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Ways in Which Community Involvement May Influence Girls' Education in Senegal

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by

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This study attempts to examine through the lens of social feminist theory the ways in which community involvement may influence girls' education in Senegal. It highlights the extent to which networking, advocacy, and meaningful interactions between community and school may contribute to improving access, learning conditions, and academic achievements for girls. The paper also provides an analysis of the adverse effects of community involvement on girls' education in Senegal. It underscores the extent to which patriarchy and class interfere to shape community involvement and undermine girls' education, in terms of both access and quality. The paper further sketches a combination of Freire's dialogical approach and Nussbaum's capabilities approach as a possible direction to take in order to better address Senegalese girls' education.

Dedication

To my late cousin Senghane Ndiaye with whom I shared memorable experiences.

Rest in Peace.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the Senegalese government's commitment over these last two decades to providing equal educational opportunities for all, the reality is that advancing girls' education is still a challenge. While significant achievements have been made in terms of access thanks to the Ten-Year Education and Training Program (PDEF) that started in 2000, the results are far from being satisfactory if we consider the large gaps between levels of schooling. For example, in 2000, the enrollment rates were respectively 62.3%, 15.4%, and 6.7% for elementary school, middle school, and high school. In 2004, they were 78.0%, 23.2%, and 8.4%. In 2008, they were 92.4%, 35.5%, and 13.0% (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2011). Confronted with this difficult retention issue, policy-makers have placed a great emphasis on local communities' involvement in formal education in order to further increase enrollment and secure retention. However, according to Niane & Robert (2007), not only is the level of actual local communities' involvement in formal education insufficient, but it also varies depending on the area.

Indeed, community involvement seems to be very appealing in a field like education. While its value may be proven in some circumstances, one could raise questions, though, about how effective it might be in different circumstances. How does it affect students with different genders? What would help mitigate its potential adverse effects in certain circumstances? What would help maximize the positive ones? Questions of this nature are important to ask because other factors such as the social organization or socioeconomic conditions may interfere and yield unintended outcomes. The Senegalese society is, as a matter of fact, organized according to patriarchal norms; that is, norms that place men in a position of power over women. Although the Senegalese Family Code has been revised to improve women's rights, that revision does not

affect the lives of the majority of women, especially those living in rural areas where the law is disregarded and traditional norms are upheld (Oheneba-Sakyi and Baffour, 2006). In such a social context, community involvement may be problematic with regard to girls' education because of the patriarchal ideology. In addition to the patriarchal culture which is susceptible to influence community involvement; the parents' socioeconomic status also shapes the way they get involved, and consequently, affects their children's education.

My study is an attempt to analyze the ways in which community involvement may influence Senegalese girls' education. Using the lens of socialist feminist theory, I will specifically try to address ways in which girls' education may be advanced, but also be hindered, as a result of the influence of community involvement in education. I will also attempt to explore what possibility might help better advance their education. Although some scholars distinguish between parental/family involvement and community involvement, taking the former as a type of involvement that is limited at the family level, and the latter as a broader concept that includes people sharing such commonalities as value system, or geographic location, I use the concept of community involvement to refer to both types of involvement.

The study is organized around four sections. The first section deals with the theoretical overview. It includes the theoretical groundings for community involvement in education, and feminist theory. The second section addresses the ways in which community involvement may positively influence girls' education. It essentially focuses on issues of access and academic achievements. The third section deals with the potential negative influence of community involvement on girls. It addresses the effects of the patriarchal culture and poverty. The final section attempts to discuss the possibility of combining Freire's dialogical approach and

Nussbaum's capabilities approach. It also addresses some practical implications of such a combination.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

This section is devoted to a theoretical overview that focuses on two main areas. In the first one, I attempt to provide a brief summary of the liberal, radical, Marxist, and socialist feminist theories in order to eventually highlight the relevance of socialist feminist theory to my study. The second area of the theoretical overview presents some theoretical groundings for community involvement in education.

1.1. Theoretical Groundings for Community Involvement in Education

Having families and the whole community get involved in the education of their children has been generally perceived as a promising practice that has a powerful potential to improve education. Such a perception is, indeed, in line with a wide range of scholarly productions, many of which differ certainly in their perspectives but provide a grounding for community involvement in education.

Psychological Groundings for Community Involvement in Education

The value of community involvement in education is well-grounded in the respective work of Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, a Russian and an American psychologists. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the fundamental role that the child's interactions with his or her social environment play in the cognitive development of the child. He argued that the variety of internal development processes that are awakened by learning "are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90); such people include naturally family members and other people in the wider

community. He used his concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that defines the psychological functions that are in the process of maturation to shed light on the importance of the influences of social and cultural factors in child development. As a matter of fact, the ZPD refers to " the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). By this, Vygotsky was emphasizing the social dimension of the child's internal course of development, a social dimension that encompasses the interactions between the child and his or her family members and wider community members.

Bronfenbrenner, in his turn, provides an ecological view of human development that he represents with concentric circles to show that "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.38) and more remote environment. He argues that the form, the content, and direction of these interactions within the multiples contexts in which the interactions occur vary systematically as a "joint function" of the characteristics of the developing person, of the environment, and the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration. In other words, Bronfenbrenner is pointing out among other things the role of not only factors within the child, but also the critical influence of the surrounding world (such as family and community) on the development of the child.

Both Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner emphasize the importance the family and the community play in the development of the child, which suggests their prominent role in education.

However, they did not address the potential adverse effects a patriarchal community or a class-based community may have on girls' education.

School-Level Rationales for Community Involvement in Education

Beside these psychological theories that offer some groundings for community involvement in education, the theoretical literature on community involvement provides a variety of rationales that further underpin community involvement in education. An impressive body of work has discussed the reasons why community involvement in education should be promoted based on the authors' visions of education.

Some authors emphasize the fact that for schools to function properly they have to work toward getting families and the wider community involved in their child education at school (Epstein, 1995; Finn-Stevenson, 2014). Epstein provides a theoretical model of three overlapping spheres (family, school, and community) where she highlights the most likely outcomes when school promotes or fail to promote communication and interaction with students' families and the wider community. She argues that with frequent communication and interactions between those spheres, students will be more likely to receive common messages and joint practices that support their learnings and growth. Conversely, when the three spheres of influences push apart, as a result of lack of communication and interactions, they are more likely to generate conflicting messages that are detrimental to the students learning and growth. In the same vein, Finn-Stevenson argues that given the complex needs of children, schools needs a wide range of resources (including those of the community) in order to appropriately educate them. She explains that the child's optimal growth requires physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development.

Another body of research finds the value of community involvement in education in the extent to which it helps more adequately prepares students for the labor market. Fitzgerald (1997), for example, argues that community involvement, especially when employers are involved, increases educational and career opportunities for students. According to him, building partnerships between businesses and schools can help address "the poor quality of education and related lack of employment opportunities […as it] improve[s] quality and create[s] additional opportunities for work-based learning" (p. 493). This market-based rationale for community involvement is also emphasized in the work of Nasworth and Rood (1990). They argue that as the economy requires a more educated workforce who can adapt to a changing labor market, it is crucial that educational institutions and business build partnership to better prepare students for the workplace.

Although these school-level rationales are compelling enough to encourage the promotion community involvement in education, they tend to overlook the families perspective on the education of their children. That lack of recognition of parents' natural right may create tensions that are detrimental to child's education.

Conceptual Models of Community Involvement in Education

Though there is no common understanding of the concept of community involvement, much research tends to refer to it as a process with varying degrees of participation of those who are involved. Rothenbuhler (1991) highlights this view in an article entitled "The Process of Community Involvement". He views community involvement as a process with different steps that start from the lowest degree of participation to full participation or full involvement. In his view, while the lowest degree of participation is limited to gathering information and interacting with

others, which he describes as the necessary conditions for involvement, full involvement is only achieved when the involved generates ideas and works for the improvement of the community.

The central place of communication and interaction has also been stressed by McClain (1975). However, unlike Rothenbuhler (1991) who thinks that community involvement requires on the part of those who are involved to collect information and initiate interactions, McClain insists on the fact that school administrators and teachers should initiate activities that aim to involve the communities. According to him, involving the community in educational decisions is a process that requires three major shifts. The first one is to shift our thinking from what "community" means to where a "sense of community" can be found, for the latter involves a strong emotional dimension. The second shift has to do with the role of administrators who must act as an evaluator who assesses the needs of the institution, and who must be constantly seeking to develop a communication network that allows more community members to have access to decision-making processes. The third shift is the change of the bases of authority from the model of an authority based exclusively on administrative position to a model of shared responsibility and authority within the institution and in the wider community.

Like McClain, Epstein (1995) views community involvement from the perspective of the school. She provides a framework of six types of involvement based on the expectations of the schools that also provides families with trainings so that they can meet those expectations. In the first type of involvement, "Parenting", the school helps families to create home environments that are supportive of their children's learning. With the second type of involvement, which is "Communicating", the school makes sure that information about schools program and children's progress reach parents. The third one is "Volunteering"; here it is up to the school to look for and recruit volunteers among parents whose talents and skills match the needs of the students, the

teachers, and the administration. Type four, is "Learning at Home". The school provides assistance about how families can help students with their homework. Type five is referred to as "Decision Making". In this one, the school includes parents in decision-making processes, and develops their leadership. The last type, "Collaborating with Community", the school identifies and integrates resources from the community to improve programs, family practices, and students' learning and development.

Barnett (2013), too, provides a framework that encompasses the types of involvement he sees in Africa. However, unlike Epstein, Barnett's framework is not restricted to the school's perspective. Besides, he breaks up community involvement into only three major types. He refers to the first type as "financing". It is the case when the community supplements the financial gap in state funding. The second type, which she terms "learner support", is when parents are supporting their children's learning. The last type is "networking". It can be initiated by either parents or the school. Its purpose is to foster improved school-community relationships. In a study on the nature of parental involvement in their children's education in the Gambia, Colley (2014) argues that regardless of the mandatory establishment of parent/teacher association (PTA) in each Gambian school, "family and community participation has always played an important role in children's education and social development" (p. 2). She observes that in collectivistic societies every adult takes it as his or her duty to monitor every child, and children know that they are being monitored by every adult they encounter. She goes on to note that because of such considerations, the partnership between schools and families and the communities does not involve instructing parents on what their role is as in Epstein's (1995) model; instead, teachers "assume that parents already know and are ready to engaged in the process" (p. 3).

Although Preston (2013) does not reject the possibility of instructing parents, she notes that the collective responsibility community members feel for each other and for their youth foster their involvement in school. She stresses the concentric nature of the development of community involvement in schools by highlighting the extent to which community members who get involved in their schools build social capital which, in turn, is instrumental for higher level of involvement. According to her, as community members interact with school staff, other parents and students, they create and strengthen their social ties. She believes that these social ties are important for the development of community involvement.

Here, it appears that the type of community involvement that is referred to in this literature is associated with formal education, and it tends to overlook the extent which the concrete situation in which the community lives may shape the type of involvement which, in turn, may affect differently students of different genders. Taking these considerations into account, an analysis of community involvement that uses the lenses of socialist feminist would provide valuable insights by stressing the way both patriarchy and the class-based social organization come into play and influence girls' education. In order to highlight the relevance of using the lenses of socialist feminist theory in this study, I will try to briefly describe some aspects of feminist theory and clarify the unique value of socialist feminist thought in this study.

1.2. Feminist Theory

Feminist theory can be seen as a theoretical discourse that is concerned with women's emancipation. Applied in a variety of fields such as sociology, economics, education, etc., it attempts to understand women's oppression with a view to ending the oppressive conditions in which they live. However, while feminist thought speaks with one voice in underscoring the fact

that women are oppressed in society and need to be liberated, it ceases to be homogenous by taking diverse perspectives in the analysis of women's experiences and how they should be liberated. This certainly accounts for the emergence of a number of different labels in feminist thought even though some may argue that feminist thinking resists categorizations as Tong (2009) acknowledges in the introductory chapter of her book, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*:

> despite the very problems that come with trying to categorize the thought of an incredibly diverse and large array of feminist thinkers as "X", "Y" or "Z", feminist thought is old enough to have a history complete with a set of labels: liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, psychoanalytic, care-focused, multicultural/global/colonial, ecofeminist, and postmodern/third wave. (p.1)

For the purpose of clarifying the theoretical approach of my thesis, I will attempt to briefly review the liberal, radical, Marxist, and socialist feminist theories, and explain the reason I choose to work within the socialist feminist one.

Liberal Feminist Theory

The liberal feminist theory draws on liberal political thought which conceives of politics in individualistic terms; autonomy and self-fulfillment are highly regarded values in that thought. Accordingly, the liberal feminists view that a socially just society is a society that allows each individual, male and female, to exercise his or her autonomy and self-fulfillment. They claim that we are living in a male-dominated society that discriminates against women through oppressive legislations made by men. On that ground, they focus their analysis on trying to have the status of women treated as equal to that of men as mentioned by Hamilton (2007): "…women, like men, are rational beings with the potential to be fully responsible for their own lives" (p. 44), a viewpoint she credits to Mary Wollstonecraft, the liberal feminist author of *A*

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Vindication of Rights of Woman. Assuming that gender equality can be achieved when men and women are entitled to the same rights, liberal feminists focus on legal and social reforms to confront women's oppression.

Despite the fact that educational policies inspired by liberal feminist thought may in some ways promote girls' right to education through laws and social reforms, some critics argue that the problem is not adequately addressed. In fact, liberal feminist thought's conception of equality is problematic. They tend to refer to it in a way that suggests that to be equal to men is to be "like men". This approach may prove counterproductive in education in the sense that it does not take into account the fact that boys and girls are not in the same social condition in a patriarchal society. Boys already have privileges that girls do not have; because of that, applying a same treatment to both genders may not in some circumstances truly do justice to girls.

A closer look at the liberal feminist's approach reveals that in actuality this approach tends to be not much concerned with addressing the sources of inequalities. As a matter of fact, the liberal feminist's approach focuses on manifestations of oppression, and overlooks the structures that maintain inequalities between men and women. Today, passing laws to guarantee girls' access to education is certainly a good thing; but unless we go further and address the root causes of their marginalization, the legislation that promotes their education may not guarantee the suppression of their oppression. As shown in the following description by Sadker and Sadker (1994), girls may still be in a situation that would hardly help them develop their full potentialities in the classroom:

> When we videotape classrooms and play back the tapes, most teachers are stunned to see themselves teaching subtle gender lessons along the math and spelling. The teacher in the social studies class about presidents was completely unaware that she gave male students more attention. (in Disch, 2009, p.364)

Although this teacher in the social studies class is a female teacher, she is unconsciously reinforcing a patriarchal social expectation (she has certainly internalized) which may downplay girls' ambition to become one day president.

Radical Feminist Theory

Radical feminist thought emerged as an alternative to liberal feminism. As the adjective "radical" implies, radical feminists do not believe that mere legal and social reforms can put an end to women's oppression. They argue that the patriarchal order on the basis of which society is organized is the source of men's power over women, and because of that, it has to be challenged. Indeed their claim is that unless the efforts are directed toward eliminating the root cause of the women's subordination, no effective solutions will be achieved. They take male supremacy itself as a systemic form of oppression so seriously that they are even reluctant to attempt analyzing women's subjugation from within a framework characterized by male dominance. As Willis (1984) puts it:

> Radical feminists professed a radical skepticism toward existing political theories, directed as they were toward the study of "man", and emphasized "consciousness-raising" – the process of sharing and analyzing our own experience in a group – as the primary method of understanding women's condition. (p. 94)

As they do not constitute a monolithic group, however, different explanations arise from them when it comes to interpreting their experiences (Echols, 1989). For example, while some radical feminists provide explanations focusing on the power relationships between men and women in their everyday lives, other radical feminists lean more toward some psychological explanations to stress the important feminine qualities that are not duly recognized in a patriarchal society.

To be sure, the contributions of radical feminists to the feminist thought are impressive. However, the criticisms raised against them are compelling too. Many of the radical feminists, especially the group Tong (2009) labeled radical-cultural feminists, are in a separatist logic, seeing every single man as an oppressor and insisting on the necessity to have no reference whatsoever outside their female community. Furthermore, they do not take seriously other forms of oppression such as those related to social class. In their analysis, class is not recognized as a primary source of women's oppression. The separatist logic and the lack of serious consideration of class that characterize radical feminist thought raise important concerns when we want to address gender-related issue in education. One is that if it is assumed that all men are oppressors, it will be practically impossible to build genuine partnerships where men and women are to work together to advance the education of their children, both male and female. Another one has to do with the fact that the economic system is structured in such a way that a large of number of people are entrapped in poverty, which not only limits their resources but also influences the decisions they make about the education of their children. Such circumstances contribute to further jeopardizing the education of socioeconomically disadvantaged girls.

Marxist Feminist Theory

Drawing on Marxism, Marxist feminists focus more their analysis on ways in which women are oppressed by the capitalist mode of production. Such an emphasis is based on the fact that, unlike radical feminists who focus on sexism, "They regard classism rather than sexism as the fundamental cause of women's oppression" (Tong, 2009, p.96). In their views, to liberate women, the capitalist mode of production must be radically changed; and by so doing, the expected changes in sexism will follow. They believe that women's oppression is inescapable as long as the capitalist system is in place. They see men and women as individuals whose

behaviors and relations are shaped by their mode of production. In that line of thought, they contend that our social, political and economic institutions are shaped by the capitalist system in a way that exploits working-class men, and women even more so. The way the institution of the family is organized, and the way women's unpaid domestic work is enforced are, in their views, compelling enough to point out the extent to which capitalism maintains women under oppression.

In an attempt to draw people's attention to these issues, Marxist feminists such as Cox and Federici (1975) argue that women's domestic work should be recognized and compensated as it is central to the capitalist production process. They go further to clarify their position, however, indicating that:

> … when we say that housework—still our primary identification as women—is a moment of capitalist production we clarify our specific function within the capitalist division of labour and, most important, the specific forms our attack against it must take. Our power does not come from anyone's recognition of our place in the cycle of production, but from our capacity to struggle against it. (p.6)

In contrast to liberal feminist thought, this statement clearly shows that Marxist feminists do not believe that women's recognition within the capitalist system is sufficient to liberate women. They do need their male counterparts to have a broader understanding of the struggle they all need to engage in instead of restricting its relevance to the situation of working-class men.

Marxist feminists' position on wage domestic work is then far from being an attitude through which women would maintain the status quo. Their ultimate goal is to better challenge the capitalist system. They believe they have reasons to struggle for a radical change of the system in that, for example, even when a woman happens to have a job in the public sphere, that

job turns out to be an overload of work due to the politics of sexual division of labor that hold them responsible for domestic work. So, Cox and Federici further argue that

> What matters [in our position] is its political genesis, which is the refusal to see work—and therefore the power to destroy it—only in the presence of a wage. In our case, it is the end of the division between women 'who do work' and women 'who do not work' (they are 'just housewives'). (p.4)

While it is undeniable that Marxist feminist thought has made a significant contribution to feminist thought by highlighting the extent to which the capitalist mode of production shapes unequal relations between men and women, it has serious limitations in a patriarchal society. On the grounds that it fails to capture the complexity of women's oppression, it may prove ineffective to liberate women. Hartmann (1979) explains this limitation in these terms:

> Marxist feminists who have looked at housework have also subsumed the feminist struggle into the struggle against capital… [Their] theoretical analysis of housework is essentially an argument about the relation of housework to capital and the place of housework in capitalist society and not about the relations of men and women. (p.5)

In the field of education, if our analysis is based on Marxist feminist approach alone, we will certainly end up addressing only partially the complex condition of female students. Indeed, our analysis will overlook, in such a case, important aspects of the experiences of female students that are related to sexist oppression which is a mode of oppression as important as the oppression based on economic class.

Socialist Feminist Theory

The limitations found in Marxist feminist thought which fails to adequately address the question of gender relations in its analysis are a direct cause of the emergence of socialist feminist thought as Tongs (2009) mentions: "The Marxist feminists who decided that women's

sex class as well as economic class plays a role in women's oppression began to refer to themselves as socialist feminists" (p.111). In fact these socialist feminists hold the belief that to have a more comprehensive understanding of women's oppression, both patriarchy and capitalism need to be equally considered. The type of analysis developed by Marxist feminism is, in their views, too much influenced by Marxism to the point that it narrows the understanding of women's oppression, for it is more concerned with the relation of women to capital than the equally important relation of women to men (Hartmann, 1979; Kennedy, 2008).

On that ground, socialist feminists find it vital to confront at the same time both the capitalist mode of production and men's sexism. They believe that neither of these analytic categories taken alone can aptly liberate women. Consequently, socialist feminist thought incorporates the patriarchal system and capitalism in its analysis; that is, the analytic categories of radical feminists and Marxist feminists. Tong (2009) argues, however, that this does not mean there is a unitary theory among socialist feminists. Indeed, while some scholars like Juliet Mitchell focus on the extent to which women are oppressed by two systems (capitalism and patriarchy) taken separately, other scholars such as Heidi Hartmann (1979) insist on the extent to which these two systems, although different, reinforce each other as she notes:

> …with respect to capitalism and patriarchy, the adaptation, or mutual accommodation, took the form of the development of the family wage in the early twentieth century…[which] cemented the partnership between patriarchy and capital. [It] is the cornerstone of the present sexual division of labor- in which women are primarily responsible for housework and men primarily for wage work……The family, supported by the family wage, allows the control of women's labor by men both within and outside the home…The sexual division of labor reappears in the labor market, where women work at women's jobs, often the very jobs they used to do only at home—food preparation and service, cleaning of all kind, caring for people, and so on. As these jobs are low-status and low-paying patriarchal relations remain intact, though their material base shifts somewhat from the family to the wage differential. (pp. 18-19)

What Hartman is highlighting, here, is that even if capitalism and patriarchy are two different systems of oppression, they interact, influence each other and shape in concert the experience of women.

In the light of this understanding, it seems to me that these two perspectives in socialist feminist theory that can provide valuable insights into the ways women's oppression is maintained by patriarchal and capitalist practices. In contrast to liberal, radical, and Marxist feminist thoughts; the two perspectives of socialist feminist thought have the advantage of providing a more comprehensive picture of reality by incorporating both patriarchal ideology and class even though some people may argue that sometimes reality might be more complex than that. I think, however, that using these two perspectives of socialist feminist thought in my study would allow me to better understand the ways in which girls' education, in the Senegalese context, may be improved or adversely affected by community involvement. On the one hand, it will allow me to focus on the extent to which patriarchy but also class affect girls' education. On the other hand, the fact of keeping in mind that these analytical categories are mutually reinforcing helps me gain a deeper understanding about how the participation of girls in education may be influenced.

WAYS IN WHICH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT MAY POSITIVELY INFLUENCE GIRLS' EDUCATION IN SENEGAL

Consistent with its decentralization policy, the Senegalese government has adopted educational reforms that place an emphasis on local communities' involvement in education through the creation of Local Education and Training Councils (CLEF) in each geographic area, and a School Committee Board (CGE) in each School (Niane and Robert, 2007). In addition, the Government encourages local initiatives such as Parents' Associations (APE). Particular attention has been given to girls' education through efforts to widen their access and increase their school retention.

2.1. Widening Access

Confronted with the challenging issue of increasing girls' enrollment in formal education, Senegalese policymakers have heavily relied on the potential for community involvement to boost the enrollment rates of girls. For that purpose, existing grassroots organizations have been encouraged to contribute to the national efforts to provide every child, male and female, access to education. At the same time, the creation of larger organizations such as CNEPSCOFI (National Committee for the Promotion of Girls' Education) with local cells that directly interact with local populations and schools have also been prompted by the government. These efforts may prove effective in creating a context that allows girls' to have wider access to education because of the power of networking and advocacy on the one hand; and on the other hand, because of local communities' participation in building and maintaining schools facilities.

Networking and Advocacy

Networking and advocacy seem to be powerful strategies that can be and are being used to advance such a social justice-related issue as widening girls access to education. Because Senegal is a patriarchal country whose populations is attached to some traditional ways of functioning such as consulting elders, especially the religious leader or the local traditional chief before making an important decision, not having these influential people on one's side may jeopardize efforts to promote girls' wider access to education. In addition, the need to mitigate the effects of other factors related to socioeconomic inequalities also promotes networking and advocacy. Having all this in mind, local community organizations involved in education may accomplish significant achievements by sharing information and sensitizing these leaders to foster their receptivity, and also by building partnership with them and with other potential partners.

The importance of having the religious leader (referred to as marabout in Senegal) informed and sensitized has been raised by Lugaz and Grauwe (2010) in a study conducted in a Senegalese rural area. The headmaster they found at their research site reported that the year the school was built, most people in the village were not in favor of it. Commenting on the reasons, he explained: "Cette hostilité était due au fait que le village avait été fondé par un guide religieux; les habitants pensaient qu'il n'était pas indiqué d'envoyer les enfants dans un établissement français" (p.138). According to the headmaster, the hostility of the village to formal schooling (what they refer to as the "French school") had to do with the belief that it was not recommended to attend such a school as the village was founded by a religious leader. Had not their attitude to formal schooling changed thanks to the advocacy and networking of the dynamic Parents' Association (APE), the school would probably not have offered all the six grades of an elementary school. In situations of schools with missing grades, it is more likely

that parents will have to send their children to attend school in another area with the grade corresponding to that of their children, which would certainly be a further barrier to girls' access to education. Advocacy and networking appear here as valuable strategies to move the community from a hostility to formal school toward an increased receptivity without which girls' education tends to be more compromised than that of boy's in a patriarchal culture due to the distance factor.

Another example where advocacy and networking have played an important role in advancing girls' access to education is based on my own experience. As a teacher supervisor in the district of Bambey, I became acquainted with a female community leader who also had a high-ranking position in the government of President Abdoulaye Wade, former Senegalese President. The woman has been working with her community to promote girls' education. During one meeting that we held with her community members, she encouraged us to keep on working to promote equal access to education and reminded the other community members that their local religious leader endorsed their activities. Indeed, she was an advocate for the cause of girls' education in that area and she felt that she had to have some official approbation to legitimate her efforts. She explained to me that during her informal visits to her local neighborhood she would seize any opportunity to share with people what, in the changing Senegalese social context, an individual girl and the whole community gain from schooling.

To widen girls' access to education, networking and advocacy may also be in an attempt to seek to minimize the cost of girls' education to families that are socioeconomically disadvantaged. As Gueye & al. (2011) observe in their study on the delivery of education services in Senegal: "Various studies on the reasons why children were not enrolled uniformly cite 'lack of money', 'financial difficulties', the 'need to work' and the fact that 'the family

cannot afford to pay school fees'" (p.49). Poverty-related barriers need to be lifted; this is all the more crucial for girls' as they are generally more vulnerable than boys when they all live in a context of poverty in a patriarchal society: their schooling tends to be less prioritized than that of boys (Gaye & Diagne, 2008). Local community organizations may through networking and advocacy build partnerships with the schools at the local level to work out inclusive policies that alleviate the cost of schooling for economically disadvantaged families. They can also reach out to donors to support these families' efforts to give their children access to formal schooling. These initiatives can, for example, include cost reduction for school uniforms and enrollment fees in middle school and high school for the most vulnerable children.

While networking and advocacy may be powerful strategies to raise awareness and have some support to mitigate the cost of schooling for economically disadvantaged families, there are other challenges to girls' access to education that have to do with the lack of sufficient classrooms or schools on the one hand, and safety issues for existing ones on the other hand. In this area, too, community involvement in education may play an important role.

Contributing to Building and Maintaining School Facilities

Since the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000 on the necessity to take further initiatives to advance Education For All (EFA), Senegal has been consistently increasing the number of its schools, especially at the elementary school level, in an effort to provide education to all. However, as Gueye & al., 2011) observe, "…the increase in the number of elementary schools is marred by a proliferation of schools that only offer certain classes and not a complete educational cycle, especially in rural areas" (p.50).

In such situations, Parents Associations (APE) and their School Committee Board (CGE) and other contributors may mobilize their resources in order to overcome that limitation by building classrooms so that their children will have a place to study. Depending on how important the resources are, they may manage to have classrooms of good quality or just makeshift classrooms. Even though it should be acknowledged that such makeshift classrooms may not, in some ways, provide an environment that is conducive to learning, they at least offer girls' an opportunity to attend school. Without a nearby place, their chances to be enrolled are very small because parents are reluctant to send their daughters to schools that are far away from home as Colclough & al. (1999) note:

> Although the length of the journey to school affects the attendance of both boys and girls, the effects of distance are more severe for girls…girls [are] considered by parents to be weaker than boys, and unable to expend the energy required to walk to and from school… [In addition, parents' reluctance is also due to their] concern for girls' safety en route and to their fear that their daughters may be subject to sexual harassment. (p. 21)

These considerations mentioned by Colclough & al. highlight the patriarchal ideology that underpins parents' attitudes. Because boys are considered to be fitter than girls, the latter are more likely to be denied the opportunity to attend school in these circumstances. For these reasons, when community members engage in building schools and classrooms to obtain nearby schools that offer education for all grades, they are contributing to equal access to education.

Community participation to maintaining school facilities may also be considered as a further step toward widening girls' access to education. Indeed it is one thing to have classrooms built, but it is quite another to have a school environment that allows female students to feel comfortable there. If a given school environment is not inclusive enough to be gender sensitive, the bad experiences female students may have in that school can be a cause for nonattendance.

The situation can be corrected, however, through community involvement in the sense that it may help maximize resources that can keep the school environment hygienic, safe, and comfortable for everyone. To take just an example, in order to maintain good quality and durable school sanitation facilities, community involvement can play an instrumental role by building partnership with the school staff to work out a maintenance plan where responsibilities for all important activities are shared. In the rural area of the district of Sedhiou, for instance, in addition to extending school sanitation facilities, one local youth organization works with the local elementary school to ensure that the supply of water and soap is available on a regular basis.

This type of involvement is easier to develop when the community has the feeling that the local school is its own property. One way this attitude may be fostered is when the school remains open to the community for use during some community's events that do not interfere with students learning. That develops some attachment to the school and creates the community's disposition to support any efforts for its maintenance as being a part of the life of the community. That collective feeling of responsibility vis-à-vis the school, and the subsequent actions that are taken by the community to maintain it, can offer important possibilities to widen girls' access to education. Interestingly, the potential for community involvement to advance Senegalese girls' education expands beyond merely widening their access; it may also improve girls' academic achievements.

2. 2. Improving Academic Achievements

In the Senegalese context, one can identify some ways in which community involvement may positively influence girls' learning and academic achievements. Today, research is clear

about the fact that while students' learning and academic achievements can be explained by factors related to the school, these factors are not the sole determinants of the students' achievements. The involvement of the students' families and the larger community plays a fundamental role in students' performances.

Better Communication Between Schools and Families

Initiatives that focus on developing meaningful communications between schools and students' families prove to be effective in fostering students learning and high academic achievements. Such communications, understood here as two-way street processes of interactions between families and the school, forge strong connections and trust between the two types of institutions. For that reason, these interactions can be a valuable source of information about factors that may interfere with girls learning and achievements for both teachers and parents.

Based on what they learn as a result of their interactions with families, teachers can help parents create or improve the environment in their home to make it more conducive to learning. Given that most parents are not professional educators, teachers may also help by sharing with them some knowledge related to child development and strategies that take into account the students' developmental needs in order to facilitate and make fruitful their assistance when students are doing their homework. This may prevent some counterproductive interventions of some parents who are willing to assist but generally end up getting angry or renounce supporting their children at home because of a lack of knowledge on that area.

Through communication with families, the teacher also can gain important insights that would improve his or her teaching. For example, a teacher serving in a rural area where girls,

contrary to boys, generally have to perform their time-consuming household work to help their mother (or when their mother is away), may intentionally build upon the lived educational experiences (Dewey,1997) of girls by drawing from household work experiences to better educate them. This does not necessarily mean reinforcing gender roles; on the contrary, the idea behind it is rather to use what female students have concretely experienced with a view to both promoting their growth and challenging the traditional gender roles as Allana & al. (2010) mentions:

> Gender equality education should be understood as not only eliminating gender discrimination but also integrating the experiences and needs of both female and male students into all educational practices and, ultimately, enabling them to overcome traditional gender relations through education (p.344).

Approaching girls' education with this view in mind shows that teachers value girls' experiences, and gives room for discussing the traditional gender roles in a way that sensitizes all students to social justice issues such as gender inequality. In fact, one of the reasons most boys in patriarchal societies do not want to be involved in household work has to do with its devaluation. In Senegal, they are generally ridiculed by their peers when they perform tasks that are considered "female work". Valuing this kind of work would contribute in some ways, I think, to removing male and female students' mental representations of traditional gender roles, and to correcting their attitudes toward those roles.

Considering all this, I think that community involvement that incorporation a two-way process of interactions is apt to facilitate female students' learning both at home and at school. If learning is facilitated, improved academic achievements logically follow as a consequence of better performances. Improved academic achievements may also be reinforced by other involvement processes that build on the strengths of the local community.

Building on the Strengths of the Community

When there is a partnership between school and the community that enables the school to build on the strengths of the community it is serving, girls' academic achievements can be significantly improved. Today, many Senegalese are taking that path. Inspired by the successful partnership between the Senegalese Ministry of Healthcare and local communities through a program called "programme Bajenu gox", many schools in Senegal are trying to build similar partnership at the local level to promote girls' education. "Bajenu Gox", a Wolof phrase for "community godmother", is deeply rooted in the Senegalese tradition. It designates a female of a certain age who serves as an educator, a mediator, an advisor and advocate for women, especially girls and young mothers. Part of the features that distinguish her is her availability, her high commitment to the well-being of her community, and the social skills that allow her to easily connect with people.

Schools that recognize the "bajenu gox" skills and roles within the community tend to collaborate with her to better serve the community. That collaboration can be seen as an asset that is apt to positively affect girls' achievements. As a matter of fact, the "bajenu gox" may play an essential role in counselling female girls. In the Senegalese culture girls generally do not openly communicate with their parents on certain topics such as those related to sexuality. They may be having bad experiences that adversely affect their learning without reporting it to their parents. With the "bajenu gox", however, no topic is taboo. She would engage them in any topic, give advice, and if any actions need to be taken she acts as a mediator. In brief, given girls' reluctance to report what might hinder their learning, schools that collaborate with the "bajenu gox" of the community by sharing with her their concerns and letting her share hers may lift barriers that undermine girls' learning.

Another area where the "bajenu gox" can play an important role in contributing to the improvement of girls' academic achievements is in working collaboratively with schools to extend the traditional communal values to school children nutrition. While a school canteen program is being progressively implemented in rural areas, which is a commendable effort as research makes connections between students' cognitive abilities and the quality of their nutrition, there is not however any guarantee that the most disadvantaged students will take advantage of it in a regular basis because of the required contribution per student that each family has to provide. This situation could be challenged if the school and the "bajenu gox" collaboratively work to make the school canteen program more inclusive by integrating in it a form of solidarity that would allow the more disadvantaged children to benefit from the program on a regular basis. Because of her influential position in the community and the traditional collectivistic nature of the Senegalese society, the "bajenu gox" is often able to convince the community to pool its resources and provide a collective contribution in lieu of having each individual family contribute for its own children. Addressing that issue not only contributes to improving all students' nutrition and as a consequence their academic achievements, but it also helps maintain girls at school as they are most likely to be withdrawn if their families have difficulties to provide for their schooling.

Girls' achievement may also be positively influenced by partnerships between schools and the community's youth organizations that provide free tutoring to students. This form of support is widespread in some Senegalese areas where young educated people volunteer to teach the younger children during the last month before school reopens. Through their work, these local human resources attempt to equip all students, regardless of their gender and family background, with skills that would allow them to perform well at school. My experience with

those free tutoring programs run by youth organizations in my hometown has inspired my positive attitude toward such an initiative. Based on their partnership with the schools, these youth organizations have secured for their volunteering tutors access to the schools' facilities and some instructional materials. Available trained teachers also provide them with guidance. They focus primarily on reading skills and mathematics in their programs, and they have flexible timetables to allow a large number of students to benefit from their programs.

In some areas also, school officials go further and encourage the development of a program that addresses illiteracy problems among community members. Literacy classes are offered through such a program to community members who did not have a chance to attend school or who dropped out early. Known in Senegal as non-formal schooling, such programs generally place a particular emphasis on women's literacy, the improvement of their organizational capabilities, and the promotion of income-generating activities for them. Not only does a partnership between school and community that supports such forms of schooling empower illiterate women, but also it creates the conditions to further improve girls' achievement in formal schools. Indeed women enrolled in these programs acquire skills that enable them to improve their lives and the home learning environment for their children; but beyond that, they have opportunities to enhance both their social capital and cultural capital in a way that allows them to effectively interact with the local schools their daughters are attending.

In brief, given the potential resources communities may have within themselves, it would be a good move to draw on such resources in the provision of education. Recognizing these assets in a community and incorporating them in the provision of education may help improve academic achievements for both female and male students even though further actions are generally needed to counter some adverse effects of patriarchy and poverty.

Enhancing Girls' Emotional Readiness to Engage in Learning

Community involvement in education may also improve girls' academic achievements by better preparing them to be emotionally ready to engage in learning. Because of the effects of both poverty-related issues and the patriarchal social organization, girls' emotional readiness to engage in learning is generally undermined. As they grapple with harsh socioeconomic conditions, gender bias in favor of boys, and some forms of social pressure, the risk for them to disengage is high if they do not get support. Consequently, enhancing their emotional readiness to help them overcome the challenges is critical to their success in education.

One way community involvement in the Senegalese context may enhance girls' emotional readiness to engage in learning is to create the conditions for them to be in contact with academically successful female role models. Although the problem is less acute in urban areas than in rural areas, it is important to increase in both settings the visibility of these female figures. The community can contribute to it by working to attract and retain female teachers in their schools, for example. It may also collaborate with their schools (middle school or secondary school) to find at least once a year a female role model as guest speaker in a conference that addresses a problem relevant to the community's life. That may be a lawyer talking about human rights, a medical doctor discussing health issues, etc.

Another way in which community involvement may enhance girls' emotional readiness to engage in learning is by collaborating with the school to help girls feel comfortable with their schooling. Although most parents would rarely discuss curriculum-related issues with teachers, many of them would intervene to support sociocultural activities initiated by students in their schools. Allowing and encouraging girls to meaningfully participate in and take leadership positions in these school-based activities may contribute in a significant way to connect them to

school. Their parents' presence may also increase the importance they attach to school. I think that these initiatives and attitudes toward school may motivate female students to participate in classroom activities and beyond.

POTENTIAL NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON SENEGALESE GIRLS' EDUCATION

Although I believe there are important ways in which community involvement may improve girls' access to education and academic achievements, the reality compels me to acknowledge the numerous potential challenges that community involvement may bring along with these improvements in the Senegalese context. The patriarchal culture of the community and the socioeconomic situation of parents may work against the interests of girls.

3.1. The Reinforcement of the Patriarchal Ideology in Schools

Notwithstanding the emerging voices against some social norms and practices that do not advance women's interests, social life in Senegal is informed by patriarchal culture. By its very nature, a patriarchal culture legitimates men's power over women and the unequal gender relations is maintained by the way society itself functions. On this regard, there are grounds to fear that community involvement in Senegal might, in some ways, reinforce the prevailing gender inequalities.

Patriarchal social expectations might be a major challenge to the improvement of girls' education in most places in Senegal. Due to the power of socialization, people tend to take the patriarchal social norms as something natural, and tend to not question them. The fact of the matter is that even though any sensible parents want the best education and a good life for their daughters, the pervasiveness of the patriarchal culture makes it hard for them to conceive of their daughters' fulfillment outside the patriarchal framework where women's social roles and responsibilities tend to reflect the unequal gender relations in favor of men. There are risks of

perpetual continuation of these unequal relations in so far as they influence social interactions, and are at the same time reinforced by those interactions. As Lorber (1994) notes "Everyday gendered interactions build gender into the family, the work process, and other organizations and institutions, which in turn, reinforce gender expectations for the individual"(pp.114-15). This shows in a way the extent to which girls' education may be limited through both overt and subtle manners by gendered interactions within the community or at the school.

As an ideology that legitimates the preparation of men to hold positions of power over women, the patriarchal ideology places women in a subordinate position. It is an ideology that provides men with privileges in that it is male-centered, male-dominated and male-identified Johnson (2006). This is to say that by its very nature patriarchal culture does not see gender inequality as problematic; on the contrary, it sees it as desirable. Because most community members are more likely to look at education from a patriarchal standpoint, their involvement in school may contribute to perpetuating gender inequality. Instead of addressing gender-related problem in a way that removes the structures of inequality, they are more likely to come up with solutions that Paulo Freire would have qualified as "false generosity" in the sense that they keep the unequal power relations intact. I believe that Freire has made a good point in seeing such an approach as "as false generosity" because as long as the structures of gender oppression remain, the forms of oppression may change but that will not put an end to it. The viable solution would be to remove the oppressive structures.

The need to handle with great caution community involvement in education in a patriarchal context like the Senegalese one becomes more conspicuous when we attempt to examine its effects at both the school level and the family level in times of resource scarcity. Indeed, while the schooling of boys and girls are both affected by limited resources constraints in

developing countries, domestic and school factors combine to place girls in a more disadvantaged position (Stromquist, 2001). As a general rule in Senegal, when the family experiences financial difficulties, girls' formal education tends to be taken less seriously than that of boys due to some consideration related to the social expectations of their gender. In fact, whereas boys are seen as future heads of families and future breadwinners who will have to provide for their families, girls are seen as future wives who will be taken care of by their husbands. This view of women as eternal dependents on men, although not always in conformity with the actual reality, plays a major role in families' decisions about the formal education of their daughters. As formal education is generally associated with having a well-paying job, the education of future breadwinners tends to be perceived as more important for the family than that of a future wife whose husband will provide for her. In such a context, it goes without saying that a family who has limited resources would pay more attention to their sons' education at the expense of their daughters. The family is more expected to make sure their daughter has a husband who is able to provide for her, and that their son will be able to provide for his family.

At the school level, the patriarchal culture of the community contributes to shaping priorities. Since resources are seldom sufficient, the school becomes a school in which the pursuit of the interests of boy overshadows that of girls. This can be easily noticed during recess time in rural elementary schools, a break during which boys are fully engaged in their games while girls hardly find a place to enjoy themselves if they want to. In rural areas, schools generally functions as "boys' schools", and most of the time neither the teachers nor the school boards perceive that situation as an important problem that needs to be addressed with their meager resources. The belief that it is not a priority is, in actuality, a belief that is shared and reinforced by other community members. That influence of the community may also interfere

with the choice of instructional materials and teaching practices. Whereas teachers who are gender-aware tend resort to their agency to adapt teaching materials, which in some cases require financial resources, teachers who are not gender-aware would let themselves influenced by parents' patriarchal views and the schools limited resources and not pay due attention to some forms of gender related discrimination. Essential questions that might have contributed to improving the quality of girls' education turn out to be taken as a luxury. When there is enough money, they can be considered; when there is not, they are put aside because they are not perceived as crucial.

In short, there are clear potential risks for community involvement to reinforce the patriarchal culture in their involvement in their children's education. Such a situation would, of course, compromise the efforts to improve girls' education, its impact is however more likely to be felt most by girls living in socioeconomically disadvantaged families.

3.2. Women's Invisibility as Part of the Challenges

Community involvement in a patriarchal context may also negatively affect girls' education due to the tendency to render women invisible. In the Senegalese formal education context, women's invisibility in school-based involvement and home-based involvement might, to a great extent, impede the efforts to advance of girls' education.

Comparatively to men, women appear to be less visible in their children's schools in Senegal. This is not necessarily because they are not interested in their education, but rather this could be explained by the fact that they are in general held back by their household occupations. Because such occupations keep them away from the public sphere, they end up having a marginal role in the interactions between schools and the community, leaving men dominate

those interactions. In fact, there is a tremendous social demand on women in terms household maintenance, child rearing at home, and caring for the husband and his relatives to the extent that a married woman is permanently confronted with constraints of time to attend school-based events on a regular basis, or to meet with teachers and administrators on behalf of her children. That distance of women from the formal schools their children are attending could be equated to an important loss in terms of opportunities that the school might have seized to advance gender-responsiveness and better serve both male and female students. In the absence of gender responsiveness, school is more likely to exacerbate gender inequality than to promote gender equality. Additionally, if women stay at home, this may encourage some girls to see their future as being centered on domestic activities alone like those performed by their mothers. That may, to some degree, reduce their incentive to explore some areas that might have contributed to their growth.

Even when some women happen to get involved in the schooling of their children as an individual parents or through a local organization made up with men and women, their invisibility takes another form. Their participation tends to be marred by the patriarchal ideology. A striking example that illustrates the extent to which patriarchal culture limits modes of participation of women can be found in the Senegalese Mothers' Association described by Lugaz and Grauwe (2010) in their study. As a matter of fact, that local organization composed of women has been working alongside the two male-dominated organizations (CGE and APE) to advance formal education in their village. Despite its commitment, though, its activities in the school mainly revolves around cooking in the school canteen and cleaning. Although these activities are important ones, the members of the organization are not visible where ideas are being produced and decisions taken. The invisibility of these women when it comes to decision-

making processes could be associated with the status conferred on them in society by the oppressive patriarchal system which encourages their silence, as Alison Jaggar saw it:

> Many women feel so unsure of themselves that they hesitate to express their ideas in public, for fear their thoughts are not worth expressing; they remain silent when they should loudly voice their opinion. Worse, when women do express their thoughts forcefully and with passion, their ideas are often rejected as irrational or the product of mere emotion (Cited in Tong, 2009, p.115).

This state of affair does not do justice to girls who, like boys, need role models who are actively participating in decision-making processes in the public sphere. Through this form of timid participation of women, however, girls are receiving clear messages that might undermine the development of their leadership potentialities.

One may, of course, argue that the form of women's participation described by Lugaz and Grauwe has to do with the rural context in which women are generally housewives with a low level of formal education, and that women's with higher level education would have taken leadership positions. Indeed, women with higher levels of formal education tend to mark their presence by a level of participation involving decision making. Nevertheless, they are less likely to show up due to some other forms of constraints.

What complicates the situation of these women is the fact that their availability is limited by a combination of patriarchy and the obligations related to their jobs. Generally employed, they do have some advantages that the ordinary housewife lacks. Their cultural capital as well as their greater financial autonomy can be regarded as part of those advantages. However, even though it does not seem hard to perceive the benefits attached to having them get involved in formal education, the actual situation would lead one to believe that their involvement is not taken as important. Despite their advantages, they face time constraints that are mainly due to the

fact that they struggle on two fronts. On the one hand, their professional obligations call on them to devote time and energy to their work outside the house; and the other hand, once at home they become the housewives whose responsibilities are to attend to domestic work in accordance with the patriarchal norms.

The situation of these employed women who find themselves to be struggling on two fronts produces a severe backlash against the education of girls, especially those living in socioeconomically disadvantaged families, as they withdraw from school to be hired as maids. In Senegal, and even in many other African countries as Colclough & al. (1999) found out, going to the cities to work as maids has been a major factor for dropping out of school for many girls living in rural areas. In fact, in order to alleviate their workload, most Senegalese women who work outside their home rely on girls they generally pay to perform the household chores they are supposed to do. In the eye of poor families, that practice is appealing since not only does it allow them to have some financial support, but also it enhances their daughter's chances to quickly find a husband.

In sum, it can be claimed that the invisibility of women, which is a direct result of the patriarchal culture reinforced by employment-related constraints, may contribute in important ways to the perpetuation gender inequalities in school. It undermines girls' motivation, and deprives them of opportunities to take full advantage of educational resources.

3.3. Challenges in the Forms of Involvement in Traditional Koranic Schooling

Arguably, Koranic schooling has a great influence on Senegalese society. The provision of that form of education is based on private initiatives, however, due to the secular character of the education system inherited from the French colonial rule. Still fresh in the collective memory

of Senegalese people, the colonial experience has contributed to shaping the educational demand of some families and communities to the point that they tend to turn their back to the French-inspired formal education and direct their involvement toward the traditional Koranic schooling. Their forms of involvement in traditional Koranic schooling is nevertheless a big challenge to the promotion of girls' education in the Senegalese context.

It might be helpful to examine first one fundamental limit of the traditional Koranic schooling itself with regards to girls' education. In fact, although it is not the only form of Koranic teaching in Senegal, as there is a variety of formal private Koranic schools, the traditional Koranic schooling is an informal type of schooling that is the most appealing to socioeconomically disadvantaged families. It is strongly influenced by Sufism (a mystical branch in Islam), and the patriarchal ideology. It does not demand fees and tuition (in actuality, nothing is charged to the parents although they may voluntarily support the religious leader). The problem is not directly connected to the cost per se, however. It has rather to do with the influences of the Sufism and patriarchy. Because of the Sufi influence, the Senegalese traditional Koranic schooling is very demanding on the part of the student (the child disciple, most known as "talibe" in Senegal) in terms of commitment and dedication to the religious leader. The children who are enrolled generally leave their families to live with the religious leader, and learn the Qu'ran, the Islamic traditions while being also trained for life skills and character building. Not surprisingly, parents who have chosen that education for their children tend to enroll their sons and have their daughters stay at home because of the harsh conditions involved in that form of education. In other words, by the very way it functions, the traditional Koranic schooling exclude girls, confining them at home.

The patriarchal culture and poverty also reinforce this situation. As a matter of fact, harsh treatment is associated with manhood in patriarchal culture. Given that men are socialized to be emotionally "strong" enough (or emotionless) to cope with hostile situations and control difficulties, separating boys with their families at young age so that they experience hardship is acceptable in patriarchy. Women on the contrary, even though in actuality they may suffer worst forms of oppression, are considered weak and unable to endure hardship. That perception of reality, which is generally nourished by myths, account to a great extent for unequal opportunities between boy and girls; it has not stimulated adequate reflection or action to be more gender-responsive. As for poverty, it limits people's options. Beyond its religious education dimension, traditional Koranic schooling may appear to some parents as the only manner to have their children educated in a way that does not involve spending their scare resources. Hence, they contribute to maintaining the practice by providing the enrollees.

In its current form, community involvement in Senegalese traditional Koranic schooling is maintaining the status quo. I am not implying that girls should be allowed to participate in that form of education as it is currently; I am just trying to highlight the extent to which girls are marginalized in this form of education. Indeed, efforts are needed not only in terms of improvement of the conditions and the functioning, but also in terms of broadening the curriculum as it does not cover some fundamental areas like mathematics. My point is that community involvement just attempts to address in some ways issues that are related to the improvement of the living conditions of the disciples, leaving unaddressed the functioning that excludes girls. The way communities are involved takes many forms. In urban areas, it takes the forms of donating clothes, mattresses, and money. It may also takes the form of having well-off families volunteer to provide food to one or more disciples. In cities where these forms of

participation do not exist the disciples tend to be sent to beg in contempt of the law prohibiting child begging. In the rural area where the main activity is farming, communities generally participate by cultivating a collective field for the religious leader to have enough harvest to feed the disciples. These forms of involvement clearly show that they are intended to support the practice as it is, that is, to not transform in a way that makes it inclusive enough to allow girls to be enrolled.

The other problem with regard to girls' education in this situation, is the fact the public schools tend to be lacking in the areas where there are Koranic schools in general, and traditional Koranic schools in particular. Even if happen to be built, they do not generally have all the grades. This is generally justified by a utilitarian argument that prioritizes building classes in areas where they would benefit the greatest number of people given the weak economy of the country and the need to rationalize the resources. Although a utilitarian argument may hold in some circumstances where what is at stake is not fundamental in human life, it would hardly be accepted when applied to an issue as fundamental as education. In any case, research has shown that girls are less likely to be enrolled, or even if they are, they tend to drop out when the school is far away from where they live. In respect, supporting the traditional Koranic school in its current form contributes also to excluding girls from public school.

In brief, the forms of community involvement in traditional Koranic schooling deny girls access to both that traditional Koranic schooling and public schooling. Had the communities and the government reconsidered their attitudes, I believe that girls would have had broader opportunities to be educated in a proper manner.

COMBINING FREIRE'S DIALOGICAL APPROACH AND NUSSBAUM'S CAPABILITIES APPROACH: A PROMISING DIRECTION

A combination of Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Freire's dialogical approach would offer, I believe, an excellent foundation for an educational reform that places community involvement at the heart of the improvement of Senegalese girls' education. Despite the fact that some tensions that are related to where the emphasis should be placed may arise, a dialogue between these two approaches can create a coherent basis upon which community involvement in education can be built for the benefit of all. This is all the more understandable as both approaches share a profound commitment to social justice, understood here as a humanized world.

4.1. Freire's Framework

Central to Freire's philosophy of education is the concern for humanization. He argues that what characterizes a situation of oppression is precisely the fact that humanity, which is the natural vocation of a human being, has been stolen from the oppressed; and because of that they must struggle for the restoration of that humanity (Freire, 1993). The restoration of that humanity involves their recognition as Subjects and their treatment with respect.

In the "Foreword" section of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993), Richard Shaull notes, referring to the author's work, that:

> Freire is able to do this because he operates on one basic assumption: that man's ontological vocation (as he calls it) is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively. (p.32)

Although the way Richard Shaull puts it may be viewed as not including women, Freire is in actuality credited with a conception of human nature according to which being a Subject is a core characteristic of a human being, whether it is a man or a women. Here, a Subject is referred to as an individual who has critical awareness of his or her existential conditions (the concrete reality that the individual is experiencing), who thinks for himself or herself and acts on that concrete reality to improve it.

In Freire's framework, humanization consists in acting in a way that is in accordance with that inherent nature of human being, but not in a way that contradicts it. It contrasts with oppression in the sense that the latter dehumanizes. In a situation of oppression, the oppressor denies the oppressed their ability to act as Subjects, they are objectified and controlled. Because the oppressor relates to them in a way based on inequality and objectification, Freire believes that such social injustice should be countered by the restoration of humanity, a situation in which every person is treated as a Subject, that is, a situation in which all people are equally recognized for their intrinsic capacity to critically examine their living conditions and to transform it for the better. In Freire's perspective, this humanistic orientation liberates insofar as it allows the individual pursue his or her natural vocation to have control over his or her own destiny. To that end, Freire proposes a dialogical approach that empowers all those who enter into dialogue in order for them to become more fully human.

Seeing dialogue as an "existential necessity" due to the dehumanizing character of its absence and the humanizing power of its practice, Freire assigns his dialogical approach a central place in the process of liberation. Not only does he see in dialogue a way of including people, but more importantly, he finds that the practice of dialogue in itself is critical to the acquisition of the knowledge through which the people act upon the world to transform it. In his view, the word

"which is the essence of dialogue itself […] is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible… Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action" (Freire, 1993, p.87). Indeed, Freire's conception of dialogue calls for each individual's active participation based on mutual respect and cooperation between people; a participatory process that involves both critical thinking and action on the part of each of the individuals who enter into dialogue.

He finds that the combination of these two dimensions of dialogue are essential for conscious transformation of reality. In accordance with Freire's perspective, thinking critically, which he differentiates from thinking naively or thinking in order to just adjust to the normalized current situation, allows the individual to gain awareness of the oppressive structures of patriarchy and classism. I believe that without that critical awareness, any attempts to improve girls' education in Senegal through community involvement would be undermined by serious barriers that are related to the patriarchal culture and the socioeconomic conditions at work. Such attempts that Freire would refer to as "activism" will be less likely to generate genuine change in the education of girls because of the presence of the adverse influences of these oppressive structures, the effects of which are perceptible both within the school and the wider community.

Before moving to Nussbaum's approach, it seems important, however, to note that Freire's dialogical approach does not preclude in some circumstances

> …to include some fundamental themes which were not directly suggested by the people…The introduction of these themes has proved to be necessary, also corresponds to the dialogical character of education. If educational programming is dialogical, the teacher-student [that is, a teacher who teaches and learns from students at the same time (he or she has the same characteristics of a revolutionary leader),] also has the right to participate by including themes not previously suggested. (Freire, 1993, p.120)

Freire calls such themes "hinged themes" due to the role they play in connecting other themes, and illustrating relationships between other themes. The point is here to attempt to clarify that dialogical process is in actuality a give-and-take process through which those who enter the dialogue have something to offer and are willing to take from others in manner that contributes to treating everyone as a Subject. That situation empowers everyone, and we can note that it allows the oppressed who may be submerged in the situation of oppression to emerge from the oppressive situation and act upon it in order to transform it.

4.2. Nussbaum's Framework

Although her approach is different from Freire's, Martha Nussbaum (1999; 2000) insists, like Freire, on the necessity of humanizing people, arguing against the treatment of as women as mere instruments to some other people's ends instead of being themselves considered as ends. In fact, Nussbaum offers an account of a humanized world that is based on a profound concern with respect for human dignity, an idea that

> …involve[s] an idea of equal worth: rich and poor, rural and urban, female and male, all are equally deserving of respect, just in virtue of being human, and this respect should not be abridged on account of a characteristic that is distributed by the whims of fortune. (Nussbaum, 2000, p.4)

She contends that women are generally subject to gender discrimination which violates their fundamental human characteristic of dignity as most of them lack support to lead "a life that is worthy of the dignity of the human being" (Nussbaum, 2000, p.5). She believes that in order to correct that situation, a set of human capabilities that allow each individual to function as a human being. Simply put, Nussbaum sees in the development of capabilities a way to protect human dignity for every individual, male or female. The

challenge turns out to be, then, ensuring that everyone have the basic capabilities without which the person's human dignity is violated.

Indeed, Nussbaum believes that a socially just world cannot exist in the absence of capabilities that entitle the individual to the fundamental aspects of human life. She refers to such capabilities as "central capabilities", and has identified ten areas that need to be covered: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and finally control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2000). It seems important, though, to highlight the fact that Nussbaum's approach is concerned more with the capabilities than with the functioning of the individual. The capabilities are seen in terms abilities that are not necessarily actualized, but which gives the individual possibilities to function in a humanly manner. In other words, the capabilities empower the individual in allowing him or her to resist oppressive situations and to live a life that reflects human dignity. As for the functioning of the individual, it is the actual life led by the individual. In a situation of oppression, it does not reflect human dignity. So the capabilities empower the individual in making it possible for him or her to have options and to control his or her functioning.

One may have some reservations, though, about the paternalistic stance that Nussbaum's list of central capabilities reflects even if she has left flexible and open-ended so that it can be adapted to local specificities. Understandably, she has made a compelling argument that needs to be taken into account, when she observes that "…circumstances affect the inner lives of people, not just their external options: what they hope for, what they love, what they fear, as well as what they are able to do" (Nussbaum, 2000, p.31). Nevertheless, I believe that it is equally important, if not even more so, to avoid being prescriptive in matters that affect other people people's lives. The idea of developing capabilities is hardly refutable, in my view. Yet, accepting

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that idea does not necessarily mean that one also accepts the way these capabilities are selected in Nussbaum's approach.

One can clearly see that while both Nussbaum and Freire argue against the treatment of a person as a mere instrument at the exclusive service of others, the way Nussbaum's list of capabilities has been generated seems too paternalistic, and that may in some ways compromise the endorsement of the capabilities even if they are relevant. I think they should not be imposed upon people because of the alienating nature of prescription, on the one hand; but also because of the fact this is less likely to radically change the existing oppressive structures, on the other hand. Based on the considerations mentioned above, we would need to take into consideration Freire's dialogical approach in that it involves cooperation, mutual respect, critical thinking and action, but also does not preclude in some circumstances that the revolutionary leaders, which may also be the government, come up with issues that are critical to the people's humanity. I believe that a combination of this nature where people will pursue the development of capabilities defined through a dialogical process has real potential for addressing the question of gender issues in education in the Senegalese context.

4.3. Some Practical Implications of the Combination

In terms of practical implications, it is clear that dialogue should come first and should help generate the list of capabilities. That dialogue needs to involve government's experts, teachers, and communities. In order to have better chances for the whole community to endorse the capabilities, it is crucial to have an inclusive representation of it in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnic group, religion. It is also important that the participants be the representatives of the community who have legitimacy, that is, people who are accepted as

leaders in their communities. Even if by chance this dialogical process happens to generate list of central capabilities that is identical to that of Nussbaum, as they are all connected to education in a way or another, something different from the endorsement of the capabilities is at play in this process.

In fact, in addition to making easier the endorsement of the capabilities by the community, the significance of the dialogical process also lies in its potential to transform the oppressed into Subjects who act on the reality to transform it. Dialogue will give voice to community members who speak out about the education of their children. They give their perspectives, share what they value and what their concerns are, show what they are grappling with either explicitly or implicitly, ask questions, listen to other perspectives, etc. It is also the moment for the other stakeholders to do the same. I think such interactions are an important moment for the consciousness raising without which those who are submerged in situation of oppression cannot emerge to see in a new light the effects sexism and classism on them and on the education of their children. Through this dialogical process intended to arrive at a list of the central capabilities, then, the foundations of a process of social change that will undoubtedly influence girls' education are laid: a process that would involve the whole community working together to contribute to addressing the educational challenges their children face. That dialogue, which involves, collaborative work should be understood, however, as something restricted to the definition of capabilities. It needs to inform the relationships between the local schools at the heart of all the interactions between all the stakeholders in education, including the students.

Another important practical implication has to with the distribution of the resources that allows the development of the capabilities. Given that the central capabilities that will be selected are essential for the students to function in a way that is worthy of human dignity, and

given the existing inequalities based on gender and complicated by other factors such as poverty and place of residence; the distribution of educational resources should be a need-based distribution. In other words, equity in the distributing will be the guiding principle. This allows, once the central capabilities are listed and their development recognized as a public concern, to guarantee the provision of resources every student whose development of capabilities may be jeopardized by a lack of, or inadequate resources. Proceeding that way can help solve the problems of discrepancies related to the student's place of residence, socioeconomic status, or any other factors; these factors further placing girls at a disadvantage. That would certainly require more efforts on the part of both the government and school in terms of resource planning and redistribution, but it also requires a lot of effort on the part of the local community in terms of involvement as they may have to bring their contributions.

Furthermore, the practical implication has also to do with the curriculum. The combination of Nussbaum's ideas of capabilities development with Freire's dialogical approach gives an important place to the community in the curriculum. By taking part in the selection of the list of central capabilities which will serve as a guideline during the development of the curriculum, the communities provide inputs that are relevant to their situations. It changes the top-down approach to the curriculum which, despite the Senegalese option for decentralization, comes from the top. Even though in this new approach the curriculum content may include some other aspects the community did not suggest, they can see the connection with their lives. The point I am trying to make is that due to the relevance of the curriculum to their lives, the community member's connection to the school will be more developed, and their involvement will tend to increase.

What is more, by developing a curriculum which relevant to the life of the community, most parents will be more inclined to discuss curriculum-related contents with teachers and students, learning from school and teaching the teachers and the students. In a process like that, social change will be facilitated in the community, for even though school does receive influence from the community, it is also a change agent. In the process of developing of the capabilities agreed upon, the school also fosters a change of attitude with regard to gender. So, in such a context the interactions between the school and the community take another meaning as everyone learns and teaches. That can help change the standoffish attitudes of some parents who generally perceive the public school as a continuation of the French colonial rule assimilationist policy. Indeed, this approach gives room for the incorporation of local languages in the curriculum.

Additionally, the difficult question of the traditional Koranic schooling could be approached differently in order to address its adverse effects on girls' education. As in its current form, the traditional Koranic schooling restricts gender girls' access to education in addition to having a narrow curriculum, the need to reconsider it will arise if the capabilities are to be pursued. Reconsidering that form of schooling would not mean questioning the value of religion or spirituality in general; instead, it should be understood as a way to rethink its teaching practices to align them with the shared goals of promoting the development of capabilities. To that end, two possibilities may be explored.

The first one is to incorporate religious teaching in the state-run schools' curricula. In this scenario, the teaching of all religions must be available but attendance should not be compulsory. The responsibility to choose a given religious class and to maintain attendance is left to the student and his or her family. The second possibility that may be explored is a fully community-

run school for religious teaching. In this second scenario, it is the community that governs the school but neither the state nor a single religious leader. Here also, two options may be possible. In one of the options, the community-run school is delivering only religious teaching, in which case the students will need to attend formal public school in addition to taking these religious class. The school schedules will be flexible enough to allow that combination. In the other option, the students are attending the community-run school only, in which case the narrow curriculum focusing mainly on religious teaching will have to be enriched to make it possible for every student to develop all the capabilities agreed upon.

The practical implications also pertain to the teaching strategies. Even if the goal that is pursued is for every student to develop at least the basic capabilities that allow everyone to function in a way that is worthy of human dignity, that does not necessarily means all students will learn to develop them the same way. All students do not have the same learning styles, and the factor needs to be taken into consideration when teaching. Applying the same teaching strategies may end up disengaging those whose learning styles do not match with the teachers' methods of delivery, which leads to failure to develop the capabilities. Because of that, it is crucial that the teacher learn to know his or her students, and uses teaching strategies that are responsive to their learning styles.

The efforts to be responsive may cover the selection of topics, the activities, the rhythm, the delivery, etc. It goes without saying that in order to better equip teachers to address these issues, training them in multicultural education would be recommended. The idea here is to have teachers who are well-prepared to be able to identify the strengths of every students and to build on them I order to better teach the student. That would undeniable help advance girls education because of its potential to be responsive to the social conditions of girls. To be responsive to

gender does not entail, however, isolating girls. They can be empowered in a context that is

mixed, provided everyone is recognized as a Subject, an agent capable of active participation in

the cooperative give-and-take learning process.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that, in the Senegalese context, community involvement does have a potential to advance girls education; but it faces serious challenges that may impede the process. Advocating and building supportive networks within and outside the community may play a critical role in promoting girls' access to education by fostering more receptivity and managing to minimize the families expenses associated with schooling their children. Other forms of involvement in which meaningful interactions between families and the school are maintained may also contribute to facilitating girls' learning.

The study underscores, however, the extent to which community involvement may be shaped by the pervasive patriarchal culture and poverty. These adverse forces stand as powerful barriers to girls' education. Given that they inform the dynamics within community involvement, the latter turns out to compromise girls' education. In such a context, although all the situation of all girls deserves attention, that of girls living in rural areas where there are traditional Koranic schools needs a special attention.

In attempt to lay the foundations for my further research on possibilities to improve girls' education in Senegal, I have sketched a discussion on the possibility of combining of Freire's dialogical approach and Nussbaum's capabilities approach. I believe that, if deepened, such an idea may yield a powerful combination with a unique value in addressing the situation of girls' education in Senegal. I find Nussbaum's capabilities approach very interesting in that it allows to secure for every individual at least the basic capabilities to live in a humanly way, but I also think Freire's perspective would help alleviate its paternalistic character.

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