

The Socialization of the Child in a Bambara Village (Mali)

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The observations and data in this article are the result of research conducted in a Bambara village in 1972 and 1973. We were interested in studying education in the traditional Bambara milieu, based on consideration of the psychological and social difficulties of young people of rural origin and the failure of innovating policies both educational and social: the imported institutions remain alien and ill-suited to the system, or else they disturb it by taking its vital force — the young people — away from it. In the towns, on the other hand, an imbalance is introduced into family relationships and the school imparts a different outlook because it induces a questioning of the criteria of knowledge and power. If the imbalance stems from imported or disintegrated educational systems, the question arises as to the link between education and the original traditional milieu; and if, furthermore, neither the traditional system of education nor the present formal education system are a tool of development, there is a need, in order to devise an educational system capable of inducing innovating behaviour and stimulating youth, to consider the milieu concerned, with its specific values and structures.

Hence we have studied:

- the existing consistency between the educational system and Bambara society,
 - the ultimate purpose of education for that society. —
- Our approach was therefore a dual one:
- a study of the society as a whole,
 - an analysis of the mechanisms by which the child becomes an adult destined to live in that society: the educational « authorities » and their specific type of teaching.

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I. WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION FOR WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY ?

A — THE SOCIETY

Our research postulates a study of the Bambara social structure. We summarize below its fundamental features :

A dual social stratification

- a) a *vertical* stratification based on the principle of seniority :
 - at the level of the clan and lineage hierarchy in which authority passes down a vertical axis from senior to junior,
 - at the level of the whole society in which there is a clear opposition between the *old*, holder of knowledge and power, who establish a political, economic and religious control over the *young*, the active force of the village : labour force (through their associations : ton), defence force (from the time of the bambara kingdoms), an social stimulus (« animation ») (mutual aid system, celebrations etc...). The most powerful people are those who are closest to the source of power : the ancestors.
- b) a *horizontal* stratification by age grades, which overlaps the first one. The age grades group together people in the village of the same age into highly-structured associations.

The family as basic social unit

The extended family (blondah) includes all the male members, their wives and their children descended from the same ancestor. It lives under the authority of a chief (Fa) and is subdivided into nuclear families (fani). Geographically, its members live together in the same neighbourhood, in a group of huts surrounded by a fence ; the blondah constitutes a unit of production and consumption, a religious unit (ancestor worship) a legal unit (with collective responsibility) and a political unit (the Fa has to keep order in it) :

- a) goods and authority are transmitted along kinship channels ; the economic relations correspond to those of kinship. The economic plane is dominated by the socio-cultural plane : any attempt at innovation has to be assessed through this filter ;
- b) the social groups perpetuate themselves by exchanging their goods and particularly their women : marriages involve an alliance between two lineages with a view to procreation.

The groups regulate sexual intercourse by rules of marriage according to an alternate generation principle, thus determining a reciprocity and a continual circulation of goods and women. The wife « loaned » against compensation is destined for *exchange* from the start, whereas the men are destined for communal life.

The economic foundation of the Bambara village

— the essentially noble activity is working the land ; the men of caste,

praise-singers (griots), blacksmiths, those skilled in techniques, are regarded as strangers, endowed with an ambiguous power.

- work involves a precise division of labour and a complementary between male and female rôles,
 - accumulation is negligible ; what is produced is consumed.
- At all levels of Bambara society we find the principle of the primacy and necessity of the group :
- at the power-wielding level : while the elders and in particular the village chief are the holders of Authority, they are only the *managers* of a power which was delegated to them on behalf of the ancestors : they must ensure the stability of the society and the maintenance of traditions ; it is impossible for an individual to hold power personally ; that of the village chief is a decision-making power for the benefit of the group,
 - at the family level : the extended family has primacy over the nuclear family and even more so over the couple. The forms of communication are strictly controlled. For example, the affective exchange between husband and wife is reduced to the minimum in order to avoid the danger of atomization of the extended family,
 - at individual level : there is no conception of an isolated individual. From birth, everyone is involved in a series of networks which integrate him into various groupings which preexist and which continue after him.

Bambara social life is highly codified ; everyone, according to his status, has rights and duties, and precise attitudes. Hence social control is very strong. Tensions do exist, but tradition does not give them any possibility to exist ; they are diverted and canalized through institutionalized rituals. This codification is maintained through education. Education implies a control by the seniors over the generations that are not yet ripe for social life ; its fundamental goal is to internalize the group's own norms and law (primacy of the group, obligation to follow the rules, need for the exchange system) with a view to reproducing social relationships : maintenance of traditions, domination of seniors over juniors, division between male and female rôles, separation between farmers and caste people.

B — EDUCATION

The ultimate purpose of Bambara education

In Bambara society, the child is the supreme value : for the village he is the perpetuation of the group, for the family he is wealth, and for the woman he is the means of social recognition.

From birth, a series of rites aim at integrating the child into society. The Bambara conceive education as a process of weaning the newborn child away from his animal nature and making a human being of him.

The human being, according to the Bambara, is destined to communal life. The « complete », « educated » man is one who has

acquired the « mogoya », that is, savoir-vivre, sociability, self-awareness in relation to oneself, to ones fellows, to the family, to the community ; self-control of one's emotions, and steadfastness of character. This makes the individual feel responsible for the whole of his society and perceive himself as a mirror of the community. In European societies, the child is also socialized by internalizing the values of his group, but the blossoming of his personality is marked by the autonomy of the ego and innovating behaviour. But in the Bambara society, the blossoming of the personality entails *identification with the group*. The child and the adolescent, will not have to define their identity : their values are those of the group, and the individual is totally absorbed in group rôles. The young people among whom we felt some anxiety, a break between the system and themselves, were those who had been through the alien institution which is the *school*.

The content of education

a) the different levels of education

A distinction is usually made between :

- instruction : acquisition of techniques and knowledge,
- education of the individual : perception, intelligence, memory,
- social education : internalization of the law.

Among the Bambara these different levels are dialectically inter-related, both at the teaching level, which we will analyse later, and the level of the knowledge itself. There is a whole network of analogies between man, nature, society and the universe ; and for the Bambara child, learning to think is to become able to establish these analogies. This thinking is consistent with the environment and could not survive in an environment in which it did not find the material basis of its representations.

b) social intelligence

The learning process is, from the start, moral and social : the first words the child learns are the names of the members of his family. His mother sings him lullabies in which these names recur continually. From a study of the circulation of objects between children, we noted that the objects were never owned, but served to establish relationships between the children. We also noted that exploratory behaviour among children, and games specifically meant to develop their « intelligence », were rare. However, we came across several games and riddles involving, for example, mathematical exercises. In fact, intelligence is always developed within a total situation in which the social and intellectual planes are mingled :

« Although at six years old we do not yet fully take part in farm work, we have to bring in the cattle or poultry at nightfall. Hence we get the idea of punishment, because neglect of this task does not go unpunished. To carry out this task, an interplay of memory and intelligence is required. Firstly, we have to know how to bring in the

chickens, because if we do it by hitting them with sticks, they may well be reduced from 20 to 3 overnight. Secondly, if there are too many hens and sheep for us to look after, we call on our friends in a system of mutual help. Thus we acquire the need for life in society, and we no longer doubt that we belong to the society from which we came', we were told by a young Bambara in Bamako (Extract from biographical account by a pupil in a Secondary level teacher training school).

Here we can see the child learning his role, and the type of teaching which aims at developing intelligence by placing him « in a learning situation », which we will return to later. We also see how, in this situation, the child learns about the need for others. Thus ethics and intelligence are interlinked.

All the learning of knowledge and skills is *functional* : the child only learns what he needs in order to live in his society and nothing else. What the child learns cannot be changed or disturbed without the whole system being upset : the role of the old would be downgraded and the functions challenged ; the whole system would be undermined and motivations would collapse. This knowledge is also *consistent* with this society : we are in a culture based not on the power one has over the world, on the will to change and the autonomy of the ego, but the recognition of one's status and the status of others, on subjection to one's environment.

II. THE EDUCATIONAL « AUTHORITIES »

Just as we were unable to describe an economic, political or social system functioning separately, we cannot single out any institution which has a specifically educational purpose. The institutions are congruent : for example, the family is at the same time an economic, political, religious and educational unit... Just as there are no specific educational authorities or institutions, there are no specific places of education or teachers, i.e. people whose function is exclusively that of teaching. At the limit, the whole village is the teacher, and daily life is a permanent place of learning.

Nevertheless, we can detect within the social units a precise educational function. Learning is imparted by the family, the associations, age grades and initiation societies ; these groups, which have their own permanent structure, can be formal educational authorities, as opposed to the informal educational mechanisms such as daily rites and practices.

a) The family

The whole family group is an « educator ». Thus, with respect to new-born infant, after the first 40 days any person present can look after the child : although it has a special relationship to its mother, the whole group can come in as mediator at any time ; any exclusive or « closed » relationship is criticized. The « good mother » is one

who introduces the child into the society by encouraging it to open out to other children as soon as it is weaned. Everyone teaches the child to walk and talk, everyone carries it and stimulates it.

The father may have a more precise role in the child's education : a medicine-man father transmits his secrets to his son. The totem and the relevant taboos are also handed down from father to son. However, in general the father does not intervene in the child's education ; he has a *repressive* role devoid to effective (emotional) content. He is the guarantor of order in the family ; though his authority is very great, it is formal : all he wants is not to be openly challenged. The father and the whole paternal line has this authority over child ; thus the father's brothers and sisters are feared just as much. Authority is not incarnated in one person ; it is assumed by the whole paternal lineage. The members of the *maternal* lineage (mother, maternal uncle...), on the other hand, are vectors of *affectivity* : the mother is morally responsible for her child, and the maternal uncle is particularly respected and loved for the moral advice he gives his nephew. These conceptions still persist, even in the town. Both the maternal and paternal grandparents also intervene in the child's education : they gather the children of the family in the evening and, during the family discussions, tell them legends which impart a moral teaching, and stories about the family and the village.

Generally speaking, it is all the older people who have authority over the child. The child belongs to the whole family group : on the day of his baptism, the head of the family (the Fa) announces « a child has come to us », « the child does not belong to one but to all ». Similarly on the wedding-day they say « a wife is given to us ». The children may be given or exchanged between people of the same family. This attitude is reflected in the classificatory kinship names, where the child calls all his father's brothers « father », and all his mother's sisters « mother » ; these designations are extended to the whole village.

« The child acts as liaison agent between the adults of the community. In exercising his rôle, he learns that those adults who may be in his father's age grade must be treated like the father and the older ones like the grandfather. Indeed this concept will be fixed in his mind when he is required to add « n'fa », my father, or « n'baba », my grandfather, to the adult's name : this requirement also applies to the women of the community. Many times I got a good spanking for having called an adult of my father's or my mother's age just by his own name. When you have had this education, you are « branded » with the differentiation between age grades » (Extract from a biographical account by another pupil in a Secondary-level teacher training school).

b) The associations

The associations prepare the young for community life and impart a group spirit to their members. In this respect the *N'tomo*

association of uncircumcized boys or « bilakoro » is typical. Each member is regarded as an *alter ego* « flan » and their mask, which is the depository of their spirits and their forces, embodies the group. The education received there is common to all the boys of the village, and in this sense it can be regarded as taking the child away from the family for the benefit of the community. « What the family wants is to keep its child, it is selfish ; that is why it cannot educate him », we were told. In this connexion it is remarkable to note the small part played by the parents at the time of circumcision, which officially breaks the child's link with his family and is the transition from the « bilakoro » stage where he belongs to the N'tomo society, to the stage of being a man. True, the parents do have a role, but they are entirely guided by custom and do not express any personal decision or choice. They act as members of the group, not as individuals. Nevertheless the N'tomo association depends on the parents for its subsistence. It is linked up with higher associations and is manipulated by the village elders : it is the latter who fix the date of the celebrations and who appoint its leader. Once he has been circumcized, every young man continues to belong to an age grade which covers those circumcized at the same time and to which he will belong all his life. The hierarchy between age grades is always scrupulously respected : whenever a dispute arises, its members resort to the arbitration of the leader of the age group above it. When a feast is organized, one dish is given to the senior age grade and one to junior age grade ; they each have their own emblem. The young also belong to the « ton », an association of all young people of the village. As well as its essentially economic role — its main activity being farm work — this body also has a social role (mutual help, festivities) and an educational rôle : it supplements the individual's training and develops in him the feeling of solidarity, emulation and personal discipline.

c) The initiation societies

Superimposed on the « lay » stratification by age grades there is a « religious » stratification of secret societies. In them, the secrets of *wisdom* and *knowledge* are taught by initiation : these societies make the individual a being indissolubly linked to his milieu. Among the Bambara, there are traditionally six initiation societies, but only two were active in the village where we worked. Two points are fundamental for our purposes :

- there is a link between secret societies and political power : all the old men, and only they, belong to them ; they incarnate the Law and Justice of the village ;
- they intervene at all the fundamental moments in the individual's life, at each transition rite.

Lastly, specific know-how is also transmitted by initiation and hence under the seal of *secrecy* : knowledge about conception and childbirth, reserved for the old women, knowledge about animals, life

and death, reserved for the hunters ; the same applies to medical and medicinal knowledge.

d) Day-to-day rites and practices

Socialization occurs on the occasion of every celebration and ritual which punctuates social life. Baptisms, funerals, weddings, celebrations of young people or families, are all activations of laws, traditions and the social structure. Furthermore, every act of daily life is part of the teaching process : meals, meetings of the young or the elders, and work groups set in motion the rules of Bambara social life : subordination and hierarchy of age, reciprocity, need for the group. Thus the child, an every individual, is from birth to death involved in a continuing system of education, which is present as a « principle » at all times in one's life.

In conclusion, although we have been able to detect what we called « educational » authorities, these never fulfil that function exclusively ; a systematic education is given at certain special moments in the individual's life (circumcision, initiation). Both education and authority are scattered, they do not belong to any one person as such ; they are embodied in the whole system and the village. While there is complementarity between the education received in the family and in the associations, the latter transmit the same norms, so ensuring the *consistency* of the models. Lastly, the associations ultimately fulfil a liaison function between the family and the village as a whole, thus playing a *stabilizing* role in the system. We shall try to show how this mechanism works.

III. THE TEACHING PROCESS

Just as it was not possible to isolate an educational system, there is no explicit pedagogical doctrine : teaching is a process lived by the individuals who hand it down from generation to generation. At no time did we ask the question directly ; it was only by participating in the everyday life the village and by cross-checking our observations that we were able to detect the principles of Bambara pedagogy. We shall show how learning, which has its specific features, proceeds essentially by *doing* : everyday practices, imitation of adult life, placing the child in a learning situation ; the only teaching tools used are intended to materialize abstract concepts.

A — THE NATURE OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

The learning process of the young Bambara is gradual and continuous. Bambara society clearly defines the stages through which the child passes, and at each of these stages he is allotted a name, a status, a type of clothing, and a portion of know-how. The child abandons them when each stage is completed. While education begins at birth, it only becomes systematic after circumcision : before that,

the « bilakoro » is regarded as irresponsible and innocent. The following characteristics stem from this principle :

- education is in a way « adapted » to each age : the child passes successively from one stage to the next, each stage being prepared by the previous one and closed by a ritual. Through the similarity of ceremonial in the transition rites (birth, circumcision, marriage, etc...) every stage the individual goes through is *taken up again and completed*. The child does not go through these transitions individually ; continuity is ensured from one stage to the next, so that « crises of identity » and sharp breaks are avoided.
- the child must never ask questions. All curiosity is looked on askance in the Bambara milieu ; it would mean that the child wanted to outstrip his fellows, to get ahead too quickly. In this connexion the European-type school which satisfies the desire to understand and a wish for rationality may have given rise to a conflict or, in extreme cases, to an alienation from the traditional milieu.
- learning is never acquired individually but in the *group*. The child learns by and with the others ; usually the groups are self-managed, an equal amount of know-how is allocated to everyone ; to want to know more or to be more brilliant, more intelligent, is a cause of anxiety « as if one had taken other's share of the chances ». This communal life is reinforced by joint actions, meals taken in common, and sufferings (flagellations, blows) which mark the bodies of individuals.
- lastly there is a dialectic such that everyone is both teacher and taught. We have already said that each association is interrelated with and defined in relation to the age grade above it : for example, in the N'tomo it is always a bilakoro of the senior age group who manages the mask of the junior grade. The mechanism is spelled out in everyday practices : at every moment, everyone is subordinate to someone and the superior of another. At time of circumcision and excision the mechanism is institutionalized : the circumcized boys and the excized girls are each taken in charge by an older man or woman, the « zeme » who looks after them and acts as a link between them and the community from which they are withdrawn during the period of retreat.

B — LEARNING BY DOING

Education is conceived as a gradual process aimed at transforming the child's personality by modifying his successive environments. It involves deliberately acting on the child ; there are many proverbs describing the child as soft clay, as a paste to be modelled ; so the highest quality of the child will be his malleability, his docility. There are two forms of learning by doing :

- the child learns through *imitating* adult life, and
- by being placed in a *learning situation*.

Imitation

We have already noted that most « African » children's games were games of imitation, as opposed to the games of « Western » children which involve more imaginary identification. Indeed, most of the games we observed in the village involved imitating adult life : the children pretend to grind the millet, to build huts, to prepare a festive meal. As a boy wrote in his biography,

« with us, it is scratching the earth with a stick which characterizes agriculture in the countryside, and if the child does this, he feels that is really in a millet field and thinks he is as clever as his elders ».

Through these games there is a beginning of *internalization of male and female rôles*. The tasks are already allocated according to sex ; thus, we attended make-believe marriages where each boy is given a wife, and everybody behaves according to the adult model. These games become more institutionalized after circumcision ; when each boy chooses in the equivalent girls' age grade a girl friend, « sungu-run », to whom he remains very closely attached and for whom he will in fact be responsible until marriage : their union is a miming of the transactions of a real marriage. If we consider the children's associations, we see that they are organized on the lines of the adult associations and of a real society : for example, the N'tomo association has its leader, its advisers, its praise-singers (griots), its financier, its herald, and institutions like those of adults : a tribunal, a mutual aid system, festivities, solemn meals. The child, we were told, is « a trainee of adult life ». This calls for two comments :

- although in principle there are male association and female associations, the latter are in fact rare : since they are destined rather for exchange, the girls are educated in the family group, to which they will still remain linked even after their marriage, whereas the men are destined to live in the community,
- because of the *continual updating* of the rôles for which the children are destined in their future life and the group spirit they impart, the associations are also a means of *reducing hostility* or potential rivalry between *generations*.

The learning situation

While the child internalize the norms of his society by passive imitation, he can also be introduced as a full member into adult life : the learning will then take place by actual practice, or « doing ».

We attended some meetings of children led by an adult. In certain circumstances the child is called upon to play the rôle of judge. This happens when a fight breaks out between two children. Their arguments and their opinions are then observed. In the course of conversations, the child is encouraged to put forward certain ideas

and is helped to develop them ; he takes part in discussions among various members of the family. One may tell deliberate lies so as to see how, from his own thinking, he manages to stand up for himself.

From the age of about five, when the child becomes bilakoro, he may at any time be sent on *errands* by an adult — shopping for him, taking a message, fetching something. In this way not only does he get to know the village and its inhabitants and his family, but he also learns to calculate and to get along by himself. The child will be told to do something without being shown why he must do it, still less how he should go about it.

At this age too, the child takes part in the adults' work. He has his place in the division of labour : in the fields, the girls help their mothers, and the boys are there to chase away birds and render any services asked of them. In the family, the boy will look after the poultry and will be the shepherd ; the little girl will wash the dishes, and sweep the hut and the yard. At about 15 years old, the boy is initiated into men's work ; as well as a personal field and that of his association, he cultivates his father's field with the other members of the family ; while the girl spins the cotton, washes the clothes and grinds the millet.

So the child is integrated into adult life through the life of his association and through his own specific function in the society as a whole : education and production are interlinked.

C — THE TEACHING TOOLS

The child is never given a reasoned argument : he is left to discover for himself. If he asks for an explanation, an image or symbol is evoked to make him understand what he is asking about. Stories, riddles, songs and entertainments help to spell out abstract concepts. During talks and evenings spent with the grand-parents, the latter tell stories and legends illustrating the taboos and norms of moral life. The songs also incorporate the ethics of the group ; they are an important pedagogical factor for the age grades and the circumcision stage. Lastly, the rules are implicitly internalized in the entertainments ; the dances and songs of the hunters and the buffoons, the masks, the theatre. Just as there is a « religious » hierarchy superimposed on the « lay » hierarchy of the associations, there is in the Bambara milieu a « profane » theatre and a « sacred » theatre. The crucial moments in the individual's life are imbued with mystery and myth. This is particularly the case for circumcision and initiation in the komo (secret society). The former marks the transition to the state of a social being, and the latter ensures the link between the society of the living and the dead through the elders. These initiations take place through play-acting which marks the individuals in their body and in their affectivity. Again, short plays are regularly acted in the village square by the « koteba », an association open to everyone provided that he has been presented to the chief. The koteba performs

in the village square with the accompaniment of musicians ; everyone can attend, and the children are always present. The plays express the problems that may arise for the villagers : the school, taxation... or else they ridicule a villager who has committed an act not approved by the group. They illustrate taboos : there is the punishing of the unfaithful wife, or the man who has abandoned his family. Sex education comes into it : in a dedramatized and playful way, the sex act is mimed, danced, thus supplementing the education received explicitly at the time of marriage and of the initiations. The koteba is an institution which at the same time as a safety-valve because it provides an outlet for aggressivity ; it constitutes a ritualized transgression of the social Law, which in fact enables that law to be better maintained.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis shows that there is not, in the Bambara culture, a universe of the child cut off from that of the adult. In Western society, the child may have the impression that his activities are regarded as less important by his elders. In Bambara society the child has as legitimate a function as the adult ; his games and celebrations take place on the village square : by his games, his tasks and his rôles he is immediately immersed in the every-day activities of the adult and he is thus integrated very early into his society. The efficiency of the traditional education is due to this integration : traditional education is not an entity separate from society ; we have seen how it links training with action ; moreover it makes sure that all the members are involved in production. But it does entail a passive submission to the surrounding world ; no attempt is made to arouse a critical spirit in the child, or the idea of changing the environment. The child is ever induced to call his society into question.

As a conclusion, we would like to make three series of comments.

1) The characteristic feature of education in the Bambara milieu is that it relates to a society based on the consensus of all. This presupposes that the parents recognize society's right to shape their life and that of their children. Every individual fully accepts his rôle. The price of this cohesion is a very strong social control ; nothing is permitted which interferes with the principles of the community. There is extreme dependence on the group ; it would be very difficult for the individuals to live in a different milieu than their own — any rejection of the group is intolerable.

2) Formal school education and urbanization introduce an imbalance in this cohesion :

- the total environment of the village which used to embody the child's education is profoundly affected ;
- the extended family which used to incarnate authority gives way to the nuclear family whose interests are divorced from the extended family and the society as a whole. The school

introduces different aspirations and forges a different outlook, so leading to a questioning of the traditional values and of the criteria of power ;

- the school does not assume the socializing function of the age grades ; so there is nothing left but the nuclear family and the State which is a mere abstraction. There are *vacuums* which are not filled, especially as the parents in the context of the nuclear family are not accustomed to taking responsibility for the educational function.
- 3) Any attempt to create a new system of education must take into account the specific logic of these societies.
- Education and training will only be successful if it takes into account the indissoluble link between the economic, political, religious and cultural sectors. Any technological or other innovation will have to measure the impact of these various factors if it is not to be rejected or adapted differently. It must be integrated into the society and use the « channels » of traditional education. In general, no education will be accepted unless it is transmitted by people well integrated into their milieu. Certain types of know-how (techniques, knowledge about conception, life and death...) are the preserve of a few social groups ; no teaching on these matters can be given without going through them. Moreover as this know-how is surrounded with secrecy, there is a need either to maintain the secrecy or to reject it deliberately with full awareness of the implications of that choice.
 - In the present context, youth seems to be the force on which a modern system of education must rely ; but that system will not be accepted unless it suits the elders, who are the guardians of social values, and the group as a whole.
 - The strenght of the traditional system was the consistency of its « institutions » and of the type of man it created. Any new system will have to take into account the development model proposed to these societies and the type of man it is sought to promote.