

Grandmothers at the Centre in Velingara, Senegal

The Transmission of Knowledge, Education, Intergenerational Relationships and the Gift Logic

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Les considérations contenues dans ce texte ont été générées d'une part par la collaboration de l'auteur avec Grand-Mother Project (GMP), une ong américaine-sénégalaise qui travaille au Sénégal dans un contexte marqué par des sérieux conflits intergénérationnels et par une perte des valeurs traditionnelles et de l'autre par la rencontre avec Geneviève Vaughan et sa théorie du don maternel unilatéral, qui met en évidence la différence radicale entre la logique du don et la logique de échange - logique qui s'impose en discréditant la logique du don et des ceux qui la pratiquent. Dans le cadre de l'expérience de GMP, le discrédit des pratiques traditionnelles, dont souffrent les communautés locales, dans lesquelles les femmes âgées sont les premiers cibles, rentre dans cette dynamique. En valorisant les femmes âgées, qui précédemment étaient fortement marginalisées, GMP a individué une stratégie efficace pour réactiver des pratiques de solidarité et d'éducation communautaire, qui visent à retrouver un bien-être collectifs surtout celui des femmes, des ados, et des enfants.

A home without grandmother is like a room without doors.

—Peul proverb

The considerations contained in this text were generated by two different experiences. One was my collaboration with the GrandMotherProject – Change Through Culture (GMP), an American-Senegalese NGO operating in Senegal within a rural context marked by strong intergenerational conflicts and by a progressive and painful loss of knowledge and faith in local ethical and socio-cultural values.¹

The other was the encounter with Genevieve Vaughan that gave me insight into her theory on the unilateral maternal gift. This theory highlights the radical and primary difference between the gift logic and the exchange logic, as well as the dynamics of annihilation that exchange brings upon gifting. The totalitarian imposition of the exchange logic, as is happening with the increasing spread of neoliberalism, is also sustained by devaluing the logic of the gift in its many variations, and discrediting those who practice it.

Within the context of GMP's experience, the discrediting suffered by local communities, of which older women are the first targets, the loss of local knowledges and values, the

loss of traditional community education, seem to result from this loss of shared values.

In this context, the GrandMother Project adopts a holistic approach to promoting the well-being of adolescent girls and to combatting harmful practices (such as, for example, FGM, early pregnancies, and child marriages). It has identified the valorization of elder women, and their practical and theoretical skills, as key to starting the process of protecting of young women and to developing a strategy to reactivate community practices in educational contexts, that can lead to the restoration of greater collective well-being, and especially among women, adolescents, and children.

The Interruption of Intergenerational Dialogue and the End of Community Education — Logics of Gift and Logics of Exchange

GMP has been working in Velingara, in Casamance, Senegal, since 2008 with a project called “Développement Holistique des Filles” and has promoted inter-community

dialogue² since its inception. The activity aims to identify problems of common interest and possible shared solutions. The extensive transcriptions of these encounters has revealed that one of the communities' major concerns regarding young people and their education, is the interruption of dialogue among generations. This interruption is expressed among the young people by their loss of respect towards the elderly, their loss of local knowledge and practices, and by the increase in underage pregnancies (a phenomenon closely connected to that of underage marriages).³ The interruption of dialogue (or conflict) occurs not only between generations, but is also felt as a problem that involves many other relationships, including those between neighbours to those between different villages.

The interruption of intergenerational social relations halts the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the other and especially creates a break with the values on which the community's life was based. There is a denial of the educational responsibility of the traditional community educators, the elders, and especially elder women, though even parents can be seen as no longer fulfilling this important role. The education of young people is thus increasingly delegated to school institutions alone. Consequently, among young people there follows a progressive lack of respect towards the elderly and a distancing from the communities' knowledges and values.⁴

If the traditional knowledge is lost and not considered, it is because there is no longer any contact between the elders who possess this knowledge and the young people for whom this knowledge is normally intended.—Boubacar Balde (young man) (Lulli, "Investigations...")⁵

Community Education: A World of Social Relations and Its Corrosion

I refer here to one of the most significant practical and philosophical African beliefs: the importance of community education.⁶ In this area of Senegal (as in many other African areas), children traditionally benefited from the teachings of the whole community, receiving a variety of influences. They learn through participating in intergenerational activities, such as rituals, ceremonies, and work, and through forms of intellectual formation such as the telling of tales and stories. Learning is continuous and lifelong and in early childhood the children actively take part in a number of community activities, gaining ethical, practical, and theoretical knowledge connected to these activities. This takes place through the understanding of myths, stories, riddles, songs, and dances of which the elders are the main knowledge keepers.⁷ Knowledge is gained through interpersonal relationships and the relationship with the environment, and is based on honesty, moral integrity, and a sense of responsibility for the common good (Ntseane Gabo). This provides a holistic education that prepares children, and adults, for their responsibilities towards the community, and for the formation of interpersonal relationships as key elements of the learning process (Shizha).

Knowledge, therefore, has a relational connotation, in the sense that it is through my relationship with others and with the environment that I gain experience, that I know, and through participation that my knowledge becomes action. In this perspective, the connection with ethics and teaching of values becomes significant, as well as the relationship of each and every one with others and with the environment.⁸ The form of community education, embodied in

the transmission of this practical and theoretical constellation, is known by most as Ubuntu, and represents a philosophical and pragmatic dimension which, albeit in its different acceptations, is common to many African cultures (Ndorefi and Ndorefi 16 ff.).

Mogobe Ramose describes Ubuntu as a social-ethical necessity that is not limited to the Bantu populations but has spread to other Sub-Saharan African societies who share similar ideas. This is a way/form of life in which everyone must learn to live humanly in relation with others, in different spaces and times "A person is a person because of other persons" says a Bantu proverb. This perspective defines a different concept of person compared to the Illuminist concept, for which rationality is the most relevant element of a human being.

From this perspective, an individual learns to be a person starting from the dialectic (and gift-giving and receiving) relationship with the community, and with the environment (Ramose; Boateng; Ntseane Gabo).

This community and relational dimension of education corresponds to a form of learning and experiencing the world that is built on relationships, sharing, care, proximity, and respect. The loss of this custom, as we can see in the community of Kandia in Senegal, consequently also dismantles the transmission of a corpus of local knowledge and practices, the relative ethical and socio-relational system of reference, and the "ergonomic" and symbolic continuity of the communities and their environment.

The interruption of intergenerational dialogue, and consequently of community education and knowledge transmission not only delegitimizes the specific values of local knowledge handed down by the elders, but also the more complex and practical vision of the world: a way of life which values

the community dimension, social relations, and giving. A vision of life that cannot easily survive in contact with more aggressive paradigms such as that of the exchange logic, increasingly pervasive and penetrating, not only at an economic level but also at a social and symbolic level.⁹

As Genevieve Vaughan has stated, “Exchange among humans can prob-

filter, we really should not read this as an exchange. Instead, it is simply turn-taking: creative reception and response that is imitative in taking the initiative, *prior* to the logic of exchange” (61).

This human dimension, rooted in our first experiences as infants, and without which we could not survive, is an affective, cognitive, and economic

paradigm. According to Emmanuele Seyni Ndione, a Senegalese author, economic exclusion, but also cognitive and symbolic exclusion, occur when all forms of relationship and productive mechanisms outside the monetary logic are disqualified, and when giving is seen with suspicion if not actually repressed. All this takes place in different ways within

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ably coexist with unilateral giving when it involves only symbolic or occasional trades, but when it becomes the social nexus, exchange overtakes, exploits and devalues gift-giving” (Vaughan, *The Gift in the Heart* 54).

The logic of the unilateral gift that Vaughan refers to precedes the exchange logic and also precedes the logic of giving, receiving, and reciprocating, as a “total social fact” as elaborated by Marcel Mauss. Considering gift-giving in this way enables us to more freely redefine the social and economic categories. As Vaughan states “...giving and receiving, without the obligation to give back, are at the basis of human relations. Unilateral giving to satisfy another’s need is the basis, the first move, the opening gambit of communication, which can be elaborated socially in many ways, only one of which is the obligatory return gift” (*The Gift* 54). This logic is rooted in the experience of having been nurtured as a child, and it continues to produce itself: “Unilateral giving/receiving can be repeated by the same person again and again, as does happen in mother-child nurturing” (54). She adds, “If we want to get beyond the market

dimension that can be expressed in countless forms. Nevertheless, it is vulnerable to the totalitarian spreading of the exchange logic. Exchange, which the neo-liberal society has assumed as the dominant paradigm (and which entails the satisfaction of the other’s needs only in order to satisfy one’s own), is nevertheless only one of many economic models and, according to Vaughan, it gains its strength of expansion also from the fact that it operates according to familiar linguistic procedures such as definition and classification (Vaughan *For-Giving; Homo Donans*).

The all absorbing affirmation of this logic, which entails a monetary vision of life, perverts cohesion and community dialogue, which were elements of mutual and unconditional recognition, originating from a common experience built on values, which in no way refer to monetary value and exchange but rather to the values associated with the gift logic.

The logic of exchange devalues and conceals other visions of the world and the actors engaging in them, and brings with it the symbolic, social, and economic exclusion of everything that is not contemplated in its

different contexts but produces the same kind of exclusion and poverty:

Every group, every culture has its own way of conceiving logical connections between things in order to interpret events. Impoverishment is manifested in an inability to unify the world, to explain why and how what there is constitutes reality. In this sense, the current economic development, in delegitimising non-commercial systems (not based on exchange we could say) is “diabolical”: it separates and disintegrates symbolic representations. For this reason we speak of symbolic impoverishment. Poverty is, we believe, associated with the loss of relations of solidarity between people and their surroundings, which, using another language can be called their environment. (Ndione 24)¹⁰

With the spreading of this process, people are not only excluded, but tend to exclude themselves from their own systems of explanation of the world, because the bonds

that connected them to material things, animals, and other human beings are deprived of sense by the dominant market logic. When this exclusion affects the cultural sphere, it becomes self-exclusion and validates dominant representations triggering a self-exclusion and self-devaluation process of those “bearers” of a different logic, coming from the logic of the gift (Ndione). This is a process that removes the value of gift-giving, of voluntary participation in the solution of collective issues, of the recognition of the value of giving, of those who give and those who receive, and of the elders, especially elder women who personally represent these attitudes more than anyone else. As bearers of free knowledge, oriented towards well-being and care, herbal, medicinal, and mystical knowledge with a social and supportive community-tending dimension, grandmothers are the ones who see to the physical and psychological well-being of younger women and children and consequently of the entire community.

Grandmothers, Witches, Gift and Knowledge in the Changing Paradigm

In the Kandia community, where GMP takes place, this sense of confusion is highlighted, as we have seen, in the distancing of the young from the old and in the rejection of the educational role by parents and grandparents, which in turn increases marginalization and conflict. The elderly lament that the young are rude, disrespectful, inconsiderate, and mocking. The young, on the one hand consider their elders to be useless and old fashioned (though showing some nostalgia for ancient wisdoms), while on the other, they are afraid of them and avoid especially the old women, whom they fear may be witches.

In our society we have values that now are almost buried. No one speak more about them. Only grandmothers and grandfathers spoke about it, but they were marginalised. Before the GMP project, people dared not approach grandmothers because they said they were witches. Only four years ago grandmothers were considered witches in society.—Mamadou Mballo (young man) (Lulli “La collaboration”)

In this coming together of different forms of life (visions and practices of the world) elder women, agents and active bearers of local knowledge and values, are among the most vulnerable. In situations of social and economic fraying, older women are those who advocate most strongly for a non-capitalist use of resources and for living practices exempt from commercialization, such as the transmission of knowledge in its quality as gift and its relational dimension.

Accusations of witchcraft against vulnerable people, especially older women, in some areas in Africa has led to terrifying forms of violence over the past thirty years, to the extent that, in some countries such as Ghana and South Africa, “camps” have been created to rescue women accused of witchcraft who have been banished from their communities (Federici; Mbako and Glenn).

There is a vast anthropological literature produced from the end of the 1950s on the subject of witchcraft in Africa, explaining its various economic, social, and psychological functions.¹¹ However, our reading of the phenomenon in the context of the project is in agreement with the analysis of Silvia Federici who says:

...these witch-hunts must be understood in the context of social reproduction that the liberalization and globalization

of African economies have produced, as they have undermined local economies, devalued women’s social position, and generated intense conflicts between young and old, women and men over the use of crucial economic resources starting with land. (21-22)

The conflicts regard not only the non-market communitarian attitude of the sharing of economic resources, but also of the sharing of knowledge and relational resources. They are conflicts that affect the symbolic sphere and the practices of community values linked to local logics that preceded the spread of globalization. However, we believe that it is reasonable to imagine that, in the transition from a symbolic and socio-economic dimension strongly valorizing the gift and giving to one based prevalently on exchange, the compliance with a new logic of exchange, reinterpreted collectively as a “supreme good,” creates diffidence towards those members of the community who refuse it, who cannot become a part of it, or who become a psychological and physical burden on those who have (willingly or unwillingly) accepted the new rules and individualistic values of the exchange logic. Consequently, the community reacts towards people who are “hostile” to the new paradigm, in the well-known ways that were traditionally adopted towards those who were harming the community prior to the spread of the exchange logic (typically the individualists, the envious, the malevolent, and the greedy), and that is by accusing them of witchcraft. Accusing someone of witchcraft in this changed context does not affect the real “individualists,” i.e., those who relinquish solidarity exclusively for personal gain (Marie). Instead, it affects those individuals who are still driven by the opposite logic, i.e.

the logic of the collectivist gift, who demonstrate the need for it (in many societies in transition, children are the other designated victims of witchcraft accusations) and who remind us of how the community used to work before the massive spreading of the new paradigm.

GrandMotherProject has found itself facing the problem, if not

Communities, Elements of the Rift and Centrality of the Educational Institution

Breakdown in communication and new conflicts are connected to the production of cognitive and value spheres that are no longer being shared by the different generations. The knowledge that the young gen-

projects implemented in Africa do not take into consideration the elderly nor community dynamics. They focus mainly on adults and youths as elements that can be isolated, decontextualized, and considered capable of being productive.¹⁴

Before, in community development activities, the grandmothers, who

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actually of accusations and explicit condemnations for witchcraft, of the suspicion towards elderly women and their marginalization from different moments of community life. In the Kandia communities, diffidence and suspicion of elderly women has led to their isolation by the other members of the family and community. Mothers stopped leaving their children in the care of grandmothers (mostly their mothers-in-law since these are prevalently patrilineal societies) and young adult women resorted less and less to their grandmothers' traditional medicinal knowledge, mostly regarding reproductive and sexual health, in spite of not having access to allopathic knowledge and resources. Adolescents stopped turning to elders (to listen to stories, legends and riddles¹²) while at the same time they feared and mocked them. The loss of intergenerational contact and respect for the elderly was strongly felt. Respect for the elderly, particularly for elderly women, is an expression of respect for humanity, for the community, for the individual in his/her wisdom and relationship with others, the respect for one's own roots, and for the ethical values that are collectively shared.

erations absorb from the media and from educational institutions, the individualistic values that these and other institutions promote, refer to a completely different order of reality to that experienced by young members of the community in their everyday life.

Within this process, there are certain agents which, according to the Kandia community, embody, more than others, the causes of the practical and cognitive disruption that contribute to the consequent distancing of generations and faltering of the community's idea of reciprocity.

While school is seen as one of the main causes of this conflict, other factors are also considered. Television (powered by car batteries where there is no electricity) provides models of behaviour that are completely different to those found in the communities, thus triggering new ambitions and introducing new languages and images that replace community and family dialogue.

Many development projects also promote values that are different to those rooted in the traditional logic, such as for example, an economical concept of time and reality.¹³ Furthermore, the majority of development

have much knowledge, were rarely involved. Other programs have shown how to make money, how to read and write, how to avoid disease, but did not help us to know our culture. Other programs have contacted those who have the strength, that is, young people and those who have the means. We lost our landmarks.—Old man in Sare Boulel (GMP "Sare Boulel...")

In these dynamics of comparison with other logics, an important part is played by tales about the west told by returning migrants, which in a context characterized by poverty and progressive monetization become fascinating and can have a devastating impact on adolescents. It has been a frequent practice in fact, due to poverty and to the prestige attributed to money, to marry young girls off to older migrants that live abroad and flaunt a certain monetary wealth.¹⁵

School centrality

Colonial education has been, from the start, hegemonic and destructive towards African cultural practices, towards African traditional knowl-

edges and the “ways of knowing” (Shizha; Kapoor and Shizha).¹⁶ In Sub-Saharan Africa, colonization has brought foreign knowledge, so-called scientific knowledge, which has denigrated the African local knowledge deeming it “unscientific,” untestable, and inapplicable to education and social development. The dominant knowledge is now western knowledge that overpowers and rejects all other knowledge (Shizha).

In the villages of the municipality of Kandia, in spite of the multiple factors mentioned, school programs are considered to be responsible for conflicting relations and for the rift created between generations.¹⁷ Communities have difficult relations with this institution.¹⁸

People think that school works as a brake in the relations between old and young, because the young people think that the elders are exceeded.—Diao, young man from Kael Bessel village (Lulli “La collaboration”)

Sometimes school pushes children to change their character. They develop a superiority complex with respect to all those who have not gone to school. They think they are above them.—Aminata, SCOFI operator (Lulli “La collaboration”)

In Velingara, many communities, that are deeply attached to their traditional and cultural values, complain that school programs are based on values and knowledge which do not reflect their own values and priorities. The limited space given to cultural values in the school programs, as well as the lack of trust and of communication between teachers and the members of the community with a low level of formal education contribute to the negative feelings people in the community have for the schools.

This often leads parents to stop sending their children to school or to pull them out of school altogether.

People think that school teaches toubab values. Often children who go to school behave badly, and parents think it is because of school, that is the fault of teachers. For this there is a mistrust.—Thierno S., teacher (Lulli “La collaboration”)

Rural primary schools, which are often built just outside the village, are not simply a laboratory in which new knowledge and new learning methods are transmitted, but they are also the physical and symbolic space where the fracture between contents and forms of collective knowledge, and the new inputs from the outside world, is determined. A new figure gains a concrete role in school: the teacher, who becomes the new role model whose modernizing light and literate knowledge obscures oral and practical knowledge, of which elders are the bearers, thus leading elders to abandon their educational role within the community.

Communities say they do not get involved in education because children are always stuck to teachers and do not respect the word of the elders, but they respect the word of the teachers.—Nfalli Demba, teacher (Lulli “La collaboration”)

Teachers, who often act as intermediaries for other external institutions, such as the registry office or the hospital, are often seen as hostile, arrogant, and incapable of putting themselves on the same level as the community, and they often ignore the communities’ wealth of knowledge.

It is through the established school education process, implemented by schools that create a figure of reference that is cut off from the local

context and brings a knowledge that replaces and marginalizes the knowledge generated by relations and skills rooted within the territory, that we witness the abandonment of traditional knowledge both in its content and in its method. The vision of the world intended as an epistemological framework and as “embodied” dimension of knowledge seen as “being in relation with,” and the ethical dimension and connection with the participation in the collective well-being is lost in the learning process favoured by these institutions and their western-based concepts of knowledge and learning.¹⁹

In the imported western universe, school education expresses and promotes social ambition, socio-cultural anxieties and needs for a social-economic development. Within this context, cultural values favour individualism rather than community and support independence, rather than interdependence and community (Ntseane Gabo). The only knowledge considered valid is that imparted by the formal institutions, with a teacher and texts, whose contents, prior to its acquirement, are objectified as completely separate from the learner. On the contrary, as many authors agree (Shizha), the production of knowledge and traditional African education was holistic and integrated all activities, including rituals and the skills needed to maintain cultural practices, and family and community life. The objective of a traditional African holistic education was to prepare individuals to meet their responsibilities towards the community, and to engage in interpersonal relations that honour and sustain collectivity and mutual support. Therefore, education is not limited to gathering knowledge and skills. It includes different ways of knowing, perceiving, and interpreting the world. Knowledge itself has a

relational connotation inasmuch as it is through my relation with other people and the environment that I gain experience, and by participating my knowledge turns into action. In this dimension, the connection with ethics and teaching of values assumes a certain significance.

The loss of the ethical and relational dimension, both in its epistemological and social dimension, is in fact one of the aspects highlighted by the Kandia communities interviewed by the project GMP. Children, and young adults, are losing respect for the elderly and their knowledge, and in general, they are also losing the proactive awareness of belonging to a community and a culture they no longer take part in, both at a theoretical/cognitive level, and at a practical, ethical, and participatory level.

Grandmothers, the Well-being of Adolescents, and Community Solidarity

Within this context, in its actions against early marriages and early pregnancies, against harmful practises and in favour of school attendance by young girls, GMP has always supported intergenerational and community dialogue, and the valorization and strengthening of local culture and especially of grandmothers. With this objective, many different activities have been and continue to be organized, from the *Journee d'Hommage aux Grands-mères*,²⁰ to the production of booklets on local values and knowledge to use in schools, and the collaboration among grandmothers and teachers in classrooms, as well as providing training for grandmothers in leadership skills and in finding shared solutions of community issues. Grandmothers are a forgotten resource that if given a central role and a possibility of expression are able to produce positive changes for the benefit of all.²¹

Teachers Who Learn, Grandmothers Who Teach

One of the key elements of the GMP program is the "Stratégie Ecole-Communauté."²² This strategy aims at including positive cultural values in the school programs, strengthening communication between children/adolescents, parents, and grandparents, and building on communication and collaboration between the community and the teachers. Grandmothers participate in the classrooms and share their knowledge with the students and teachers.²³ They share traditional stories, proverbs, and riddles with the aim of passing down knowledge, together with the traditional customs and the communities' social and moral ethics. They also elicit discussions on subjects concerning traditional customs and ceremonies, traditional medicine, medicinal plants, and the nutritive properties of local foods.

Involving the elders in school is a recognition of their importance. The involvement of grandmothers in the school's activities helps to strengthen the links between them and grandchildren. The discussions during the workshop gave me the courage to invite grandmother Aissatou Sow in my class to share her knowledge with the students. —Néné Badji, teacher in Kandia village (Lulli "La collaboration")

Grandmothers, individually or in groups, in the village or at school,²⁴ mentor teenage girls and strengthen their knowledge connected to sexuality. They teach them traditional songs and dances that were typically used in the past to educate children. A tool used to bring back memory and re-actualize the importance of these activities, and of the knowledge of elder women for the younger gener-

ations and for the whole community, are the songs of praise dedicated to grandmother. This, together with other activities, has enabled teachers to understand the value of grandmothers, to appreciate the values of the local context, and to teach the local culture in school, with the participation of the community. Children and adolescents are re-approaching traditional values and respect for the wisdom of the elderly.²⁵

Learning between village and school

Other activities for the reaffirmation of local culture have also been developed in the villages. In addition to the Intergenerational Forums, the elderly (grandmothers and grandfathers) indulge in discussions on local history or other subjects associated with the natural and cultural context for the benefit of the students and the teachers. Elderly women have also gone back to telling traditional stories to the family in the evening, and children have begun to bring these stories they have learned at home back to school.

Some communities occasionally organize storytelling and traditional dance evenings during which traditional values and culture are transmitted to the younger generations. During the storytelling night, the entire village and the teachers gather together to listen to grandmothers telling stories and teaching traditional dances. In these occasions, the young rediscover their roots and the teachers have the opportunity to learn about the complexity and importance of local culture. The elderly thus pass down their knowledge in a collective manner and at the same time one that is "institutionally" recognized.²⁶

Relations and Knowledge?

Various assessment studies have pointed out that the promotion of

intergenerational dialogue and of the positive values of local culture in schools and in the village, and of the centrality of grandmothers, has brought positive results on various levels. With regard to the “school-community strategy” of GMP, the school principals, the teachers, and the parents all agree that the results of the GMP-IEF strategy are considerable. Amongst these are: improvement in the relations between communities and schools; positive change in the teachers’ attitudes towards local knowledge and members of the community; adoption by teachers of improved pedagogical practices; integration of activities rooted in the local cultural values within the school programs; improvement of the children’s behaviour both at school and in the village; increase in students’ self-esteem in and improvement in their results.

All actors interviewed, (elders, adults, old women, young boys and girls) acknowledged a reciprocal rapprochement. Insinuations of witchcraft and fear of mystical powers have ended. Young boys and girls spend more time with the elderly, listening to their tales, discussing and learning their stories. Intergenerational and community dialogue have increased, and conflicts have generally been reduced.²⁷

The girls attend us every day now. We make tales and dances together. We meet every night now, but before it was rare.—Monde Balde, grandmother. (GMP “Sare Kouna”)

We spend a lot more time with the grandmothers. They teach us stories, tales, legends and songs. —Ajja, young girl (GMP “Montomba”)

Young girls spend more time with their grandmothers and this has increased mutual affection and at-

ention. Grandmothers have regained their educational role within the family and community and in many cases they collectively take responsibility for the education of the young girls, with a particular attention to sexual health. All age groups (male and female) say that before the project they rarely spent time together, but now they gather more frequently, even several times a week.²⁸

Here in the public square, every day, now spontaneously people meet to discuss. Before, there were the elders only.—Village chief of Medina Samba Diallo (Newman)

Also, grandmothers and grandfathers have confirmed that the project has helped them in their task of transmitting cultural knowledge.

We teach them traditional games, which we began to forget, and we discuss on all subjects.—Anon, grandfather from Dialakegné village (Newman)

The young people in the community now respect the elderly and their knowledge much more than before the project was implemented. They are interested in their culture and love talking about it.

Now girls understand a lot, it is not like before. Now we are discussing a lot about culture and traditions.—Grandmother of Kayel Bessel village (Newman)

The latest evaluation of community leadership training programs for grandmothers shows that the elders have regained confidence in their skills, and the revival of mutual solidarity has favoured dialogue and the transmission of knowledge and traditional values to the new generations. The risk of early pregnancies

and also early weddings has also been reduced.

It’s thanks to the grandmothers that we have not yet been forced to marry. They are the ones who were able to convince our parents to wait. —Khady Mballo, adolescent girl (Lulli “Les resultats”)

As has been evidenced, grandmothers fight to keep girls in school.

As they gradually regain a voice and respect, grandmothers are increasingly taking responsibility for the well-being of the whole community in general. The involvement of grandmothers in protecting young girls from early marriage, their collective involvement in negotiating solutions to conflicts within the village or community on issues of various natures, expresses a strength and expertise that had been set aside and is now eagerly embraced.

Elder women, with their practices and knowledge rooted in the socio-cultural territory, embody the possibility of an articulation of various principles, such as free sharing of knowledge, rooted in experience and sharing, and in both its social and epistemological relational dimension. In this way, the project has restored value and brought community discussions back to the centre. Further, the school experience now recognizes that “traditional” knowledge is not to be separated from the affective, relational, symbolic and ethical dimensions. This traditional knowledge that is handed down by the grandmothers through metaphors, gestures, affection, and symbolic associations belong to a “form of life” that emphasizes sharing and that is connected to the gift logic.

As Ndione suggests, the exchange logic breaks the symbolic and emotional bonds, as well as logical ones, reducing its parts into pure commercial value, and causing dire poverty.

For Vaughan the logic of exchange takes control over what exists, first by denying its value and then by becoming parasitic upon it.

The dynamics of the implementation of the GMP reflects this as well. Development projects are accepted by communities for various reasons, but first because they lean on the dynamics of hospitality, which at least in these areas are deeply felt. Therefore, in this sense they make a parasitic use of the gift logic practised in these areas. Besides, as we have seen, even if unknowingly, projects follow the logic of exchange that has already been spread into these territories by external institutions (Ndione). Though they are well-meaning in their efforts to repair the damages caused by the mercantile logic (sometimes successfully other times not), the projects derive their authority from the very fact that they are seen as part of this logic. In some way, in the dynamics of de-valorization of local practises and vision of the world, that we have seen emerging from the logic of exchange, the (at least formal) acceptance of projects is a “good practice” because it responds both to the value of hospitality, as also to the aspirations to participate in a new model of life which, more or less, has a certain attraction.

With regard to GMP, it is true that the development project has a “market” oriented authority, because it comes from the outside, from the western world, and it uses the term “development” (albeit in an almost physical acceptance, because it deals with the psycho-physical development of adolescent girls). However, it drives and promotes commercially unproductive factors such as dialogue, and grandmothers and traditional culture (with the exception of harmful practices) as factors of realization of personal and collective well-being. This double role allows it to revitalize those giving activities tied to tradi-

tional community education, to the values of solidarity and the logic of the gift that improve life for everyone and especially for the women of the different generations. And it is exactly in the valorization of what has the least value according to the logic of exchange, i.e. non-productive elderly women, that we see an albeit momentary way out of the sense of loss and of conflict. The valorization of older women, and their knowledge, seems to offer a bulwark against the spread of exchange logic and of its foundation on hierarchies, patriarchy, individualism, and social suffering.

In the perspective of the gift logic, reflections about the GMP emerge on the epistemological directions and practical and relational scope of our very knowledge, and therefore in general on the education of children and adolescents. Reflections also emerge on the centrality of the female element in the transmission of knowledge and practices that are able to resist conforming to the logic of exchange.

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Endnotes

¹GrandMotherProject – Change through Culture (GMP) is an NGO that has been developing the “grandmother inclusive and intergenerational approach” for over fifteen years. This program promotes the

health and wellbeing of children and women through the strengthening of intergenerational dialogue, the involvement and valorization of grandmothers, and of positive local traditions and values. GMP identifies grandmothers as a resource in many aspects of the wellbeing of the community and promotes their empowerment as a key element of development prioritizing community and culture. For more information see www.grandmotherproject.org.

²One of the techniques used is the “Intergenerational Forum” that elicits dialogue on a number of issues concerning the education of adolescents. During these occasions, discussions are first held in small groups of peers. Subsequently each group will bring its considerations to a plenary discussion to reach consensual decisions. The representatives of the various institutional categories present in the villages are also included in the decision process on an equal footing (teachers, midwives, religious leaders).

³An interesting study on teenage pregnancy in Senegal, especially in school, and in their relationship with early marriage, is available at the UNFPA website, titled “Senegal: Etude sur Grossesses Precoces en Milieu Scolaire.”

⁴The weakness of the values and traditional knowledge, showed by dynamics such as intergenerational conflicts, affecting most, if not all, of the Casamance region. This is evidenced by the interviews gathered by GMP in the villages, before the start of its activities, and those gathered in the neighbouring villages of the project (for assessment comparison reasons), as well as evidence gathered by other research such as that of Virginie Sagna (2013).

⁵Interviews were held in the French language; all translations of the interviews are by the author.

⁶Many authors agreed on the importance in African societies of

family/community education, closely connected with community life and engagement of social relations. Some of them, though stressing the difference between African cultures and socio-political organizations, identifies a number of general common traits in education, such as: the great importance given to the collective and social character of education, its intimate connection with community life, at both material and spiritual level, its multipurpose character (all aspects of the personality are identified and considered at the same), its progressive and gradual character (this education is perpetuated across all the different stages of life using different means suited for each; (see Ndorefi and Ndorefi; Higgs; Paré Kaboré; Ngakoutou; Moumouni).

⁷The concept of wisdom acquired through experience and age is a very important epistemological principle. It is a decisive concept in terms of acquisition and building of knowledge in African societies (see, among others, Mungala; Ogandaga; Aube).

⁸According to Vaughan the gift shapes our way of giving meaning and understanding. The manner in which we know is formed in childhood through gift-giving and receiving. "... Language is turn-taking verbal giving-receiving and mothering/being mothered, it follows then that the nurturing interaction does not disappear in maturity (when we continue to use language" (*The Gift* 47). "In a functional gift economy, abundant material communication, language structures and linguistic and other forms of sign communication are aligned and then they can be used to communicate with Nature that is also understood as abundant and free, not exploited" (*The Gift* 43). Rauna Kuokkanen also states that the notion of gift is one of the structuring principles of many Indigenous philosophies in different areas of the world. While gift practices are

very different from one another "the purpose of giving it is usually alike: to acknowledge and renew the sense of kinship and coexistence with the world." Where the central idea "that the world as a whole is constituted of an infinite web of relationship extended to and incorporated into the entire social condition of the individual" (Kuokkanen 256, 258).

⁹On the symbolic and linguistic dimension of the exchange logic and its connection with patriarchy in a progressive devaluing of gift-giving practices and actors, see Vaughan *For-Giving*.

¹⁰All citations from French sources have been translated into English by the author.

¹¹The authors who could be mentioned are many and the aspects of witchcraft countless. However it is reasonable to point out that the accusation of witchcraft phenomena, despite their differences, underwent great changes after colonization and took on a massive and violent dimension especially with the debt crisis and PAS application policies in the years '80-'90 with their resulting poverty and economic and social disasters (Federici).

¹²About the importance of storytelling in the transmission of knowledge and values in community education see, among others, Mungala; Puren.

¹³The time of the developers (including those who carry educational activities) is a trajectory that moves from the past towards the future, from worse to best. Progress, with its universalistic ambition, is measured in Accumulation, from which derives the notion of growth. All that is not reduced in figures is not important. The endless reference to indicators, rates, percentages, contributes to the spreading of a logic that ultimately resorts to money as universal example/equivalent. For more on the mercantile dimension development cooperation see Ndione (38 ff.)

¹⁴In development experiences connected to the well-being of adolescent girls, for example, programs are almost always addressed exclusively at the young girls. They often ignore the fact that girls develop in socio-cultural contexts in which roles, interactions and family and community decisions have a crucial influence on them. Furthermore, these programs do not take into sufficient consideration the resource people present in the environment of these girls who can support and help in their development. (In a different manner GMP has adopted an approach that enables us to identify all actors who, at a community level, play an influential role in the education and development of young girls, and involve them actively).

¹⁵Various testimonies from grandmothers tell us of the change that is taking place thanks to their strengthened opposition to this practice, helped by their participation in the project: "*We managed to avoid a marriage of a girl of twelve years. We went to meet his father together, he was very respectful with us and follow our advice. So the marriage did not take place. Moreover we realized that we are able to do many things.*"—Fatoumata Bintu Kamara, grandmother in Medina Diamberene village (Lulli "Les resultats")

¹⁶We are aware that in Africa the term indigenous is rarely used. As Kapoor and Shiza remind us, all the colonized communities were originally Indigenous.

¹⁷The school-community relationship has been identified as pivotal also in government education policies, that are identifying strategies for an integration that in general continues to be a difficult process.

¹⁸The difficulties in the relations between community and school is an old topic, which dates back to the colonization. Among the many authors who have dealt with this

topic, we mention Joseph Ki-Zerbo who approached the issue in 1990.

¹⁹About Indigenous epistemology, research methodologies, and their relational and ethical dimensions see, among others, Romm; Wane; and for a focus on Native Americans, see Wilson; Wulff.

²⁰These are public occasions in which village communities and representatives of other institutions are invited to celebrate the importance of grandmothers with songs, poems and stories.

²¹Strengthening the centrality of women who take on a caretaking role but also one of decision-making and action in favour of the family and community, finds fertile ground. Here, there used to be a strong tradition of female association (Reveyrand; Lulli “Movimenti”). Furthermore, many studies (Sarr; Sow) talk of an image of women prior to the advent of colonization and of the spreading of abrahamic monotheisms, quite different to the subordinate role that colonization has exported.

²²The strategy was developed by GMP and implemented in close collaboration with the Velingara Education and Training Inspectorate (IEF), which is in line with the priorities defined by the Ministry of Education (MEN). MEN of Senegal ensures that the timetable at school helps children grow up, firmly rooted in their cultural values and traditions, so that they can live in harmony with their families and society. Nevertheless, much remains to be done to adapt school curricula to local cultural realities.

²³A collaboration has thus been created in which grandmothers pedagogically assist the teachers, taking part in activities which in the dry season may involve class participation more times a week. Teachers have previously participated in training (Ateliers) on integration at school of local actors, values and knowledge.

²⁴Grandmothers hold their lessons

in Pulaar, but the reflections and discussions are carried out in French.

²⁵The school activities have included the publication of five booklets on the roles of grandmothers, on local values, local proverbs, traditional stories, and children’s rights and duties, that GMP has produced starting from the collection of contextual elements to strengthen integration between the school learning model and the knowledges shared orally by grandmothers.

²⁶Another initiative was the promotion of traditional games such as *worri* and *choki* similar to our checkers. This activity contributes to valorise traditional games and encourage parents and elders to take a more active part in the transmission of cultural knowledge to children and adolescents. They thoroughly enjoy these games.

²⁷According to the data collected for the evaluation of the grandmother training program, one of the spheres in which they are being reinvested at a community level is conflict solution (GMP 2015).

²⁸This rapprochement between generations, the new prominence that grandmothers play and the consequent strengthening of solidarity, and also the reduction of early pregnancies, characterize villages included in GMP activities, and it is seen with appreciation in neighbouring villages not included in the project, in which the intergenerational conflict continues to be strong.

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