth type is the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in ‘the areas of art, culture, sports, the media, education, religion and the law’ and argues this has prevented ‘women from having a significant impact on many key institutions’ (Platform for Action, ch.4, para.183). This addresses that just as in other institutions; women have been underrepresented in religious leadership.

The fifth type, which is the first I consider slightly different from the previous ones -which seemed more clearly connected to a secularist or ‘bad’ religion perspective- is how religious authorities are viewed to be instrumental on two issues in the Platform. Firstly on the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmittable diseases and their impact on communities, as the Platform mentions the need to include religious and traditional authorities for the education of parents, decision makers and opinion leaders on the matter (Platform for Action, ch.4, para.108(a)). Secondly religious authorities are perceived as being key actors in the elimination of female genital mutilation. Because they are separately mentioned this implies that they have a different role in this, apart from non-governmental and community organizations (Platform for Action, ch.4,

para.232(h)). However, although religious leaders are addressed as able to govern behavior, influence communities, and catalyze change, it can also be a sign that only when secularist actors are desperate for change, that they call on the abilities of religious actors, perhaps even because the problem at hand is perceived to be religious. This theme therefore does not challenge my expectation that the drafting of the Platform was mainly from secularist thought, which largely privatized religion or perceived it as ‘bad.’

The sixth type which is particularly interesting when studying religious and secular dynamics and the impact of ‘Western thought’ in an international arena on a concept such as gender equality, is that the Platform urges governments to eliminate violence against women without using cultural or religious sensitivities as an argument for their continuance. The Platform urges governments to ‘Condemn violence against women and refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination as set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women’ (Platform for Action, ch.4, para.124(a)). Sensitivities that may rise from a religiously framed perspective therefore cannot be used as an excuse by governments when it comes to addressing violence against women according to the Platform. An underlying assumption of this paragraph is that religiously framed arguments can be used by governments to justify violence against women.

Within and throughout Beijing, religion is mentioned in relation to freedom of religion as an individual choice and right to be respected in enumerations, and as a potential obstacle in achieving one’s full potential and human rights. It is also linked with extremism and terrorism. The references can thus be categorized into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religion. These references to religion feed into the idea that Beijing is drafted from a secularist perspective, because these references are linked with the individual dimension of religion and emphasize the privatization of religious and spiritual beliefs, and they also frame religion as an obstacle to achieving human rights and one’s full potential. The Platform mentions religious authorities as possible agents of change in relation to education about preventing HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmittable infections, as well as mentions religious institutions as possible makers of change in relation to female genital mutilation. However the Platform does not elaborate on the possibility of religious organizations, groups, leaders or authorities as potential

bridge builders on the subject of gender issues elsewhere. Nearly all references construct religion to be something ‘bad’ and to be kept in the private sphere (where it is ‘good’). Thus the references do not frame religion as something that is ‘lived’ by religious population. In other words: Beijing seems to focus on the aspects of religion that are potential barriers to women’s empowerment and equality, and not so much on those dimensions of religion that could promote gender equality. This focus of religion as an obstacle throughout Beijing can be interpreted as a sign of a dominant secular framework influencing the agenda. It seems from reading Beijing that there is no role cut out for religion in the promotion of gender equality, and that it is best to keep religious beliefs privatized.

3.3 Religiously framed reservations at the time of the conference

This section will go over reservations at the time of the conference in which religion was explicitly referred to, in order to give an idea of the argumentation that member states with diverse religious backgrounds could use to voice their concerns with the promoted gender equality in Beijing. As is not uncommon when reaching consensus, a number of member states and organizations voiced their critique regarding the Declaration and Platform for Action. Some states expressed reservations and made statements about the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after the draft resolution was adopted (United Nations, 1996, 154-175). A couple of these criticisms were, albeit partially, religiously framed. Kenya’s representative did not place a reservation on behalf of Kenya, which makes it the more interesting to look at the resonance of Beijing in Kenya because the idea of religious opposition in Kenya is perhaps less expected. It still can be interesting to look at other representatives who did phrase religiously framed reservations, because these reservations could give insight into the secularist bias of Beijing as criticisms could unveil dynamics that may not be prevalent in the Beijing text itself. Of interest for this thesis is if some of these arguments at the international level can be linked to the responses of religious Kenyans at the grassroots level. Similarly to the discourse analysis of the Declaration and the Platform for Action, this section is the product of a search through all of the reservations for the term ‘religio’ and how the references to religion are embedded and constructed. The next paragraphs will explain the three uncovered dynamics when studying the

religiously framed reservations, which are cultural imperialism, opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and believed incompatibility of Beijing with religious values and Islamic law.

The first dynamic that was identified by reading these reservations is that of cultural imperialism and cultural relativity. The representatives of the Holy See voice their disagreement with the texts when it concerns the so-called colonization of the human rights discourse with ‘excessive’ and ‘exaggerated individualism’ and a ‘libertarian rights dialect’ (United Nations, 1996, 159, 152). This argument strongly links to fears of developing countries mentioned in the last section (*Religion as an obstacle to development, gender equality, and women’s empowerment*) of the previous chapter of this thesis, which asserts that cultural imperialism and Western-style individualism are concepts of concern for developing countries (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, 845). This colonization of the human rights discourse or cultural imperialism is explicitly addressed by the representatives of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Vanuatu as well. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya’s representative mentions that no nation or civilization has the right ‘to impose its culture or political, economic or social orientations on any other nation or people’ and stresses the ‘sovereign right of every State to draw up domestic policies in keeping with its religious beliefs, local laws and priorities for social expressions.’ (United Nations, 1996, 165). Libya will thus apply the Declaration and Platform for Action to the extent that it does not exceed the limits of what their beliefs permit or exceeds their laws and traditions. The representatives of Vanuatu express similar concerns, stating that ‘its endorsement of the Platform is made with full respect for the constitutional, religious and traditional principles which the sovereign State has inherited and kept for the good government of our nation’ (United Nations, 1996, 174). All of these concerns are closely related to both the concerns of the Holy See and Iraq, as they (implicitly) address cultural imperialism and countries’ right to sovereignty as these reservations stress that countries want to be able to govern and regulate the behavior of women without interference of the international community. In reality this means regulating behavior at a national level and with strong guidance of religious authorities.

What Iraq’s reservation, and thus potentially those of Mauritania and Morocco, contests is that women themselves can make decisions with regard to

their sexuality, and instead ascribes most authority to religion, or at least to ‘religious values.’ These ideas challenge Western-style individualism, or the ‘colonization of the human rights discourse’ as the Holy See representatives called it. A deeply rooted assertion that state should not interfere with private matters, with gender and sexuality as the battleground, seems to be the underlying assumption. This connection between religion and sexuality is closely related to the second and third dynamic.

The second dynamic is the perceived incompatibility of parts of the Declaration and Platform for Action with religious values and Islamic law. Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, and Libya mentioned Islam in their reservations. The representative of Iraq explicitly mentions religion in the reservation as he refers to paragraph 96 -which concerns women’s rights to decide freely about their sexuality- and paragraph 232 (f) ((Platform for Action, ch.4, para.96, 232 (f)) for its linkage to paragraph 96 as both are considered ‘incompatible with our social and religious values’ (United Nations, 1996, 164). The representative of Iraq also mentions that Iraq accepts paragraph 274 (d), which concerns inheritance rights regardless of the sex of the child, only on the basis that it does not conflict with Islamic Sharia (United Nations, 1996, 112, 164). Similar reservations are placed by the representatives of Mauritania and Morocco, who both place reservations on paragraph 96, 232 (f), 106 (j/k), and 274 (d) because all of these are believed to be in conflict with Islam. Libya places reservations with the entire text of paragraph 96 and paragraph 232 (f). Additionally three other paragraphs are mentioned by the Libyan representatives as being contrary to the Islamic Sharia, these paragraphs concern abortion and inheritance (106 (k), 106 (j), 274 (d)). These member states thus choose national and religious authority over that of the international community as well when it concerns women’s rights.

The third dynamic gathered from the religiously framed reservations is opposition to the references to sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Holy See representatives are strongly opposed to the prominent references to sexual and reproductive health and rights. According to them fertility has been given disproportionate attention when speaking of women’s health. They also express the concern that ‘ambiguous language concerning unqualified control over sexuality and fertility could be interpreted as including societal endorsement of abortion and homosexuality’ (United Nations, 1996, 159). In fact, the Holy See

placed a general reservation with the entire section on women's health (United Nations, 1996, 161). Consequently the Holy See does not endorse paragraph 232 of the Platform, which addresses women controlling their sexuality, which according to the Holy See could refer to sexual relationships outside heterosexual marriage (United Nations, 1996, 161). Other reservations that the representatives of the Holy See highlight include, first, the lack of reference to the nuclear family as the fundamental societal unit; second, the representatives emphasize that every usage of the terms 'fertility' and 'sexuality' should refer to sexuality within marriage; thirdly they stress that the Holy See does not approve of abortion and contraception including condoms; and fourth, they stress that nobody should be providing health services he or she feels to be conflicting with his or her religious belief or moral or ethical conviction (United Nations, 1996, 160-161). The Libyan reservation is also linked to the reservations of the Holy See and Iraq in that it too expresses reservations to paragraphs that could be interpreted as justifying sexual relations and sexual behavior outside of marriage, using contraception outside of marriage, or providing services to individuals who are unmarried (United Nations, 1996, 165).

Another point I want to highlight is that the Holy See reservation includes a statement on the meaning and interpretation of the term 'gender.' It explains the Holy See's view that gender is grounded in biological sexual identity, male or female. It stresses that sexual identity is not to be adapted freely. In the statement the representatives underline that the roles and relations between the sexes are not 'fixed in a single, static pattern,' thus dissociating themselves from the biological deterministic notion when it concerns gender roles (UN, 1996, 162).

Concerns and reservations placed by the Holy See may be of most interest for the study of the perception of Beijing in Kenya, because the Kenyan population is predominantly Christian, which is arguably more closely related to the beliefs of Catholic teaching than to those of Islam. Not surprisingly, in all its argumentation the Holy See focuses on the traditional family and its subsequent gender roles as the fundamental societal unit, emphasizing that all sexual activities should only take place within the heterosexual marriage and without contraception. Modern values of gender, including the meaning of gender entailing more than being genetically male or female, are contested by the Holy See. The Holy See representatives word their argument so that they are in favor of

women's rights, but between the lines it can be argued that they are not in favor of gender equality in the 'secularist' or 'nonreligious,' or how they phrase it 'individualized' and 'libertarian' sense that is being promoted within and throughout Beijing.

3.4 Cultural relativity and sexuality

This section will provide more analysis and background to the uncovered dynamics from the religiously framed reservations from the previous section. The first and second dynamic from the previous section: cultural imperialism and incompatibility of Beijing with religious values and Islamic law, will be grouped as cultural relativity in this section, which covers countries' need for sovereignty, and for their religious principles, laws and traditions to be respected. The third dynamic from the previous section, which is opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights, will in this section entail the proclaimed belief that women should not be granted the right to choose freely over their fertility and sexuality, as well as the emphasis on sexual relations only being accepted as they take place within heterosexual marriage.

The first argument, hereafter cultural relativity, is one of the arguments considered as worrisome, as well as inevitable, by parties in preparation of the conference according to Christine Chinkin (1996, 122) who wrote an account about the Fourth World Conference on Women as she attended it herself. According to Amal Abd El-Hadi who wrote an article titled *Islamic Politics in Beijing: Change of Tactics not Substance* (1996) after the consensus, both the Vatican and the 'Islamic political tendency'²⁶ claimed Beijing failed to notice moral and spiritual values, and ignored the sovereignty of states and peoples as well as their cultures and traditions, which is why they suggested to have a phrase added which guaranteed the conditionality of sections on women's rights (El-Hadi, 1996, 49). This conditionality on parts of declarations and treaties, with the reason that cultures and traditions in states differ, is exactly what other member states are fighting with a discourse on the universality of human rights. Beijing

²⁶ El-Hadi does not specify what she means by this, she merely speaks of 'the Moslem community,' 'Islamic groups,' 'Islamic states,' 'Islamists,' 'Islamic nation,' and international level networking of international Islamic associations.

explicitly states in the Mission Statement that no cultural exceptions will be made (Platform for Action, ch.1, para.9):

(...) While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The implementation of this Platform, including through national laws and the formulation of strategies, policies, programmes and development priorities, is the sovereign responsibility of each State, in conformity with all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the significance of and full respect for various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of individuals and their communities should contribute to the full enjoyment by women of their human rights in order to achieve equality, development and peace.

Within states, often more people are against the enforcement of international standards, than there are people promoting them (Hajjar, 2004, 14). According to Chinkin (1996, 122) a strong lobby on the universality of human rights, including the slogan 'women's rights as human rights,' could not be accepted by countries who were afraid of being imposed with so-called Western values. Lisa Hajjar, who was introduced earlier as studying domestic violence in Muslim societies in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia argues that when international standards try to regulate behavior in the private sphere people are averted, she even goes as far as to call it the quintessential challenge to the so-called 'universality' of human rights because these issues are taking place in the context of family relations (Hajjar, 2004, 14). Susan Okin (1998, 36) argues along the same lines that when promoting women's human rights, changes in areas of life are required that are generally considered private. According to Okin (1998, 37) 'Women's freedom and equality are often understood as clear symbols of Western values, in contrast to which and in reaction against which religious, conservative, or nationalist movements define themselves.' An essential part of Hajjar's argument is that the critics in many developing countries view the notion of individuals as so-called rights-bearing subjects as a notion charged with inherently Western values, in contrast to their own societies which 'prioritize collective relations and mutual duties' (Hajjar, 2004, 14). It seems developing countries are urged to form an opposition with developed countries in order to be protected from the imposition of Western values of women (El-Hadi, 1996, 48). Hajjar also emphasizes that this reaction is not one opposing change, but rather a 'relational response to

globalization,' because in countries where expected changes from international legal standards seem foreign and alien, the more 'they provoke or exacerbate anxieties about cultural imperialism' (Hajjar, 2004, 15). Because women's rights touches upon many aspects of society, including local laws, they started to become the face of anxiety for cultural imperialism according to Hajjar (2004, 15). Okin takes a different angle, as she claims that when cultural differences are the subject of discussion they usually serve as a euphemism for the restriction or denial of women's human rights (Okin, 1998, 36).

Besides the complex and overarching discourse on cultural relativity, what is the role of the other dynamic, which is opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights, when studying the role of religious and secularist dynamics in global responses to gender inequality, such as Beijing? Firstly this opposition concerns women's right to control their fertility. The reservations seem to confirm the religious discourse regarding the complementarity of roles, where the differences of the sexes are stressed and women are expected to maintain the household and be responsible for childrearing (El-Hadi, 1996, 49-50; Buss & Herman, 2003, 109, 112). In a chapter about the 'Gender Agenda,' in their book *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*, Doris Buss and Didi Herman (2003) argue that the Christian Right and the Vatican see the outcomes of the Beijing conference as an attack on the family. El-Hadi also identifies the 'Islamic political tendency' as viewing Beijing as a destroyer of the family (El-Hadi, 1996, 48). El-Hadi (1996, 49) argues that the criticism from the 'Islamic political tendency' was that the Platform 'encouraged the principle of conflict between men and women within the family.' and that it even gave women the right to kill fetuses and be promiscuous. These arguments from religious perspectives regarding fertility have taken the shape of defending traditional family values. These arguments are closely linked to the cultural relativity discourse, as it seems member states and religious organizations argue the universal human rights discourse is not fit to be applied within the private sphere of the family, and they are using religious argumentation to voice their discontent.

The negative attitude towards the ability to have sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage is closely linked to religious teachings about relationships. An example of this is the Vatican, who according to Buss and Herman (2003, 109), stress complementarity even though they reject the phrase biological

determinism. The Vatican thus accepts that women can perform more roles than those related to childrearing and childbearing, but also stresses these roles as their ‘true vocation’ for which heterosexual marriage will provide the ‘fundamental building block of society’ (Buss & Herman, 2003, 109). Countries with religious populations thus may feel uncomfortable supporting the Beijing agenda in its entirety when there is language in paragraphs that could be interpreted in a way that make it seem like they support these sexual relations.

Despite religious reservations, global consensus on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been reached. However, the unveiling of the religious opposition and the framing of religion within Beijing is relevant when studying the perception of religion as a barrier to gender equality in the international realm, and the influence of Beijing on Kenyans perceptions of gender equality, because they show that religiously framed arguments are very much opposing the Western-style, secularist, nonreligious, individual, human rights language that is proclaimed throughout Beijing, in particular when it concerns women’s sexuality. At an international level, it seems references to religion are largely emphasizing the incompatibility of the two concepts, referring to religion as an obstacle. The religious voices that are at present at the international level in turn voice their discontent with the proclaimed gender equality in certain areas, focusing mostly on sexuality. In the following chapters this thesis will go into more detail about the national and grassroots responses to Beijing in Kenya, as it attempts analyze the perceptions of gender equality from a religious perspective on different scales.

3.5 Concluding remarks

Beijing was and continues to be well-received globally by a diversity of groups and voices as the key global policy document on gender. This chapter introduced the contents of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 before analyzing the references to religion within the document through discourse analysis. Beijing refers to religion multiple times, but when doing so it predominantly categorizes religion into either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ religion. Referring mostly to the right to freedom of religion, and religion’s ability to enable people to realize their full potential, but nearly always as being an individual matter. It mentions religion’s ‘bad’ side when it is stated to be a barrier to full equality and advancement of women and the enjoyment to human rights. The inability of the

document to acknowledge other dimensions of religion is an initial contribution for the argument that it is drafted from a secularist perspective. For religious adherents this text could be perceived, and has been perceived, to be centered on Westernized values and nonreligious beliefs, which is not an agenda countries with predominantly religious believers and governments, which includes many developing countries, would be able to identify with.

Religiously framed reservations of member states to the conference were covered next in this chapter and the last section explicated the usage of cultural relativity arguments in those religiously framed reservations. When it concerns religious perceptions of Beijing it has come to the fore that a small group strongly opposes to key sections of the document, mainly using religious argumentation to do so. During the preparations religious groups mobilized and voiced their discontent with the way women were portrayed, particularly surrounding the disproportionate attention given to fertility. The discourse on cultural relativity plays a key role in the continued opposition towards the document.

So far it can be concluded that religion within Beijing is mainly framed as a barrier to gender equality, which is in line with the argument that secularism as a political authority has largely influenced the content of the text. Religious groups have voiced their discontents with the secularist tendency of Beijing.

The next chapter will concisely study the current status of women in Kenya. It starts with an overview of legislation, policies, and international responsibilities that Kenya has committed to when it concerns gender. Then the current status of women in Kenya will be discussed briefly. After this a short section covers religious adherence in Kenya. The chapter will close with a section which attempts to show how Kenyans view gender and how religion influences this social construct.

4. Religion and gender in Kenya

When exploring how Kenya has and is implementing Beijing, as well as to study the perception of gender in Kenyan society and the influence of religion on this perception, it must be borne in mind that the discourse on gender is a complex mixture of globalized values, popular culture, international requirements, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and all other factors one can think of. However, despite the persistence of the cultural relativity discourse, women's rights as human rights seems to be a powerful discourse that is there to stay. This thesis started with an introduction of religion, secularism, and gender, followed by the second chapter about the perception of religion as an obstacle to gender equality in international politics and the third chapter covered the framing of religion within Beijing as well as the role of religious voices in Beijing. In order to answer the research question of this thesis, which was phrased in the introduction as: *How have secularist and religious dynamics manifested in global responses to gender inequality?* this chapter will set out the context of the contemporary situation of religion and women in Kenya. It will do so in four sections. The first section covers legislation, policies, and international responsibilities of Kenya concerning gender, the second section entails an account of the status of women in Kenya today. The third section briefly covers the situation of religion in Kenya and the last and fourth section attempts to show how Kenyans view gender and how religion influences this social construct. This chapter's aim is to clarify the context concerning gender in Kenya, both at the governmental level and at the individual and family level, before analyzing in the last chapter what could have influenced the associations that religious Kenyans have at the grassroots level when Beijing is mentioned.

4.1 Legislation, policies, and international responsibilities of Kenya concerning gender

This section will provide an account of recent national commitments and international responsibilities of the Kenyan government to the advancement and empowerment of women, which will contribute to the understanding of how people at the grassroots level feel about and think of gender. To start off with, the in 2010 revised constitution of Kenya recognizes in article 27 in the Bill of Rights

the right to equal treatment for both women and men (Constitution of Kenya, ch.4, art.27). The constitution explicitly addresses the duty of all state organs and public officers to address the needs of vulnerable groups, and when these are enumerated women are listed first (Constitution of Kenya, ch.4, art.21(3)). The representation of women in Senate and Parliament is explicitly mentioned as well (ch.8, art.100 (a)). The Directorate of Gender²⁷ falling under the Ministry of Devolution and Planning (MDP) (previously the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development), is overseeing the implementation of some of these laws. The mandate of the Directorate is formulated as follows (2014, 8):

(...) overall coordination of gender mainstreaming in national development, formulation, review and management of gender related policies, negotiations, domestication and reporting on gender related international and regional treaties and promotion of equitable socio-economic development between men and women.

Another major commitment of the state to gender equality is The National Gender and Equality Commission Act, 2011.²⁸ This act settles the establishment of the independent Constitutional Commission called the National Gender and Equality Commission, the ‘successor in title to the Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission.’²⁹ The Commission’s functions are among others promoting gender equality and freedom from discrimination, overseeing the integration of these in national and county legislation, public education and research activities, and the mainstreaming of issues of gender (The National Gender and Equality Commission Act, 2011, 2011, 7-9). The mainstreaming of gender has proven to be a challenge at the national level, partially this is due to the lack of an effective monitoring and evaluation framework being in place (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development, 2009, 5).

Other acts in place concerning gender in Kenya, in particular with regard to property rights and violence against women, in chronological order, are: the Sexual Offences Act 2006, the Employment Act 2007, the National Land Policy, the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act 2010, The Prohibition of Female Genital

²⁷ UNFPA pledges support to the newly created Directorate of Gender and anti-FGM Board. Retrieved on January 1st 2016 from:
http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/kenya/2014/04/10/9438/unfpa_pledges_support_to_the_newly_created_directorate_of_gender_and_anti_fgm_board/

²⁸ The National Gender and Equality Commission Act, 2011, Retrieved on January 1st 2016 from:
http://www.ngeckkenya.org/Downloads/The_National_Gender_and_Equality_Act_2011.pdf

²⁹ The National Gender and Equality Commission Act, 2011, Retrieved on January 1st 2016 from:
http://www.ngeckkenya.org/Downloads/The_National_Gender_and_Equality_Act_2011.pdf, 6.

Mutilation (FGM) Act 2011, the Kenya Citizenship and Migration Act, 2011, the Matrimonial Property Act, 2013, and the Marriage Act 2014 (Ministry of Devolution and Planning, 2014, 6, 14). According to the Ministry of Devolution (2014, 7) and Planning, it is no coincidence that most of these laws are recent, with more women having taken up positions in Parliament over the years.

The renewed constitution of Kenya provides that two-thirds of the members of elected public bodies is the maximum amount of people to be of the same gender, which gives women the opportunity to take up decision-making positions (MDP, 2014, 14, 26). The Ministry of Devolution and Planning (2014, 6, 10, 30) asserts that implementing this law has proven difficult, partially due to male dominance. Despite the underrepresentation of women in policy and decision-making bodies and organizations in legislative, public and private sectors (Parsitau, 2012, 206) small achievements have occurred as more women, however few, are nominated and elected to political offices, more women participate in Parliament, and more women participate at the County Assemblies, Cabinet, Judiciary, Constitutional National Commissions, County Commissioners and NGOs (MDP, 2014, 28-30). The Ministry even claims ‘a changed cultural attitude towards women’s participation in politics has occurred in Kenya’ (2014, 30). While challenges persist in working towards equality between men and women, in particular those living in the rural areas, at least the law protects gender equality and instruments are in place to try and implement the legislation.

Next to national commitments, Kenya also has international responsibilities that address gender. After being a dualist state that did ratify international treaties but could not follow up on them until making national legislation fit for its implementation, Kenya is now a monist state after revising the constitution in 2010 which is strongly based on international law and obligations (MDP, 2014, 39). Kenya is a signatory of international and regional treaties, conventions, and instruments promoting gender equality (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development, 2009, 5). A few of these, in chronological order, are the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1984, the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the advancement of women of 1985, the Convention of the Rights of Children of 1989, the United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women of 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development of 1994, the Beijing

Platform for Action in 1995, and the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development, 2009, 5).

4.2 The current situation of women in Kenya

Ever since Beijing the efforts of the government of Kenya to address the needs and rights of women have increased as was demonstrated in the last section. Yet in spite of recently improved legislation, on the ground level many Kenyan women face discrimination and violence. This section will give a general background of the situation of women in Kenya on the ground level, aiming to provide an account of the barriers women face in daily life towards reaching their full potential in society. Similarly to the section in chapter two of this thesis about gender in developing contexts, this section largely gives a problem oriented account. This is partially due to the available literature, which focuses more on women as victims than it does focusing on women as powerful agents or catalyzers of change. It is thus important to keep in mind that differences can exist about what would be best for women in Kenya, and that there may be more than one approach to achieving that situation. Having said this, the upcoming paragraphs will cover poverty, education, maternal and child health, and violence against women.

Poverty disproportionately affects Kenyan women, both in rural and urban areas (MDP, 2014, 12; Wangila, 2007, 27). Reasons behind this can be patriarchal property rights, the double burden women have as they take care of the household (i.e. unpaid work) and work mainly agricultural jobs outside of the house, lower literacy rates,³⁰ fewer options for economic empowerment and harmful traditional practices (MDP, 2014, 12; Kimuna & Djamba, 2008, 334; Wadud, 2009, 106).

On average women receive less education than men (MDP, 2014, 17). Despite an increasingly higher enrolment of girls in all types of education, a high drop-out rate of girls during secondary education persists (MDP, 2014, 6). A possible barrier to attending school for girls could be lacking sanitation facilities available during their menstruation (MDP, 2014, 17). Another issue could be to become pregnant unexpectedly and therefore dropping out of school because that

³⁰ Of people aged 15 and over 81.1% of men can read and write, whereas 74.9% of women can. Retrieved on January 2nd 2016 from the CIA The World Factbook. Retrieved from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html> , section People and Society. Last updated on December 18th, 2015.

is what is expected of them or simply because they have to take care of their child (MDP, 2014, 18; Wangila, 2007, 26). Forced early marriages could also be why more girls than boys drop out during the transition to high school and beyond (MDP, 2014, 22; Wangila, 2007, 26). Next to 'regular' education, legal literacy among women, especially in rural areas, remains low (MDP, 2014, 40).

Maternal and child health are a challenge in Kenya. One in fifty-five Kenyan women dies from giving birth or after complications from giving birth.³¹ According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2015, 24) antenatal care and delivery care differ as mothers in urban areas, with higher education, and more wealth are more likely to have skilled attendance when they give birth and to give birth in a health facility. One in five married women have an unmet need for contraception, this number is one in four for unmarried but sexually active women (KNBS, 2015, 20-21). One of the biggest health concerns for women continues to be posed by HIV/AIDS, which affect twice as many women as men (8% compared to 4.3%, MDP, 2014, 23). Reasons for HIV/AIDS being a gendered pandemic according to Philomena Njeri Mwaura (2008, 37), who studied stigmatization and discrimination of HIV/AIDS women in Kenya from a theological perspective, are linked to the culture of male domination and female subordination that result from the patriarchal organization of most African societies. She explains that this influences the ability of women to control 'the nature and timing of sexual relations and consequently the practice of taking protective measures' (Mwaura, 2008, 37). Thus when men have more sexual partners, as is often associated with masculine behavior, and women are the passive agents this increases the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS as a consequence of men's risk-taking behavior (Mwaura, 2008, 37). Next to being disproportionately affected by the development of the epidemic, women also are more burdened with the consequences of a person falling ill because they are expected to take care of the sick (Mwaura, 2008, 37).

Between forty and fifty percent of Kenyan women reported to have experienced sexual or physical violence in their lifetime, which started as early as the age of six (Kimuna & Djamba, 2008, 333; Mbote & Mubuu, 2008, 7; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2010, 13). The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

³¹ UNICEF Statistics, retrieved on January 2nd 2016 from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/kenya_statistics.html

(2015, 59) found that of women aged 15-49 who are married, 38.4% have experienced physical violence and 14% have experienced sexual violence committed by their husband or partner.³² Next to negative health outcomes, violence also causes psychological consequences (MDP, 2014, 30). Multiple authors researching violence against women in Kenya stress that reporting violence, especially intimate partner violence, is difficult because of psychological reasons and ruling norms in society about how women should behave, but also because women often cannot afford an investigation (Fiske & Shackel, 2015, 7; Njenga, 2007, 27; Kimuna & Djamba, 2008, 334).

Key factors influencing the ability of women to be empowered and reach their full potential in society in Kenya thus are poverty, education, health, and violence against women. This background information provides a framework when discussing gender equality and religious influences in Kenya.

4.3 Religious adherence in Kenya

To make the analysis religious and secularist dynamics in global responses to gender inequality in Kenya in the last chapter of this thesis most productive, an overview of religious adherence in Kenya is in place. According to the last population and housing census conducted in 2009³³ Christianity has by far the most adherents (82.5%, of which 47.4% is Protestant, 23.3% Catholic), followed by Islam (11.1%).³⁴ Other answers respondents could choose from to the question what his or her religion was -with the answer between brackets,- were Hindu (0.1%), traditionalists (1.6%), other religion (1.7%), no religion (2.7%) and do not know (0.2%). Since the 2009 census the Kenyan population has grown rapidly, but I have no reason to believe these proportions have changed enough for these data not to be usable. A new type of Pentecostalism, also referred to as ‘charismatic Christianity’ also has a growing amount of followers in both urban and rural areas according to Damaris Seleina Parsitau and Philomena Njeri

³² Of men aged 15-49, 8.6% ever experienced physical violence committed by their wife/partner and 4.3% ever experienced sexual violence committed by their wife/partner. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2015). Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014. Retrieved on January 3rd 2016 from: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR55/PR55.pdf>

³³ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2009). Table 12, p.396 in the Report of the 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume 2 Population and Household Distribution by Socio-Economic Characteristics. Retrieved from: <http://statistics.knbs.or.ke/nada/index.php/catalog/55> on March 9th, 2016.

³⁴ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2009). Table 12, p.396 in the Report of the 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume 2 Population and Household Distribution by Socio-Economic Characteristics. Retrieved from: <http://statistics.knbs.or.ke/nada/index.php/catalog/55> on March 9th, 2016.

Mwaura (2010, 1-2) who conducted research on exactly this phenomenon. The Pew Forum's research³⁵ on Pentecostalism in Kenya in 2006 suggests that at that time about seven-in-ten Kenyan Protestants are Pentecostal, and so are one-in-three Catholics. Parsitau and Mwaura ascribe part of the success of neo-Pentecostalism to its appeal to people living in poverty and the youth, well-educated youth often even found churches (2010, 5-6). Next to an emergence of places of worship in a variety of unlikely places, Parsitau and Mwaura (2010, 9) write that the internet has become a very important avenue of evangelism as many churches have their own websites on which they actively post, sermons and other messages.

I could not find sex-disaggregated data on religiosity of Kenyans, but according to several scholars of religion, the pews of Kenya's churches are filled with women, but men are in the pulpit and power structures (Mombo & Joziasse, 2012, 183; Mwaure, 2015, 9). Esther Mombo and Heleen Joziasse state women make up between seventy to eighty percent of the congregations, but 'are virtually absent when it comes to leadership positions,' as they take up the caretaking jobs, where it is the men who teach and preach to the congregation (Mombo & Joziasse, 2012, 184). This does not mean that Kenyan women in their daily lives are not empowered through their religion. In a speech about Gender Equity and Empowerment in African Public Theology where she uses the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians as a case study, Philomena Njeri Mwaura (2015, 9) asserts that women are the 'pillars of the church in Africa,' as they participate in worship and create social networks. The following section of this chapter is about the perception of gender in Kenyan society, and the influence of 'religion' (again this is an intersectional category that covers a variety of concepts) on this perception. It will go more into detail about women using religion as an emancipatory framework.

³⁵ Retrieved on March 9th, 2016 from: <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/08/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-kenya/>, titled: Historic Overview of Pentecostalism in Kenya Origins and Growth, published on August 5th, 2010.

4.4 The perception of gender in Kenyan society and the influence of religion on this perception

Encountering these women (...) brings to light a phenomenon that is found more widely across Kenya and across sub-Saharan Africa: namely, women's experience of suffering marginalization and oppression, while nonetheless expressing deep, joyful, passionate devotion to Jesus Christ.

Diane B. Stinton, 2013, 273

This section will give a general account of the perception of gender in Kenyan society, explaining more about the cultural values embedded in Kenya that influence the situation of women in Kenya today as was laid out in the second section of this chapter. Kenyan's perception of gender is a complex mixture, particularly in urban areas, of imported economic values deriving from colonial times, modernization, Westernization, Christianity, globalization of popular culture and media, as well as cultural traditions surrounding manhood and masculinity (Spronk, 2009, 504-505; Frederiksen, 2000, 209; Wangila, 2007, 21). This section will start with explaining current tensions between foreign and traditional values when it concerns gender and sexuality, then it will explain that Kenya is a patriarchal society and how this influences women's empowerment, closing with the impact of 'religion' on the perception of gender, and how Christian women have used a gender inclusive approach in their Christologies.

In her speech about Gender Equity and Empowerment in African Public Theology Kenyan theologian Philomena Njeri Mwaura (2015, 6) addresses this complexity as she argues that there is tension on the entirety of the African continent between foreign and tradition values. African nations have attempted to achieve gender equality, but poverty, bad governance, and patriarchal cultures have hindered these efforts (Mwaura, 2015, 6). Rachel Spronk (2009) extensively researched this tension between foreign and traditional values in her fieldwork about sexuality where she worked with young professionals in Nairobi. Being 'Westernized' or 'un-African' is something these professionals³⁶ are accused of, because they 'tend to have short-term or temporary sexual relationships, with their careers taking precedence over marriage.' (Spronk, 2009, 501). Spronk (2009, 501) asserts these labels are consequential of 'their implicit and explicit criticisms of conventional gender roles.' These young people's engagement in sexual

³⁶ Spronk asserts that this critique is also directed at youth in rural areas or poor urbanized youth (2009, 506).

relationships is ‘considered to break with normative notions of sexuality and gender, which equate sex with procreation and the maintenance of gender hierarchies’ (Spronk, 2009, 505-506). Spronk (2009, 506) argues that the term Westernization is directly associated to and linked with immorality in Kenyan public debates, which has turned for the worse over the past decades. These young Kenyans are in a difficult position, as Spronk testifies that while ‘they are very critical of what they call Western cultural imperialism, they are also part of global cosmopolitan processes that are often interpreted as Westernization.’ (Spronk, 2009, 511). As part of the younger generations take on more progressive values concerning the role of women and sexuality in society, Spronk found that older generations feel uncomfortable with these attitudes because they feel like their African heritage is under attack and African culture is being lost (Spronk, 2009, 505). They even view young professional women, as well as men, to be prototypes of ‘moral decay’ who practice ‘blatant sexual behavior’ and presumably do not respect authority and existing social hierarchies, the latter which are ‘experienced as fundamental to community and culture by many Kenyans’ according to Spronk (2009, 508). Spronk (2009, 508) sets out this incompatibility between so-called Western and African values as she explains:

This glorifying notion of a lost culture that strictly regulated sexual behavior and sexual patterns reveals a nostalgia which invariably postulates ‘African’ in opposition to ‘Western’ and employs the notion of ‘Westernization’ as an amoral disposition which comes about from being ‘non-African.’

What Spronk’s research sets out, is that generations hold different views of gender hierarchies, gender roles, sexual relationships, and what it means to be African.

Mary Nyangweso Wangila explains in the second chapter of her book on *Female Circumcision: The Interplay of Religion, Culture and Gender in Kenya*, about *Religion and the Social Behavior of Kenyans* (2007, 22, 25), that the perception of what roles are suitable for women in society differs between communities and ethnic groups in Kenya, though commonly women are identified with household responsibilities and childrearing, whereas men are associated with public concerns. Wangila (2007, 23, 24-25, 27) states that since Kenya is a patriarchal society, it is not uncommon in Kenya for both women and men to believe that women are the property of men. Diane Stinton (2013, 278) cites an

unpublished speech from Philomena Mwaura who has pointed out that ‘African Christian women have suffered under three forms of patriarchy: that from African traditional culture, from European colonialism, and from the western missionary enterprise.’ In other words: these patriarchal values are not solely created or promoted by one religious or cultural tradition, but have emerged as a combination of these influences. Wangila (2007, 24-25) goes on to argue in her book that from an early age children are socialized with patriarchal values by their family, churches and schools, often through storytelling. Wangila (2007, 24) states that these values entail not only the promotion of male dominance and female subordination, but that they also stress the importance of social status and age when it regards hierarchical relationships. This authority in particular is what older generations feared younger generations were disrespecting according to Spronk, which will be reflected on later in this section (2009, 508). Wangila also claims that at times women take up key positions within their communities, but that these are rarely the positions that assert the most power, therefore these do not negate patriarchy (Wangila, 2007, 24).

Wangila (2007, 26) also writes that as a result of stereotypes and attitudes during their socialization and beyond, few women believe they have what it takes to take up decision-making positions or be politically active. These internalized beliefs are not surprising when considering that for many women the patriarchal value system is what they perceive to be normal (Wangila, 2007, 26). When women do take the effort to criticize and resist current practices that discriminate women, they are viewed as ‘dissidents, divorcees, frustrated, single, and domineering’ according to Wangila (2007, 28). The construct of gender and expectations of women in Kenya at the local level are influencing public opinion. In turn this can constrain governmental efforts inspired by Beijing to eradicate gender inequality as patriarchal expectations have proven to be difficult to overturn.

So what is the role of ‘religion’ in all of these expectations and perceptions of women? The social construct of gender is influenced by a multitude of actors, taking aspects from the categories religion, culture, tradition, and one’s socialization into account. Because gender is an intersectional category, and so is religion, simple conclusions of causality or correlation between the two do not exist. This thesis explores the influences of those attitudes concerning gender

influenced by religious beliefs and authorities, but acknowledges that this is but one of the categories influencing perceptions of gender and sexuality.

Wangila (2007, 26) asserts that religious beliefs from various religions in Kenya can reinforce attitudes of women as subordinate, and women as managers of the household. Ambe Njoh and Fenda Akiwumi (2012,7) assert in their article *the Impact of Religion on Women's Empowerment as a Millennium Development Goal in Africa* that Christianity entering British colonial Africa after a long period of predominantly traditional and indigenous beliefs dominating, changed certain views and expectations of women (Njoh & Akiwumi, 2012, 7). Women were now expected to work at home and to take care of the children and the household, just as girls were denied an education (Njoh & Akiwumi, 2012, 7; Wangila, 2007, 21). In a chapter exploring women-focused non-governmental organizations and women-led Pentecostal and charismatic churches, Kenyan researcher Damaris Selena Parsitau (2012, 210) asserts that:

In traditional Pentecostal churches such as the Deliverance Church, women's roles are supposed to be in the domestic sphere and they are expected to follow 'God's natural order' by acting as helpers rather than leaders. (...) Men are also the head of the household and women are expected to submit both to God and to their husbands.

Parsitau (2012, 210) stresses that despite their exclusion from leadership positions in most churches, women are very active within the churches and carry significant responsibilities. Since some churches have redeemed female pastors, these pastors have went away and founded their own churches, which according to Parsitau (2012, 210) has led to the 'increasingly feminized face' of Pentecostalism in Kenya. Jane E. Soothill, (2010, 84) who has researched female religiosity in Ghana's charismatic churches, also asserts that women's leadership is increasingly embraced in charismatic churches, leading women to become pastors and church founders, and also asserts that 'the "spiritual equality" of believers is a cornerstone of the charismatic discourse on gender.' Soothill (2010, 84) even claims that Ghana's new charismatic churches stress that 'success and prosperity do not depend on gender.'

Next to traditional gender roles in families and churches, another religious belief that impacts women is the expectation that in most Kenyan communities sexual relations are expected to occur within heterosexual marriage (Wangila,

2007, 81). In line with this, Parsitau (2009, 45, 54-55, 58) explains in an article about Pentecostal church's more recent engagements with HIV/AIDS and youth in Kenya that Pentecostal churches have been preaching abstinence and fidelity as they intensified their efforts to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, even by using contemporary Sheng, which is 'a blend of Kiswahili, English, and ethnic dialects' and is 'largely understood and produced by urban youth.' Before this revised compassionate and accepting attitude of Pentecostal and the larger Christian church, churches responded to HIV/AIDS in a negative manner, as they associated AIDS with sexual sin and considered it a punishment of God (Parsitau, 2009, 50-51, 53). However still, the messages of abstinence and fidelity leave many congregants to associate sex with sin, and youth feel guilty and inadequate when they do engage in sexual behavior according to Parsitau, even though she claims many young people are unable to abstain (2009, 60). Parsitau mainly criticizes the narrow outlook of the Pentecostal churches on the complexity of sexuality, as they purposely reduce it to abstinence, but Parsitau stresses that the behavior of their members is different in reality (Parsitau, 2009, 61). In a study about the role of religion in adolescent sexual risk-taking in Nairobi, Gyimah, Kodzi, Emina, Adjei & Ezeh (2014, 14) also stress that 'religious values provide a perspective on life that often conflicts with risky sexual behaviors.' They conclude that religiosity has a viable role in sexuality programs for the youth, as well as stress the importance to involve religious organizations in the programs related to change sexual behavior (Gyimah, Kodzi, Emina, Adjei & Ezeh 2014, 24).

In order to understand the impact of religion on perceptions of gender, I want to stress that religious beliefs and text can also help women to achieve equality, empowerment, self-esteem and confidence. Diane B. Stinton (2013) explains a Christian example of this as she dedicated an article to reflect on African women's Christologies. She explains that African women's conceptions of Christ are emphasized on the need for so-called holistic Christologies (Stinton, 2013, 288). She explains this term in the sense that these women are affected by Christologies in all dimensions of their life, and thus discarding of the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular that is promoted by Western thought (Stinton, 2013, 288). Stinton (2013, 88) adds that these holistic Christologies discard of another duality, that between male and female, arguing that these Christologies

are made to stress the ‘wholeness of the community as made up of male and female.’ These women thus are looking at the community as a whole, and to value every person in it equally, discarding of preexisting social- and gender hierarchies. One of Stinton’s arguments is that a key methodological step of African women theologians is to bring their experiences ‘into dialogue with the Bible or other Christian texts, read from feminist perspectives.’ Previously theologies were often written from a male perspective, and Stinton points out there is a scarcity of research when it concerns the lived theology of women, though work on this is emerging (Stinton, 2013, 283, 289).

Parsitau (2012, 216) also recognizes the ability of women to use religion to be empowered, and build self-esteem and confidence, as she explains that women-led ministries and churches empower women ‘by drawing on positive female heroines and images from the Bible.’ Parsitau continues (2012, 216) that ‘Pentecostal women in Kenya seek to recast themselves as ‘Women of Excellence’, ‘Daughters of Faith’, ‘Daughters of Zion’, ‘Women of Honour’ and ‘Women without Limits.’ Parsitau (2012, 219) thus asserts that Pentecostal religion can shift the mentality of converts ‘from from victims to empowered persons,’ and that women in their transformation ‘offered by Pentecostal religiosity, which is both a sort of struggle for gender liberation and a critique of the prevailing patriarchal order.’

Following this Mwaura (2015, 9) stresses that African women are not victims of circumstances, but rather agents of change. As was argued in the section *Religion as an obstacle to development, gender equality, and women’s empowerment* in the second chapter of this thesis, both Christian and Muslim women have challenged religious traditions from within as they used religion as an emancipatory framework, working from a religious feminist perspective that allows them to change harmful traditions in ways that suit them. Kenyan women may thus in a variety of ways be impacted by categories of religion in their lives. In turn, society, communities, and other individuals also are influenced by categories of religion as they form attitudes and perceptions towards gender. These perceptions do not necessarily have to be negative, as women have used, and will continue to do so, aspects of religion to motivate for and strive towards a more gender inclusive community and society.

This chapter started with an explanation of what legislation, policies and international responsibilities of Kenya concerning gender there are in place, what the current situation of women in Kenya is, what the religious adherence in Kenya looks like, and gave an account of the perception of gender in Kenyan society and the influence of religion on this perception. The aim of this chapter was to provide the context of Kenya before analyzing ‘gender’ and ‘Beijing’ at the grassroots level. It aimed to convey that despite increasingly progressive legislation at the national and international level regarding gender equality, that there are still patriarchal, and possibly religious, values entrenched within communities that hold up expectations of what women can and cannot do. Then there are also the internalized beliefs as a consequence of these culturally socialized values, namely that women themselves believe they are not fit to be the equals of men. In all of these debates surrounding the construct of gender, religious influences play a role because they often take a traditional stance on gender relations, promoting complementarity and difference, rather than equality. Within Kenya, this has manifested itself mainly during colonial times when Christian influences entered society. Women have however taken up religion as an emancipatory framework. The last section of this thesis will explore how Kenyans at the grassroots level link Beijing to gender equality. It will do so through analyzing interviews taken as commissioned by World Vision, which were aimed to evaluate a program about promoting gender equality from a Christian perspective, and brought up Beijing quite unexpectedly, giving away that ‘Beijing’ nearly twenty years after the conference still influences perceptions of gender at the local level in Kenya today.

5. 'Do not bring Beijing to Kenya'

So far this thesis has set a context of how religion, and all that it entails, is often perceived as a barrier to development and gender equality, particularly arguing for the role of secularism as a dominant political authority influencing this perception. The references to religion within Beijing are framing religion as an obstacle and seem influenced by a secularist perspective. It also analyzed opposition to Beijing from religiously framed reservations that stressed cultural relativity and opposed sections concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights. The previous chapter has given an overview of the situation of women in Kenya and the perception of gender in Kenyan society. This chapter aims to analyze the attitudes of Kenyans at the grassroots level concerning gender equality, and study how religious dynamics and Beijing have played into these attitudes. After illustrating one perception of Beijing in Kenya by citing from a documentary about the conference, the first section will describe the methodology and shortcomings of the data, the second section will discuss the data at length and the last and third section will analyze the complex relationship between religion and gender.

In a documentary³⁷ released in December 2015 about the conference in Beijing Esther Mwaura-Muiru says a few noteworthy words about the discourse on 'Beijing' in Kenya. She attended the parallel NGO Forum in Huairou as the aide of Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.³⁸ Esther Mwaura-Muiru is on screen saying:

When we came back from Beijing, the first thing the President of Kenya³⁹ said was: 'Don't bring Beijing to Kenya.' To the larger population, Beijing was about how to go and rule men. How to go and no longer listen to your husband. But I had been very inspired to see women in Beijing speak on their own behalf, speak about their issues, and relieve poverty themselves. And I say I wanted to start something like that.

This excerpt illustrates that despite keeping up international appearances, at the country level the government, or at least the president, seemed unwilling to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. More so, this

³⁷ The documentary can be found here: <http://www.makers.com/blog/watch-makers-once-and-all>. The moment where Esther Mwaura speaks which I used is from 01:06:58-01:07:34.

³⁸ Wangari Maathai was awarded the price 'for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.' Retrieved from: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/ on January 10th, 2016.

³⁹ Daniel Arap Moi, from 1978-2002.

statement implies that everything that Beijing could bring to Kenya, including new perceptions of gender at the community and grassroots level, was not deemed welcome. Mwaura-Muiri also states that most Kenyans assumed that Beijing was ‘about how to go and rule men,’ or in other words: female dominance. Then Mwaura-Muiri goes on to link this to a typical issue of power imbalances between men and women; to be exact the fear of men that their wives would become dominant and disobedient. Mwaura-Muiri closes her statement with saying that she was inspired by the sight of women speaking for themselves, which suggests she was not used to this kind of behavior at that time. In conclusion, Mwaura-Muiru argued in her short statement that all the way from the national to the individual level, many Kenyans were worried about the consequences of Beijing.⁴⁰

In the next section this thesis analyzes the findings from data gathered at the grassroots level in Beijing, which resonates with Mwaura-Muiri’s statement. This resonance is undesirable, because the ambitions of Beijing were to change attitudes on gender equality from its consensus onwards, which is over twenty years ago. And yet people associate Beijing with female authority, and not its intended gender equality. Can religious beliefs provide for a partial explanation of the unchanged or hardly changed attitudes among the general population of Kenya surrounding gender issues, given the development sector’s widespread perception of religion as a barrier to gender equality? This chapter aims to find out why Beijing in relation to gender equality continues to be significant in the social and political imaginary of gender for some Kenyans nearly twenty years after the conference in 1995, despite the seemingly continued attitude towards gender equality as an unwelcome, Westernized and feminist concept.

5.1 Data description

Prior to discussing and analyzing the data, this section will introduce what data were used and discuss the methodology and limitations of the data. The data that will be used is conducted in 2014 for the evaluation of World Vision’s program *Channels of Hope for Gender (CoHG)* and is based on individual and group semi-structured interviews, as well as visits to households and churches (Bartelink &

⁴⁰ Finding academic literature about the perception of Beijing in Kenya after the conference in 1995 proved to be a challenge, which I yet have to succeed in.

Wilson, 2014, 13). Bartelink and Wilson (2014) gathered data in two areas in Kenya: Wema and Riruta. In both areas CoHG was introduced in 2012. Wema is a more rural area than Riruta, the latter being situated closely to Nairobi and changing quickly from a rural community to a more urbanized area (Wilson & Bartelink, 2014, 37, 44). Both areas are predominantly Christian (Wilson & Bartelink, 2014, 37, 44). In both areas religious and community leaders, teachers, and adults doing peer education were interviewed. Beijing was mentioned in multiple interviews conducted in Riruta, but never in Wema, which is why in the rest of this chapter there will be no further specification of which area the interviewees lived in, as they are all from Riruta. This could be a sign that here too rural-urban differences favor the urban context as the message of an international conference, as well as the changing legislation within Kenyan boundaries, could trickle down to the perhaps more educated and elite urban dwellers, but not to the possibly less informed rural residents of Kenya.

The group interviews were aimed to be conducted in all-men or all-women groups, and where possible in adult and youth groups (Bartelink & Wilson, 2014, 12). The interviews addressed perceptions within the communities concerning gender roles and relationships, about the importance of addressing gender relations from a biblical perspective, about involving religious leaders while doing so, and for the program evaluation they asked questions regarding the personal impact of CoHG, the impact of CoHG on the church and community, and about what were key-moments and what could be changed within the program (Bartelink & Wilson, 2014, 13). This thesis uses five of the conducted interviews with a total of 28 participants, four of which are group interviews and one personal interview. These are (1) the interview with nine religious leaders who are exposed to CoHG, (2) the interview with one community leader and two pastors, (3) the interview with four adults doing peer education, most of whom are pastors, (4) the interview with twelve⁴¹ congregation members in Riruta, and (5) the interview with a head teacher in Riruta.

*Channels of Hope for Gender*⁴² is a program that looks into gender norms and values from a faith perspective. It is about actively engaging religious leaders

⁴¹ This is Erin Wilson's personal account, there was not a number in the documentation of the data that I used.

⁴² Information in this paragraph is retrieved on January 10th, 2016 from:
<http://www.wvi.org/health/publication/channels-hope-gender>.

to promote principles of equality from a biblical perspective. Among others this includes the sharing of responsibilities within the household as opposed to traditional role division, and sharing access and utilization of resources by both men and women in order for relationships in communities and families to be as harmonious as possible. The program is about addressing power imbalances, which in the long-term can help decrease gender issues such as gender-based violence. Where religious texts have been used to legitimize negative attitudes and behavior on gender issues, this program works to motivate people to read and interpret texts differently and to use religious texts to promote gender equality.

According to Bartelink and Wilson's evaluation, interviewed respondents seem to be optimistic about the method of work of CoHG (2014). This positivity could be biased for three reasons: (1) all interviewees have either participated in CoHG workshops or have at least heard of them, (2) answers could have been socially desirable answers to please the researchers who travelled all the way to interview them, or (3) to please the organization of World Vision because continuing of funds or follow-up projects were desired. In addition, the researchers stress that their findings provide insights of the perceptions people have of changes that occurred at the same time as CoHG, whether they are connected to CoHG or not, and that is not possible to point out causality of the CoHG program with changes that concern gender (Bartelink & Wilson, 2014, 14). Other limitations the researchers point out are restraints in terms of time, language and composition of the research groups (Bartelink & Wilson, 2014, 14). Both the donor and the consultants were pressed on time, which left little time to do research and establish report (Bartelink & Wilson, 2014). Secondly language was a restraint because of the dependency on -potentially biased- translators, and lastly the groupings of people were not always as intended (same-gender, youth versus adults) due to the earlier mentioned time constraints (Bartelink & Wilson, 2014, 14). The mentioned limitations are revealed by the researchers and therefore are considered as constraints when the data is used for its intended purpose, which is the evaluation of CoHG. Despite the fact that this thesis is not concerned with the evaluation of CoHG, some of the limitations are relevant as well. Perhaps more responses from women or young people would have emerged if the groupings would have been better, or the translations could have been more accurate if one of the researchers spoke the local language, and more time could have led to more

useful interviews for the purpose of this research. However, the data as it is still can provide valuable information to study the perceptions of Beijing at the grassroots level, particularly in relation to religious influences, which is why the next section will continue to discuss and analyze the data in order to answer the research question.

Because I am the one analyzing the data, an introduction of my situation is in place to question the possibility of a bias on my behalf. Though I try to take on a scientific approach that is as objective a possible, the fact that I am a well-educated 23 year old woman who was born and raised in the Netherlands, perhaps gives away my potential Western outlook on feminism and gender equality. I was raised by my atheist father, who until my thirteenth was a stay-at-home dad. When I was seventeen I lived abroad in Utah as a foreign exchange student in a conservative Mormon family and community, which has given me a broader perspective on life and on religious and conservative values. Today I volunteer as a youth advocate for the organization CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, and I lobby at the level of the United Nations in favor of the right of adolescents (aged 10 and up) to access sexual and reproductive health and rights. What this information conveys is that despite my attempts to stay objective, and my experience with living in a Christian conservative community and being a student of religious studies, I could be biased towards a Western style feminism and approach to gender equality. What I want to stress in my favor is that because I did not collect the data and do not have personal contacts to the NGO who commissioned the evaluation I can take a certain distance from the data, which does allow me to give an objective analysis.

5.2 Beijing' in Riruta

To start the analysis I read through all the data collected by Bartelink and Wilson to get an idea of how and where people mentioned 'Beijing.' As stated earlier, this turned out to be the case only in Riruta. Then I analyzed the data in a similar way as I did with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (discourse analysis), thus not only counting the times Beijing was mentioned, but looking at what assumptions were underlying the times Beijing was mentioned, and how respondents constructed reality.

The fact that interviewees in Riruta brought up ‘Beijing’ is surprising because no questions were asked about the implementation or consequences of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995. Yet one female pastor (Interview with community leader and church leaders, September 2014, Riruta) asserted that people think of Beijing and women’s equality when gender is mentioned. What became apparent when looking at the transcripts of the discussions was that the dominant discourse of gender equality in relation to Beijing in these communities, is that gender equality is perceived to be about women taking authority. Respondents’ answers concerned mainly the increased educational and employment opportunities for women after Beijing, gender roles with family relations, and the view that Beijing was about women taking authority over men. The upcoming paragraphs will discuss these arguments separately, starting with perceived change in the access to education and employment.

When asked whether the situation was improving with regard to opportunities for women, the adults giving peer education (Interview with adults doing peer education for CoHG, September 2014, Riruta) affirmed this, and one respondent brought up that ‘ever since we gone to Beijing so many things have changed.’ Then these respondents continued with mentioning that the enrolment of girls in school increased, and that for both girls and boys opportunities exist when they did not before (Interview with adults doing peer education for CoHG). When asked if women are contributing to decision-making, one pastor stated that today they are contributing in ‘offices and in parliament,’ in a similar way as men are contributing (Interview with community leader and church leaders, September 2014, Riruta). He states that much change has occurred since the Beijing Declaration. One more pastor in the same interview supports this, and adds that women have a platform now and that they are contributing a lot in different meetings and forums about development. One pastor (Interview with religious leaders, September 2014, Riruta) was less optimistic, she proclaimed that Beijing brought about changes in politics and offices, but she stressed that at the community level problems continue to persist. The fact that interviewees from Wema did not mention Beijing when they were asked the same questions is in line with this assumption. This pastor ascribed the lack of progress in particular to women’s (il) literacy (Interview with religious leaders). In contrast to the increased employment and educational opportunities, the prevalence of violence

has remained the same according to the four interviewed adults who teach peer education with CoHG who stressed that physical and sexual violence affects boys and girls in the community (Interview with adults doing peer education for CoHG).

When it concerns the family sphere the worries of Kenyans in relation to Beijing were the largest according to the respondents. Congregation members (interview with congregation members, September 2014, Riruta) asserted that women continue taking the sole responsibility for their families because their husbands often refuse to do so. One of the interviewed religious leaders (Interview with religious leaders) emphasized that he believed that new generations would be more gender-sensitive because CoHG has been teaching about different role division around the house through Genesis. One pastor (Interview with religious leaders) declared that many Kenyans think that Beijing ‘was about women becoming the same as men entirely,’ which she claims is not possible. The latter of her statement may refer to biological deterministic notions of women being dedicated to reproduction. According to her Beijing concerned sharing, and not doing the same things, referring to the household and family. Consequentially she emphasized the need to teach men that they can do things around the house, and that teaching about gender relations can be done in the pulpit (Interview with religious leaders). The words of this pastor suggest that Kenyans, in particular male Kenyans, are afraid of women taking authority after Beijing because this is what they associate Beijing with.

Aside from respondents associating Beijing with changes in education and employment opportunities and family relations, respondents also proclaimed a fear that Beijing promoted a certain authority for women. One interviewed pastor (Interview with religious leaders) asserted that Beijing even worsened the mentality that gender equality regards women taking authority, and not only that, he stated that the situation for women had gone worse. According to him this belief in society among men that women want to rule over them is strong, he states:

When this Beijing issue came it worsened in fact. Men thought women were taking authority and men started fighting this authority. I don’t think it was well understood as being about balance. Men have this mentality that women want to rule over them.

Another instance when gender equality was framed to be about women taking authority is when asked why equality is such an issue, another pastor (Interview with community leader and church leaders) answered that the message of Beijing that ‘men and women are equal in power, nature and strength,’ is making men feel threatened and humiliated. Men think equality means women becoming more powerful than men, even commanding men. The ruling assumption thus is that so-called equality ‘really means women having power over men.’ (Interview with community leader and church leaders).

Related to the fear of this authority, interviewees (Interview with adults doing peer education) and the head teacher (Interview with head teacher) brought up that the needs of the boy child should be addressed more. This uncovers perceptions of respondents, who observe that when the girl child is put central in the community, the boys are left out to an extent. This is exactly what people fear when gender equality is promoted according to the interviewees; that it is all about women, and that women are given the ability to rule over men. When promoting gender equality it is thus important to not only address girls and women, but also to engage boys and men, and to provide accurate information about equality.

Overall the interviewed respondents seem keen to change this perspective of gender equality as being women taking authority through implementing the tools and information given to them by CoHG. The respondents seem receptive to bringing about change in power imbalances by using scriptures. This way of bringing about change is a more inclusive way as opposed to teaching gender equality from only human rights language, as it does not assign religion to the private sphere, but attempts to change behavior of individuals and communities by using the core values that govern their lives by tapping into their cultural, traditional and religious values. This practice shows that gender does not have to be a battleground between religious and secular actors. A variety of values influence the perceptions people within societies have of gender, not only religious values influence this. The upcoming section will elaborate on the complexity of gender equality and the influence of religious beliefs on this.

5.3 The complex relationship between religion and gender

‘Religion’ is not the barrier to gender equality that it is often perceived to be in international relations and secular development paradigms as these grassroots interviews illustrate. In fact religion cannot be the sole determinant of anything, as religious influences and beliefs always operate within a complex framework and are interpreted in a variety of ways. The category religion, just as is gender, is entangled with other features such as culture, traditional values, and family traditions, which makes the relationship between religion and gender less straightforward than it is often portrayed.

An interviewed pastor stated that the role division as it is today is inherited from culture, church, and family, and that when it concerns a woman ‘there are just some things she should not do.’ (Interview with community leader and church leaders). Even though this pastor asserts that the message of Beijing is about men and women being equal, he affirms that men still fear women will govern men (Interview with community leader and church leaders). The latter part of his statement conveys that the pastor himself continues to believe that a certain traditional role division should be kept in place (Interview with community leader and church leaders). As was also covered in the previous section, it seems people are afraid that rearranging their family responsibilities in a way in which women and men, and girls and boys share responsibilities, will lead to families in which men are oppressed or dominated.

The interview with this particular pastor highlights an important argument for this thesis. He states that the contemporary role division has not come into being through religious influences only, but is a practice that is inherited from cultural influences and family traditions as well. His statement highlights that when studying religious influences, it is key to study not only religious influences, for they are always part of a more complex context in which the history and traditions of a group, community, nation, or state also influenced and continue to influence relations as they are today. In another interview a religious leader asserts that culture and tradition influenced the belief of many Kenyans thinking that Beijing promoted women becoming the same as man. Interviewed congregation members (Interview with congregation members) too stated that cultural influences are important determinants of unequal role divisions within the family, as the common belief that was taught to children is that ‘women are made

to be married and to bear children.’ These congregation members also spoke of the importance of role models and how these are negatively influenced by the current culture, because the contemporary culture feeds into the discourse that women and girls can be taken advantage of by men and boys. These congregation members stated that the ‘empowerment of women is conflicting with traditional values,’ which highlights that traditional values still govern much of the behavior towards women as well as the perception of gender (Interview with congregation members).

What all of these statements highlight is the role of cultural and traditional influences in relation to gender equality, interacting with each other and with religious values. Religious traditions and beliefs consequentially may be some obstacles to gender equality, but they are never sole factors doing so. The comments of these religious leaders highlight the importance of addressing gender equality not only from a religious point of view, or from a secular point of view, but to also take other dimensions into account that have influenced the perception of gender and gender roles as they are today in Kenya.

As was argued in the chapter four, the perception of gender in Kenya is a mixture of imported economic values deriving from colonial times, modernization, Westernization, Christianity, globalization of popular culture and media, as well as cultural traditions surrounding manhood and masculinity (Spronk, 2009, 504-505; Frederiksen, 2000, 209; Wangila, 2007, 21). This chapter closely studied interviews that uncovered how Kenyans at the grassroots level perceived gender equality as proclaimed and promoted in Beijing twenty years ago. It disclosed that often gender equality is continued to be associated with women taking authority. What this chapter examined is that religious influences and values are important to take into account when addressing gender inequality and studying gender issues, however it also conveyed that religion is not the sole barrier to gender equality and that a variety of other values and beliefs play into the unequal relationships between women and men.

6. Conclusion

Building up to the research question, this thesis started with an introductory chapter about the interlinkage between religion, secularism, and gender. The secularist bias in international politics and development studies was introduced before the chapter explicated that despite contrary belief secularism did not bring about gender equality and sexual emancipation, and that ‘religion’ is not necessarily an oppressor of women. It touched on the discursive interdependence between religion and secularism, and that following Hurd and Gutkowski within this thesis secularism would be studied as a dominant framework and political authority in its own right. It explained that religion is often negatively discussed or not discussed at all in international politics. The first chapter argued that the main argument of the thesis would be that ‘religion is not the barrier to gender equality that it is often believed to be in secular development paradigms and international relations, and that the relation between religion and gender is a complex one.’ Then the research question was formulated as: *How have secularist and religious dynamics manifested in global responses to gender inequality?*

The second chapter explained that religion is often perceived to be a barrier to gender equality, emancipation, and development. The first section of this chapter explicated assumptions about religion and secularism, attempting to define them as well as explain some of the history of secularism and the secularist bias that persists in international politics and development. The second section briefly showed that gender is an intersectional category, and that women are often viewed as the ‘second sex’ which has been historically reinforced by social norms and legislation. The third section gave an overview of women’s empowerment, in developing countries which went into depth on gender-based violence, women’s economic participation, and women’s political participation. This section too covered that the idea that women need saving is problematic, and that what works best for others can be different than what is commonly thought. The last, fourth, section of this chapter covered the perception of religion as an obstacle to gender equality, by explaining the relationship between religion and development, the role of the privatization of sexuality and gender and the securing of the natural for the formation of this perception, while also covering the role of conservative religious lobbyists and that progressive religious voices are often less heard.

The third chapter extensively analyzed the contents of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995, and the references to religion within it, as well as the religiously framed reservations given at the time of the conference. It became apparent that the majority of the references to religion were categorizations of ‘bad’ religion. These references repeatedly concerned the freedom of religion, religion as a ground for discrimination, religion as a barrier to emancipation or religion linked to extremism. The religiously framed reservations brought up the huge role of sovereignty and cultural imperialist concerns of countries, as well as the discourses on fertility, sexuality, and heterosexual relations outside of marriage. The secularist bias within and throughout the document is particularly what the findings in this chapter proclaimed, thus answering to the research question that predominantly secularist dynamics dominated Beijing, which in turn influenced the way the religious dynamics were mentioned and framed. The reservations too clearly illustrated opposition to the secularist, nonreligious, universal, individual, liberalist, and human rights language as proclaimed throughout Beijing.

In order to study grassroots responses to global responses to gender inequality, an account of the status quo concerning gender in Kenya was in place. The fourth chapter therefore illustrated the comparatively positive national legislation and international ratifications of Kenya in the field of gender. It also gave an account of the obstacles women face towards achieving their full potential in society, and it provided an overview of how Kenyans view gender and how religion influences this social construct. This chapter covered the important idea that women visibly have demonstrated using their religious background and beliefs in favor of their emancipation and empowerment as well.

The fifth chapter then went into depth through analyzing interviews taken in Riruta to study how Beijing has influenced Kenyans perception of gender equality at the grassroots level. Despite positive assertions about women taking up positions at the decision-making levels and more education opportunities for both girls and boys as perceived consequences of Beijing, the ruling conviction within communities and among individuals was that gender equality concerns women taking authority, and ruling over men. What this chapter also brought to the fore was that religion is not the barrier to gender equality that it is often perceived to be in international relations and secular development paradigms. It also

highlighted that religion is not an agent which operates on its own, but that ‘religion’ is entangled with cultural and traditional values which in turn complicate the relationship between religion and gender, because religion is an intersectional category.

For future research I would suggest looking at the agreed conclusions and outcome documents after Beijing, to see whether the trend of secular thought on gender equality and the negative framing of ‘religion’ has persisted over the past twenty years. It would also be interesting to directly interview Kenyans about their perception of Beijing. Ultimately it would be also very interesting to look at the perception of Beijing and gender equality and the role of ‘religion’ on this in Western countries, especially at a time where the universal Sustainable Development Goals are adopted.

So, how *have* secularist and religious dynamics manifested in global responses to gender inequality? This thesis aimed to make a contribution to identify that within international politics, despite believed objectivity and holistic views, that there is much ground to gain before documents of the international community can be called comprehensive and inclusive. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is one of the many global policy documents that set the example for a large group of countries to follow. Undoubtedly it is not the only one written from a secularist, ‘Christian’ influenced, modernized, liberalist, Westernized, bias. It also aimed to illustrate that including religion is necessary when studying people, community, and nations, but that merely studying religion is taking away from other influences that can be equally important determinants of people’s behavior and perceptions. Religion is neither good or bad, but religion, in its full range, is embedded in and disseminated through nearly all aspects of human life, and it is but one of the many barriers that the international community is facing in its ambition to achieve global gender equality.

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