

Children's Socialization in the Changing Society: Parents' Views in Two Gambian Villages

by

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Paper presented at NETREED Conference on “Disseminating and Using Research Results from the South” held 8 - 10 December 2003 in Gausdal, Norway

1. Introduction

Societies are changing more rapidly today than ever before because of globalization processes. Rapid change extends to economic, political, and socio-cultural spheres (see, for instance, Waters, 1995), where the school system also operates (Horio, 1997). Consequently, changes taking place in these spheres also affect the provision of school education. For instance, in some countries in the North, an information economy is dominant in society and schools must be able to prepare students for life in such an economy. In many countries in the South, the informal sector of the economy is expanding, and people are only prepared to gain just enough schooling to be able to work in local markets. In some countries with a large Muslim population, the increasing adoption of western ideologies on the part of schools may meet resistance from, for instance, those who make other, very different, demands on education on the basis of religious beliefs (see for example Barkindo, 1993; Reichmuth, 1993; Sperling, 1993).

In many countries around the world where society is changing, traditional teachings and moral values seem to be undermined. Such changes in society effect the socialization of children. Socialization here is defined as the process by which children become social beings. In addition, each individual in society is today constantly exposed to new values that may not conform to, or difficult to reconcile with, the traditional values of that society. There are many channels by which the individual is exposed to such new norms and values, and in many non-Western countries, the Western-style school is one such channel.

2. Aim and Objectives and Methods of the Study

The overall aim of this paper is to present the realities of children's socialization in two particular villages in The Gambia. The two villages concerned, *Village J* and *Village N*, are both in rural areas, but villagers in the two villages have observed various changes in the society. In order to achieve the aim, the investigation will be concerned with two more specific objectives:

- To describe the ideal child defined by the villagers, and if, in the view of the villagers, there are any differences between the village children of today and their ideal child; and
- To gain an understanding of the perceptions of parents with regard to knowledge and identity development associated with different types of school.

The methods adopted were questionnaire, interviews and observations. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain basic background information of the households such as amount of agricultural productions in the previous year, properties of the households, and names, sex, and grades of children in different types of school, namely the Western-style school, the *madrassa* (Arabic-Islamic school), and the *dara* (Koranic school). After the background information was collected, 44 households in *Village J* and 46 households in *Village N* were selected for in-depth interviews with heads of the household. The present author conducted the data collection personally in *Village J* in March 2001. In *Village N*, on the other hand, the data were collected between November and December 2001 by a Gambian associate who had acted as interpreter in *Village J*.

3. The Social Contexts

The Gambia, situated in West Africa, is a former British colony that gained independence in 1965. It is completely surrounded by its neighbor, Senegal, except for the short Atlantic coast-line (The Gambia, 2001). Although English is the official language of The Gambia, several local languages, French and Arabic are also used. Approximately 85 percent of the population are Muslims and of the non-Muslims, eight percent are Christians (mainly to be found in the capital city, Banjul). In addition, several small groups have retained other religions of African origin (Europe Publications Limited, 1999; McPherson & Radelet, 1995a). In 1993, the total population of The Gambia was 1,038,145, with an annual rate of

growth of 4.2 percent.¹

The Gambia is divided into the following six regions: Banjul and Kombo St. Mary's (generally known as Greater Banjul Area), Western Division (WD), North Bank Division (NBD), Lower River Division (LRD), Central River Division (CRD) and Upper River Division (URD). The Greater Banjul Area and part of the Western Division are considered to be urban area, where urbanization has taken place relatively rapidly.

The region where The Gambia is located today was Islamized relatively early, and an Islamic kingdom known as Takrur was established between the River Senegal and the River Gambia in the first half of the eleventh century (Clarke, 1982; Hiskett, 1994). Islam was brought to the Senegambia region in the form of *sufism* (Quinn, 1972). For the majority of Muslims, their guide has always been the *shari'a*, with the *ulama* (Islamic religious scholars) as "the inheritors of the prophets as the guardians and interpreters" of *shari'a* (Trimingham, 1971, p. 133). However, for those known as *sufi*, on the other hand, direct communion with God is considered as being possible. Further, for the *sufi*, "[i]nstead of the orthodox belief in the otherness of God, they emphasized the presence of God in all aspects of life and tolerated much of the pre-Islamic background of belief in the African communities" (Quinn, 1972, p. 58).

Islam does not recognize a clergy, but in the course of its historical development, there has emerged a Muslim clerical class. In Islamic Africa, imam and those who are called *marabout* have a functional equivalent to that of a priest (Tibi, 1990; Trimingham, 1968). In the most parts of Islamic Africa, except for the east, every village has *marabout* and/or imam living the everyday life of farmer or trader, but, at the same time, fulfilling the role as representative of the heritage of Islam. They are responsible for leading prayers, naming ceremonies for new-born babies, conducting marriage ceremonies, leading funeral prayers, and so on, where it would not be possible for village life to function in a complete manner except for their presence (Trimingham, 1968). Orthodox Islam regards that Islam advocated by *marabout* as 'maraboutic Islam', a derogatory term for what they consider to be deviant form of Islam.

The two case villages differ in many aspects. A brief description of the two villages is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Two Villages

	<i>Village J</i>	<i>Village N</i>
Ethnic group	Almost exclusively Mandinka	Mainly Jola
Population	943	1479
Location	Lower River Division (regarded as a poor area); about 5 km off main road	Western Division (regarded as relatively rich area); on the main road
Composition of the village	One entity; consisting of 4 clans; one clan owning the chieftainship and one owning the imamship	Consisting of 3 communities with each having its own chief
Economies	Groundnut production decreased; employment in urban areas during the dry season or all year round	Groundnut production decreased; income from vegetable garden and collecting economies; employment in urban areas during the dry season or all year round
Migration	Basically no immigration; emigration to urban areas	High immigration and emigration
Islam	Islamized from the beginning	Many recent converts

In both villages, there are Western-style school, *madrassa*, and *dara*. The history of the *dara* in The Gambia is as long as that of Islam. The main objective of the *dara* is to introduce the Holy Koran to the

¹ The census information from 1993 is the most recently available data at the time of writing, the next census results being planned for publication during 2003.

next generation of Muslims, where there are no formal grades, and individuals may begin and end their learning as they wish and carry out their studies at their own pace. The Western-style school was introduced into The Gambia by Christian missionaries during the nineteenth century. The *madrassa* has become increasingly popular in The Gambia during the past 15 years. It has been usual for villagers to develop their village *dara* into a *madrassa*. External links have often been established between the *madrassa* and Arab countries through teachers who have been educated in Islamic post-secondary institutions in those countries or through Islamic organizations that support the *madrassa* in various ways. The *madrassa* has a structured organization and a formal curriculum, which includes subjects other than religion, such as mathematics, science, and a foreign language (Daun, 2000). Arabic is the language of instruction in this type of school.

In *Village J*, there is one Western-style primary school and one *madrassa* of the primary level. There is one person in each of the four clans who runs the *dara* in his compound. In *Village N*, on the other hand, there is a Western-style school and an Arabic-Islamic school, both of which have up to the junior secondary level. In addition, there is only one *dara* in the whole village. In both villages, the *dara* education is considered as an Islamic education that complements the education provided in the Western-style school and the *madrassa*.

4. Children with Good Morals

The heads of the household who were interviewed were asked to depict what constituted, in their opinion, the characteristics of children of “good” behavior by responding to the question “How do children with good morals behave?” The responses of all interviewees in both villages were very similar and they were not only confined to behavior. The responses concerning children may be divided into four categories: (1) their manner, (2) their attitudes, (3) their nature, and (4) other. The responses from both *Village J* and *Village N* are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of Children with Good Moral

Manner	give up seat to elders; greet elders; don't rush to a guest but encircle the guest at a distance; after getting up, greet parents and read the Koran; don't look elders straight in the eye
Attitudes	respect others and obey elders; take advice from elders; don't do anything that is unacceptable; stay close to elders and offer assistance when required; follow parents' instructions without threat of punishment; help others; don't forget the place of origin; hardly show any discontent; don't embarrass anybody; don't steal; willing to work for the benefit of the community; go home straight after school; carry heavy loads for elders when on a journey on foot
Nature	have good human relations; don't have much difficulty in their lives; shy and quiet, and have shame; serious about learning; religious; humble and patient; would sense elder's mood merely by eye contact; not be a hypocrite; being down to earth
Others	Parents admire moral child as a promising child; parents are respected for having good children; God likes such a child; they will always succeed in life; there are those who are good by nature, which is their gift

The basic view of the interviewees is that it is not the responsibility of the school to teach discipline to children, although they may make a contribution. They state that children who have been taught good moral discipline at home are able to learn well in school. Such cultural knowledge is theorized by Bourdieu (1972) who states that “the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences” (p. 87).

There were also statements from interviewees about the behavior of children who do not have good moral behavior, such as the following: “They don't talk to elders politely”; “They are rude to elders”; “They do whatever they want”; “They want to sit at elders' place”; “They don't cooperate with teachers in

school”; “To have children without morals is embarrassing for the parents”; and “Some children are simply bad, perhaps God decided so”. One interviewee stated that even where parents do not have to pay money as compensation or fines when their children behave badly, such children are still an embarrassment to them.

5. Schools, Knowledge, and Identity

In both villages, a majority of heads of the household who were interviewed associated better employment opportunities with education in the Western-style school. In other words, Western-style education is seen as being instrumental in gaining employment. With regard to knowledge and identity development, they expressed distinct perceptions of the Western-style school, the *madrassa*, and the *dara*. The following sections give interview responses about the Western-style school and the *madrassa*. Although the Koranic school has a long history in The Gambia, it is regarded as a complimentary Islamic education in both villages. Therefore, the focus here is mainly on the Western-style school and the *madrassa*.

The Western-style School

There are interviewees in both villages who associate “intelligence” and “awareness” with education in the Western-style school, with such statements as the following: “[Western education] develops mind, and makes the person intelligent”; “[People] use brain”; “Western school makes people intelligent and allows people lots of transactions”; “[With Western education] one becomes more aware and enlightened”; and “Western education increases awareness”. There are also interviewees who go on to elaborate on the theme of “intelligence,” where they indicate that people acquire broad abilities through Western-style schooling, which is subsequently applied in later activities, for example: “People can solve their own problems”; “People can plan life well”; “People are able to know things better, and can analyze things”; “People can easily learn a profession”; “[With Western education] it would be easier to learn the Muslim religion”.

In the expressed views of these interviewees, “awareness” seems, rather, to be related to human interactions, an example of which is given in the following statement from a head of household in *Village N*:

My father and I regret not having been to school. We wish our children not to go through the difficulties we have been through. In the near future it will become necessary for one to be educated to operate or transact in business effectively. Just a week ago, a man came here and duped my father. He cut our oranges and told my father that he would pay for the oranges in three days time, and we never saw him again.

Another head of household in *Village N* stated: “I can keep records of all my farming activities and reduce the chances to be cheated by groundnut traders”. Here “awareness” appears to be interpreted to mean to be able to avoid being cheated or treated unfairly. Only two heads of households, one in each village, mentioned the elements of Koranic teaching in the Western-style school as being a good thing.

There were also negative aspects of the Western-style school that were identified by the interviewees. Six heads of households in *Village J* and eleven in *Village N* mentioned some kind of value conflict between the traditions of the village and the modern norms introduced through education in the Western-style school, for example: “Western school tends to move the person away from the own tradition and custom”; “It would make some disobey to the religious teachings”; “Western education used to be very good because it also taught good morals. Now the education doesn’t teach good behavior or morals. If a teacher beats a child, he [the teacher] will be taken to the police”; “There is no unity but only individualism”; and “It brings a loveless situation”. Here, the interviewee relates “loveless” to individualism because the better off members of an extended family are traditionally expected to support those who are in need, whereas today they only support their immediate family but not more distant relatives. Thus, the phrase “loveless” here indicates decreasing levels of solidarity within the kin system.

The interviewees also expressed particular concern about girls, as one head of household put it: “Girls may get out of control, and even get pregnant”. Several interviewees stated that those children having completed an education in the Western-style school tend to be attracted by urban lifestyles and material culture, for example, as follows: “Children with Western education may go away from the village”; “There is a temptation to move towards a more material world”; and “People leave their culture and environment to live in urban areas, and adopt Western culture”.

Several interviewees pointed out problems where unemployed children who have completed the Western-style secondary school or have had some secondary school education most often stay in urban areas rather than living in the village to work on the farm. These parents generally do not know what such children are up to away in some urban area, although they most often have relatives there who are able to offer them a roof over their heads. One interviewee in *Village J*, a father of two unemployed sons, one of whom has been seeking employment for seven years, expresses the problem as follows: “I encourage my sons to come back to the village during the rainy season. Myself, my father and forefathers all lived on this land. But they give excuses not to come back”. Other interviewees give voice to this problem as follows: “They are too proud and they don’t go back to the land”; “Those with Western education tend to think that they should do only white collar work. Their expectation is too high, they don’t want to do anything else”.

Identity may be considered as the naming of self, the naming of others, and the naming by others (Brenner, 1993). When children, having completed the Western-style secondary school, are unable to find employment but nonetheless do not return to the village, they are labeled as snobs by the villagers (even by their own parents), which constitutes naming by others. On the other hand, in both villages, children who have completed the Western-style secondary school, would name themselves “knowledgeable persons,” which constitutes the naming of self. Here, those who have been educated in the Western-style secondary school tend to wish distance themselves from the others in the village, and such knowledgeable people are “supposed to spatially and symbolically leave the illiterates behind. If they return to farm, that would be a failure” (Hagberg, 2002, p. 3).

The Madrassa

With regard to the question, “What are good things about the *madrassa*?” thirty-two interviewees in *Village J* and forty-two interviewees in *Village N* point to religious factors as being good things. Daun (1992) describes how education in Islam is a two-fold process: “(1) the acquisition of external knowledge that improves faith and (2) the internal realization of intrinsic meaning” (p. 43). Interviewees state that through education in the *madrassa*, children are able to learn the Holy Koran well, which will be of benefit in the next life, that they will know how to worship properly, and that they will become more religious. Several heads of households point out that, as Muslims, it is their obligation to make good Muslims out of their children. The imam in *Village N* stated, “One of the *hadith* says that if you have three children and refuse to give one away to learn the Koran, then you are not considered as His [Allah] follower”.

In essence, Islam is both of this world and of the world beyond (Lawrence, 1998). Husain (1995) states, “While the faithful are enjoined to be actively involved in this world and to enjoy the good things that life has to offer, they are just as strongly commanded to lead virtuous, righteous, pious, and God-fearing lives so that they can end up in Heaven in the next world” (p. 27). Many interviewees stated that by enrolling children in the *madrassa*, both parents and their children will be blessed by God. The interviewees state that the purpose for enrolling children there is preservation of Islam and following the tradition of their forefathers to act for the best in this world and the world hereafter.

While interviewees consider that those who have completed the Western-style school have developed an identity that distances them from village life, those who have completed the *madrassa* are regarded as people who keep to local traditions. One head of household in *Village J*, with two children enrolled in the Western-style primary school and three enrolled in the Western-style upper secondary school, states that he is planning to enroll his younger children in the *madrassa*. He explains: “Younger children will be sent to the *madrassa*, and they will remain in the village”.

Several interviewees point out that in the event of those who have completed the *madrassa* not being able to obtain employment outside the village, they would remain in the village. They would also be good Muslims. Thus the risk of unemployment in the case of those children who have completed the *madrassa* (and the Arabic-Islamic secondary school) is assessed very differently by their parents, because enrollment in these schools is not really regarded as instrumental. For example, the interviewees state: “They may not be far away from home, and assist the world at home. If they can’t get job, they would assist me”; and “Even if he [a child] doesn’t have a job, [with the *madrassa* education] he will be a good Muslim, and know how to worship. There is no disadvantage of the *madrassa*”.

6. Today’s Children

It appears that the responses in Table 2 are ideals and prescriptive. In other words, these are, in the opinion of the interviewees, images of how good children “should be” and what they “should do” but not necessarily descriptions of how things are in the reality. The reality became clear in the responses to other interview questions concerning changes in people’s attitudes. Here the responses represent descriptions of the reality of today, that is how children “actually are” and what they “actually do.” They are quite distinct from the illustration shown in Table 2, and the following are some examples:

If parents have good morals, children would have good morals, too. But today, even good parents with good morals may have children without morals, because children don’t necessarily follow and listen to parents. In the old days, people gave traditional good medicine to children to make them good children, but today people use Western medicine. Western medicine makes them stubborn;

Children are more aggressive now. I think this is because of the diet. They eat too much of imported food, and we don’t know the origin of the food. This makes children difficult to train;

It was easier to train children in the past, but not now. When I was a little boy, if my father told me not to do something, I remembered it with fear for a long time. Today, even when I tell my children not to do something, they don’t listen to me carefully. It’s as if nothing is happening, and they just ignore what I say. I don’t know the exact reason for the change, but perhaps education and new knowledge contribute to this. It seems that it’s the sign of the end of the world;

Morality has decreased. Children no longer understand the “language of the eye.”² When I was a child, we didn’t dare use abusive language near elders. Now children go to graveyards and make water on the way where the dead are buried; and

The youths are rebelling the village authority. They come to meetings late or don’t come at all. The youths don’t want to take a part in community work or any manual work, for example at the mosque. In the past, when there was community work, the elders sat and supervised while the youths worked. Now, the elders work and the youths sit.

One of the questions during the interview, related to the moral education of children, is as follows: “How and where do children learn good morals?” Without exception, all responses stated that this is “at home” or “from their parents.” One interesting point to note is that only a very few people mentioned the responsibility of the community with regard to the moral education of children. The primary place for the moral education of children is at home, and the disciplining of children must start at an early stage of their lives because “a child is just like soft clay.”³ However, there were differences of opinion as to which parent has most responsibility for this, as some thought that the father should have more responsibility than the mother, while others stated that the mother is more responsible since the father may often be

² The language of the eye refers to the emotive expression in the eyes of an elder. One interviewee in *Village J* stated that in the past, when children had done something wrong, they were able to understand this from the unhappy expression in the eyes of an elder.

³ This is a proverb cited by one of the interviewees.

away from home seeking employment opportunities elsewhere. Two interviewees in *Village J* even go so far as to state that in order to have good children, it was important to have a good wife.

Contrary to such responses as these, there are those from some interviews where it is pointed out that in the past it had been the responsibility of the whole community or compound to discipline children, with statements such as the following:

Before, people worked as one unit (compound). Training of children was centered around the compound chief, but today it's around different individuals. Western education caused the change. This has changed, and people have to fit into the change;

There has been the same type of moral training existing, but children are difficult to train today. In the past, it was community's responsibility to train children. Today it's parents' responsibility to train children. But if the training is harsh, children would run away. God changed the world; and

People had better morals before. People could discipline other people's children without any problem in the past, but not now.

The statements above indicate that the disciplining of children used to be the collective responsibility of adults in the compound and the community, but it has now increasingly become the responsibility of parents alone. This change has come about because collective responsibility for disciplining children is not always necessarily welcome today. A key to understanding this change would appear to be found in statements such as the following:

Anybody could beat and discipline any children [in the past]. Now, if somebody does so, children or their mother claim to the police. There are a few such cases [in which some persons who beat other's children were reported to the police]. The mother of a beaten child brought the case to the chief. People usually try to solve such problems in the village. But if they can't solve the problem in the village, they bring cases to the police;

Children lack home training. In the past child training was not just limited to the parents, but even the neighborhood. Today, if you do so, you may find yourself behind bars [meaning being put into jail] or taken to the police; and

Parents can no longer discipline their children as in the past. The child can even take his parents to the police and the parents will get a lot of blame. In the past, any parent could discipline any child if the child was found to be doing wrong.

These responses indicate that today people avoid disciplining the children of others because consequently they could possibly be reported to the police for doing so. This would appear to be the reality behind the responses of the interviewees that the disciplining of children is primarily the responsibility of parents, that is, they are describing how things actually are today. Several interviewees in both villages attributed this change to the Western-style school and Western values. The following are examples of such responses:

In the past, children were afraid of elders, but today they are difficult to train. Youths don't listen to elders, and even insult elders. Through Western education, children are exposed to many things. I'm unhappy that youths insult elders in the village;

In the past, people were more obedient and respectful to elders, but it is no longer so. Parents do not see children in the morning, because children just get up and go away. Things have just changed. God turns the chapter, and everything changes. Just a new chapter started. The Western thoughts, for example equality between men and women and human rights, cause the changes. Human relations are the same, but young people do not do things with respect;

People had better morals in the past. Children respected elders. In the past, children attended community meetings as observers only. Now, children even argue with elders at meetings. The use of corporal punishment was a useful tool for child discipline, but the government abolished it. In the past, daughters accepted to marry men they didn't even know based on their parents' verdict. You can't do that now; and

People's morals have gone bad. The reason is that the government is advocating for the right of the child, and this makes the parents afraid to discipline their children strictly.

7. Knowledge and Power

In both of these two villages, various types of knowledge are associated with different sets of values, and unspoken power relations exist between these different types of knowledge. Literate people have more power than illiterate people, and those who have knowledge of English have more power than those who only have knowledge of Arabic. During the interview, the 75-year-old village chief in *Village J* stated: "In front of young children, we old people are like little children. Once we get out of this village, we can't read the signs, and don't know how to go to places. Young children of today can read and write, and we have to rely on them when we go out of the village".

The differences in the sets of values associated with the various types of knowledge affect the relationship between parents and their children. Several interviewees state that some children with a school education seemed to feel superior to their parents, who did not have a school education. For example, people state:

Children of today aren't obedient or don't listen to parents, because of education. Education changes ways of thinking;

Western education has made children feel that they know more than their parents and therefore don't respect their [parents'] views. In the past the people were poor and illiterate, but had respect; and

Morals are bad, no respect for elders because of education. People nowadays feel too good to learn, and they feel that they know all because they have been to school.

8. Changing Children and Young People

With regard to the socialization of children, there are a number of different agents at work, such as the family and the school, that "compete with one another in the socialization process" (Tibi, 1990, p. 102). Each of these agents has influenced the phenomenon that today the moral education of children is increasingly difficult. Some of the factors indicted by the interviewees are Western norms and values in general and the Western-style school in particular. In addition, there are the influences stemming from the peer group that also may be considered.

As shown by the example described in the previous section, some adults no longer have those means of disciplining children that would have traditionally been considered proper. On the other hand, even those who would have traditionally been considered moral parents, and who surely must also have had moral children, may now have children who are considered not to be moral. The phenomenon is considered by several interviewees to be attributable to the appearance of Western norms and values, which also include the notions of human rights and democracy as declared in current Gambian state education policy.

It is useful here to mention a remark by Brint *et al.* (2001) that, at the primary level, great emphasis is put on orderliness in the teacher-initiated socialization messages, which can definitely be seen to be the case in the Western-style school in *Village J* where, to keep order in the classroom, one teacher even had a stick at the ready with which to beat the children to make them sit quietly. At the primary school situated in a rural area, the notions such as human rights are appropriated into local social reality. It is, as Quist (2001) points out, more at the secondary level of the Western-style school that children experience the

greatest exposure to ideas such as human rights and some information about societies in the North. The Western-style secondary school also stimulates the children in such a way that they are encouraged to develop a strong desire for occupational mobility aimed at the formal sector of the economy. McGinn (1996) argues further that Western-style schooling increases individualism, and the growth of this type of schooling would also indicate increasing social disintegration. Individualism gradually replaces more collective orientations and thus contributes to detraditionalism (Featherstone, 1995). This phenomenon is referred to, indirectly, by some interviewees who state that the Western-style school moves children away from tradition. Bourdieu (1972) expresses this as follows, “the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences” (p. 87).

For the children enrolled in them, schools constitute their immediate social world, where there are certain social practices through which the children concerned acquire particular *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1972). However, the school is not the only place where socialization of children takes place, and it is not only the *habitus* acquired in the immediate social world that affects a person’s social practices, but also the information that person acquires from the indirect social world through other persons. One such case that might be considered here are peers who return to the village from urban areas. For example, there are a number of females now resident in *Village J*, having previously become widowed while living in an urban area, they had subsequently returned to the village to get married again in the village. In cases where such females bring children from their first marriage with them to the village, those children may well have different social practices, acquired while living in an urban area, which other children in the village may now imitate and probably eventually acquire as their own.

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